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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعر اوان

فواطـر

المجلد {21}



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

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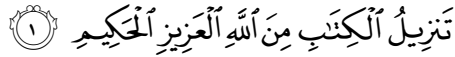
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the chapter of

az-Zumar

In the Name of God,⁽¹⁾ the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *az-Zumar*⁽²⁾:



This Scripture is sent down from God the Mighty, the Wise [1] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 1)

Several words in the Arabic language denote 'sending down'. One of them is *nuzul* which denotes bringing something from somewhere high to somewhere down. Another is *inzal* which denotes that the one who sent the stated thing down is higher in status than the one to whom it is sent. There is also *tanzil*, the one used in the verse we are considering, which denotes sending something down in parts over a period of time according to circumstance.

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- (1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (Who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.
 - (2) The chapter of *az-Zumar* is the 39th in the order of the chapters in the Glorious Quran. It contains 75 verses and is said to be a Meccan chapter (revealed in Mecca before the Immigration of Prophet Muhammad) according to the view of Al-Hasan, 'Ikrima, 'Ata' and Jabir ibn Zayd. Ibn Abbas said, 'It is Meccan except for two verses which were revealed in Medina, one of which is 'Allah has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings...' (*az-Zumar*: 23), and the other verse is 'Say, [Allah says], "My servants who have harmed themselves by your own excess..."' (*az-Zumar*: 53). [See Quran Exegesis of Al-Qurtubi (8/5875).] The chapter of *az-Zumar* is also called the chapter of *al-Ghuraf* because Allah says in one of its verses: 'But those who are mindful of their Lord will have lofty *ghuraf* [dwellings] built for them, one above the other, graced with flowing streams ...' (*az-Zumar*: 20).

For example, Allah says: 'We *anzalnahu* (sent it down) on the Night of Glory' (*al-Qadr*: 1). This refers to the act of sending down the Quran all at once from the Preserved Tablet at the beginning of Prophet Muhammad's prophethood. Then, it was sent down to the Prophet in parts on different occasions

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'We *anzalnahu* (sent down the Quran) with the truth, and with the truth it *nazal* (has come down) ...' (*al-Isra*': 105). Allah sent it down with the truth at the beginning, and it remained upon the truth. No one was able to alter it or twist its words because it is the truth.

The root of these words, *nazala*, *nazzala* and *anzala*, denotes the highness of the one who sends down the stated thing and the lower status of the one to whom it is sent. The value of what is sent down is determined by the status of the sender. Sending down Divine guidance proves that Allah *the Most High* wants to honour His servants and guide them to the Straight Path. So, *inzal* indicates the high status of the one who sends down as well as the honour of what is sent. It is also an honour to those Allah has chosen for receiving that greater good. This is why Allah says about Muslims: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind...' (*Al-Imran*: 110).

When we track the derivatives of the root *nazala* in the Glorious Quran, we find that every time they are used, they denote bringing something from on high, except in a small number of verses, as the following one in the chapter of *al-Hadid* where Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... We also *anzalna* (sent) iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind...' (*al-Hadid*: 25). Iron has not been sent down from on high, but it is extracted from under the ground, so why does Allah use the word *anzalna* in the aforementioned verse? Some say that even though iron is extracted from the earth, Allah is the Creator Who made it and put it there. Thus, it is a bestowal granted to humankind from the One in Heaven, hence the use of the word *anzalna* which denotes 'sending down'. Thus, this word does not necessarily refer to the direction of sending; rather, it refers to status of the sender.

It may be worthy of mentioning that sending iron has indeed been a necessary part of the mission assigned to messengers and those who believed with them. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says in the same verse immediately after mentioning iron: '... so that Allah could mark out those who would help

Him and His Messengers ...' (*al-Hadid*: 25). It is from iron that weapons have been made to fight against disbelievers in the cause of Allah.

Another verse where one of the aforementioned derivatives is mentioned yet does not denote 'sending down' is this one: '... He *anzala* (gave you) four kinds of livestock in pairs ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6). The same can be also found in the verse: 'Children of Adam, We have *anzalna* (given) you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you ...' (*al-A'raf*: 26).

We notice a beautiful stylistic gesture employed by the Glorious Quran with respect to the preposition it uses before the indirect object of the verb *anzala* and how the prepositions used with it correspond perfectly to the meaning intended in every instance. For example, when Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad, He says: 'Step by step, He *nazzala* (has sent) the Scripture '*alayka* [down to you (Prophet)] with the Truth...' (*Al-Imran*: 3). Allah *the Almighty* addresses His Messenger using the singular second person pronoun 'you' despite the fact that the Quran has been sent down to all people: 'This is a blessed Scripture which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to think about its messages ...' (*Sad*: 29). Nevertheless, Allah addresses the one who directly receives His revelations. When Allah speaks about the blessings that He grants to humankind directly without any intermediaries, He uses the plural second person pronoun. Thus, He uses the singular form '*alayka* in addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the following verse, He uses the plural *lakum* when He addresses all people: '...He *anzala lakum* (gave you) four kinds of livestock in pairs ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6). Let us also consider the preposition used with the pronoun in each case. In the verse about garments, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We have *anzalna 'alaykum* (given you) garments to cover your nakedness...' (*al-A'raf*: 26). The preposition '*ala* denotes 'putting something above or on another', so it is used with garments that are put on the body to cover it. In the verse about livestock, Allah *the Most High* says: '... He *anzala lakum* (gave you) four kinds of livestock in pairs...' (*az-Zumar*: 6). The preposition *l* denotes 'giving something to someone', hence its usage with livestock.

Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who has created all being and bestows His blessings upon them. He has created Adam and His offspring and sent down

to them His guidance to set their lives aright. Some scholars hold the view that Allah has made Adam *peace be upon him* His vicegerent on the earth in the sense that he is the one whom He has entrusted to carry out His Will on it. Allah *the Exalted* has placed man on the earth and created the means and resources required to preserve his life. Still, and even though everything belongs originally to Allah, He respects property rights of His servants. This is why He says, encouraging the wealthy to give charity to the poor: 'Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over?...' (*al-Baqara*: 245) He *the Exalted* calls charity a 'loan' despite the fact that He is the Giver of that wealth. Since Allah is the Creator Who has brought humankind into existence and guaranteed their provisions, He considered wealth to be the right of His servants, who own it, hence His calling charity a 'loan' they give to Him when they offer it to the poor. Let me use an example to illustrate this. Suppose a man who gave his child pocket money suddenly found himself in need of that money. He borrowed the money from his child who saved it and promised to pay the child back. Even though the money originally belonged to the father, he respected the property rights of his child, and to Allah belongs the Highest Similitude.

Back to the verse we are considering; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'This *kitab* (Scripture) is sent down from Allah ...' (*az-Zumar*: 1). When the word *kitab* is used with a definite article and without any modification that describes it, it refers to the Glorious Quran. The Arabic words *kitab* and *Quran* are both used to refer to the Glorious Book of Allah. The former means 'something which is written down', while the latter means 'something which is read'. Both are true of the Glorious Quran: it is recorded in books, preserved in the hearts and will forever be recited. Allah *the Almighty* has made it so to make it as evidence against those who have been addressed by it.

The companions of Prophet Muhammad have demonstrated exemplary caution when they started compiling the Glorious Quran in a book. They did not write down a single verse unless they heard it from at least two of those who memorised the Quran. Then, they would only write it down when at least two others of those who memorised the Quran bore witness to its authenticity. Such were the men Allah entrusted with His Book, for He says in it: 'We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it' (*al-Hijr*: 9).

Thus, the Quran was sent down '...from Allah...' (*az-Zumar*: 1). Allah does not say, for example, '...from the Lord...'. This takes us to the difference between the words *Allah* and *Rab* (Lord) in the Arabic language. The word *Rab* is derived from a stem that denotes 'increase', so it refers to material bestowals. Thus, He is the *Rab* in the sense that He has created all beings and provides for everyone, be they believers or disbelievers. Thus, when it comes to material gifts offered by the *Rab* (the Lord), all people are equal. The word *Allah*, on the other hand, is derived from a stem that means 'deity'. Therefore, when it comes to speaking about issues related to faith and worship, the word *Allah* is used. This is why when Allah speaks about the Quran, He says: '...from Allah...' (*az-Zumar*: 1), not '... from the *Rab* (Lord) ...'.

The word *Allah* is a name used uniquely to describe Him, the True God, the Lord and Creator of all things. Allah *the Exalted* has Names and Attributes that belong to Him as He says: 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah...' (*al-A'raf*: 180). Allah has commanded us to use those Names to call upon Him, yet by calling Him with His unique Name, *Allah*, it is as if we called Him by His Names all at once, for this Name encompasses all of them. This is why we should begin work with saying, 'In the Name of Allah', for when one says so, he has thus called upon Allah by all His Attributes that one needs to accomplish his work. He has thus called upon Him by His Might, Knowledge, Wisdom, and so on. Instead of saying, 'In the Name of *the Almighty* One, the All Knowing, the All-Wise, etc., it suffices to say, 'In the Name of Allah'. This Majestic Name of God encompasses all of His Attributes of Perfection, both those that have been revealed to us and those that He has confined to His Knowledge. Even if you are disobedient, do not be ashamed of your Lord or too embarrassed to start any job in His Name. Do not think it impossible that Allah *the Almighty* would still grant you His aid despite your sins, for your Lord is the All-Merciful, and He commands His servants to remember His Name and use it to call upon Him.

Allah *the Exalted* concludes the verse by these Attributes of Him: '... *Al-'Aziz* (the Mighty), *Al-Hakim* (the Wise)' (*az-Zumar*: 1). The word *Al-Aziz* means He Who has no need whatsoever of His creation—neither does their obedience benefit Him, nor does their disobedience harm Him. Allah mentions this

Attribute after mentioning the Book He has sent down to us with His guidance for a reason. Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that it is a favour from Him that He has sent down to us His guidance. He is in no need of our obedience, but He has showed us the Straight Path for us to be prosperous both in this worldly life and in the Afterlife.

Since Allah is in no need of us, He does not accept worship unless it is solely devoted to Him, the One Who has no partners. He says: 'Allah does not forgive the joining of partners with Him; anything less than that He forgives to whoever He wills ...' (*an-Nisa*': 48). He also says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'I am absolutely in no need of partners or partnerships. If anyone does a deed in which he associates others with Me, I leave him to those he associated with Me [to reward him for it].'⁽¹⁾ Why should Allah *the Exalted* accept to have partners falsely ascribed to Him? Does He have any need for our worship to compromise?! Exalted is He above every need! It is not Allah Who benefits from His servants' obedience, but the entire benefit goes back to them. Thus, your Lord has created you and sent down to you that which is for your own good. If you obey Him, He will reward you. Whoever believes in Allah and acts in accordance with his comprehension of and faith in His Most Excellent Names and Attributes will be rewarded by Him, out of His Bounty and Mercy.

The meaning of Allah's Name *Al-'Aziz* is also expressed in this Qudsi Hadith: 'My servants, the earliest and latest, humankind and jinns, were to all have hearts as mindful of Allah as that of the most devout one amongst you, that would not increase My kingdom one iota. Were the earliest and latest humankind and jinns, to have hearts as evil as that of the most wicked one amongst you, that would not decrease My kingdom one iota. My servants, were they the earliest and latest humankind and jinns, to all come together in a single place and each make a supplication to Me, and were I to give each what he has asked, that would not decrease what I have one bit, not even so much as a needle would decrease the sea when it is dipped into it. This is because I am the Generous and the Magnificent Who has the Power to bring

(1) *This Hadith is cited by Muslim in his Sahih (2985) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4202), and this narration is that of Muslim, narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

anything into existence. Just by a word from Me, I can bestow blessings and inflict punishments. When I want something, I only say to it, "Be!" and it is.⁽¹⁾

Allah is the Mighty God Who is free of any need of His servants. He has Power over all things, and none has any power over Him. He confers of His Attributes on those who believe in Him, so believers who have might possess as such out of the Might of Allah. As for disbelievers, they seek might and sovereignty through their arrogant defiance of Allah, and how far they are from attaining what they aspire to! The hypocrites at the time of Prophet Muhammad said, as the Quran mentions them saying: '... "Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak"...' (*al-Munafiqun*: 8). Indeed, they have spoken the truth, for the powerful will drive out the weak, but who are the powerful and who are the weak? Allah *the Exalted* responds to this by saying: '... power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger and to the believers ...' (*al-Munafiqun*: 8). Allah bestows of His Power on His Messenger and the believers; thus, the weak party that would be driven out of Medina were the hypocrites, and so were they.

Besides being *Al-'Aziz* (the Mighty) Who is free of all need, Allah is also *Al-Hakim* (the Wise) Who puts everything in place. One of the countless manifestations of this Wisdom is that He has not made the natural disposition of the believers moulded into one fixed mode of character. He has not created in them mercy only or severity only. Rather, He has made them capable of demonstrating both characteristics based on the occasion. Allah *Glorified is He* says describing believers: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards disbelievers and compassionate towards each other ...' (*al-Fath*: 29). He also says about them: '... humble towards believers, hard on disbelievers ...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 54). Allah has created this variation in the natural disposition of His servants and meanwhile guided them to the fundamentals based on which they can choose to demonstrate the right characteristic on the right occasion. Thus, a believer should show mercy where

(1) This Hadith is cited by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (5/104 & 177) on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi cited it in his *Sunnan* (2495) and classified it as *hasan* (literally 'good': or authentic but less in degree than Hadiths classified as *sahih* (literally 'sound' or 'authentic'). Ibn Majah also cited it in his *Sunnan* (4275).

the situation so requires and severity where the need arises. This is one of the manifestations of the Wisdom of Allah Who has made every bit of creation exactly corresponding to the mission and role assigned to each one of them.

It may be worth mentioning that the word *hikma* (wisdom) is derived from *hakama* which refers to a 'bit' that is placed in a horse's mouth. Just as a bit is a tool by which a horse is controlled, *hikma* (wisdom) is the characteristic by which life is governed, and its affairs are managed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ ﴿٢﴾ أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ
وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ
بَيْنَهُمْ فِي مَا هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ كَفَّارٌ ﴿٣﴾

It is We who sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the Truth, so worship God with your total devotion. [2] True devotion is due to God alone. [As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him, saying, 'We only worship them because they bring us nearer to God,' God Himself will judge between them regarding their differences. God does not guide any ungrateful liar [3] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 2-3)

Truth means a fixed matter that is not affected or abrogated by the changes of life or passage of time. Since the truth is so firm, we should not be deceived by how high falsehood can seem to reach at certain times, for the prevalence of falsehood paves the way for the truth to shine. When falsehood gains predominance, it brings misery and torment upon people, so they look out for the truth and long for its victory. This way, falsehood is actually one of the servants of truth, and disbelief is one of the servants of faith. Allah *the Exalted* never abandons the truth, but He allows falsehood to prevail over it for some time to test people's eagerness for the truth and readiness to defend it. If they turn out to be careless about the truth and reluctant to support it, Allah takes it upon Himself to support it and make it victorious.

Since Allah *the Most High* has sent down the Book, the Quran, with truth, we must take heed then. We must abide by the commands and prohibitions

revealed in it and undertake the responsibilities we are assigned by Him. Obedience necessarily entails that we believe in the One Who commands us to obey Him.

When a complicated matter twists your mind, you seek consultation and assistance of someone you know to possess knowledge and sound judgment, someone who can help you make a decision. One entrusts his affairs and issues with those he trusts to have wisdom. Such are the ones from whom we take advice. Faith is the most important of one's affairs in life. Therefore, we must believe in and trust the One Who has revealed faith to us so we can willingly commit ourselves to His ordinance. Belief has to come before action. Islam is about firm faith ingrained in the heart and manifested through action. Faith without action is only a claim, and action without faith is fruitless, for Allah *the Almighty* rewards those who devote their deeds and worship solely to Him. He says: 'The desert Arabs say, "We have faith." [O, Prophet] tell them, "You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, 'We have submitted', for faith has not yet entered your hearts."...' (*al-Hujurat*: 14)

In the verse we are considering, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...worship Allah with your total devotion' (*az-Zumar*: 2). Total devotion to Allah means sincerity; this is the prerequisite based on which worship is accepted or otherwise. What is the meaning of worship? It is a servant's obedience to the ordinance of his Lord. It is to commit oneself to His Commands and Prohibitions. This definition for worship shows the pointlessness of worshipping anything other than Allah, for those who worship the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, rocks, etc. offer their devotion to false deities that have sent no guidance to them nor made incumbent upon them any duties. Claiming that such things are gods and are worthy of worship is a flagrant mistake, for what guidance have those so-called gods revealed to their worshippers? What do they command or forbid? What reward have they promised the obedient or punishment for the disobedient? Since the answer for all those questions is 'None', on what grounds are they claimed to be gods, then?

As for those who alleged, 'We only worship them since they bring us nearer to Allah...' (*az-Zumar*: 3), Allah refutes their allegation; He has willed that no intermediaries should interfere between Him and His servants respecting faith and devotion.

Furthermore, Allah calls us to ponder the magnificence of creation. The universe is full of endless wonders that bear testimony to the Majesty of the Creator. With what perfect precision has everything been made and managed! Look at life and how every bit of it is governed with Absolute Wisdom. Who but Allah has made all that? Has anyone else claimed to be the Creator of this mighty universe? Despite the fact that countless people reject faith and deny the existence of Allah, no such claim has ever been made by anyone. This absence of any rivals or opponents is itself evidence of the truth that Allah is the One God and Creator of everything. So long as Allah alone is the Lord and Creator, He is the only One Who is worthy of worship. There is no God but Him *Glorified is He*. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Say, "If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne"' (*al-Isra'*: 42). Were there gods besides Allah, they would go to Him and dispute with Him for claiming creation to be entirely His own work.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us: '... worship Allah with your total devotion' (*az-Zumar*: 2). Direct your intention to pleasing Allah alone and do not seek by your good deeds to gain people's praise or admiration. Allowing people a share in your good deeds makes them entirely fruitless, for Allah would not accept those deeds, nor can people ever reward you for them. Those who give to charity only to be called 'generous' actually waste their money, for they give it away to others who benefit from it and meanwhile receive no reward for such action from Allah.

The Arabic for 'sincerity' is *ikhlas*. Amongst the derivatives of this word are *mukhlis*, which is mentioned in the verse we are reflecting on, and *mukhlas*. The latter denotes 'purified' or 'chosen', so it refers to those Allah has chosen for His worship and sincere devotion to Him, like the messengers. Thus, their righteousness is the result of Allah's choice of them. As for the other derivative *mukhlis*, it means he who exerts himself in sincere devotion to Allah, so Allah *the Exalted* accepts him and makes him of the righteous. Thus, Allah's acceptance of him is the result of his sincere devotion. They persevere in worship and constantly knock the door of Allah until it is opened for them.

An example comes to mind of those Allah has chosen for His path purely out of His favour upon them. This example is Al-Qadi 'Iyad⁽¹⁾ who was a highwayman. One day, he went out as normal to practise his job of robbing travellers, and he heard them say, 'Do not go that way, for 'Iyad would find us.' Those words hit 'Iyad like a thunderbolt as if he had never before realised how much people must have been afraid of him. Guilt pricked his conscience, and he made a firm intention to repent, 'My Lord, forgive me and let those people feel safe.' Allah *the Almighty* forgave him and made him of the devout.⁽²⁾ Seeing how he changed from a robber to a devout Islamic scholar, people asked 'Iyad about the secret that restored him to the Straight Path. He replied, 'I certainly know the reason for that. One day, I passed by a watermelon market. I think it was in Baghdad. I found a paper torn out of a Quran book. It was thrown on the ground and trampled underfoot by passers-by. I picked it up, cleaned all the dirt from it and used my last *dirham* to buy some perfume and adorn that paper with its scent. Then I placed it into a high crevice.' 'Iyad continued, 'I swear by the One Who holds my soul in His Hand that, after doing this, I heard a voice call out, "I will make your name amongst the pure just as you purified and perfumed [the paper that contained] My Name."⁽³⁾

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- (1) This is 'Iyad ibn Musa Abul-Fadl, the renowned Islamic scholar of Morocco and the imam of the scholars of Hadith at his time. He was born in Ceuta in the year 476 AH and died from poison in Marrakech in the year 544 AH at the age of 68. He was appointed as a judge in Ceuta and later in Granada. He wrote many books, the most famous of which is *Ash-Shifa fi Ta'rif Huquq Al-Mustafa*. [*Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli (5/99)]
 - (2) Ibn Khalkan mentioned it in *Wafiyyat Al-A'yan* in his biography of 'Iyad. He said, 'He was a highwayman who robbed people on the road between Abyurd and Sarakhs. Prior to his conversion, he was in love with a woman. As he was climbing up a wall to reach for her, he heard someone reciting Allah's Words: "Is it not time for believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of Allah ..." (*al-Hadid*: 16). 'Iyad was moved, so he said, "O, my Lord, the time has come!" So he wandered under the cover of darkness until he arrived at some ruins. There he saw a company of people and heard some of them say, "Let us leave now" and others say, "No, let us wait till morning, for 'Iyad will be on the road, stopping travellers and robbing them." It was then that 'Iyad decided to repent. He left them in safety.'
 - (3) This story is said to belong to Bishr Al Hafi, not Al-Qadi 'Iyad, as mentioned in the following books: *Wafiyyat Al-A'yan* by Ibn Khalkan, *Al-Wafi bil-Wafiyyat* by As-Safadi, *Tabaqat Al-'Awliya'* by Ibn Al-Mulaqqen and *Mer'at Al-Jenan* by Al-Yafi'i. However, we must point out that 'Iyad was a companion of Bishr at the time.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been narrated as saying, 'Allah hides three things in three: He hides His Good Pleasure in His servant's obedience to Him...', so do not ever look on any act of obedience as trivial or unworthy. Know that Allah *the Exalted* forgave a man simply because he gave water to a dog that was gasping from thirst.⁽¹⁾ This act indicates the man's love of obedience to his Lord, or what would a man gain from quenching a dog's thirst? Is it possible that he was showing off? Needless to say, there was no room whatever for that. That good deed could only have been out of his love to obey Allah.

The Hadith continues, '... and He hides His Wrath in His servant's disobedience to Him ...', so do not ever take any act of disobedience lightly. A woman entered Hellfire because of a cat which she locked up since she neither gave it any food or water nor allowed it to eat from the earth's insects.⁽²⁾

The third thing is '... and He hides His secrets in His creation', such as the secret that did its work in 'Iyad and changed him from a transgressor into a devout servant of Allah.

After addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the command: '...so worship Allah with your total devotion...' (*az-Zumar*: 2), Allah *the Exalted* alerts people's hearts and minds to this fundamental fact: 'True devotion is due to Allah alone...' (*az-Zumar*: 3). The original Arabic text of this verse starts with the particle '*ala*' that is used to call attention. A speaker would use such particles to alert his addressee to what he would say is worth listening.

(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him as saying, 'A man was walking along a road and became overcome with thirst. He found a well and stopped to drink from it. He did, then, see a dog that was gasping and almost eating the earth's soil due to intense thirst. The man said, "This dog is suffering intense thirst as that which was afflicting me!" He went back to the well, filled his leather sock with water and made the dog drink from it. Allah appreciated what he did and forgave him his sins.'* [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (6009)]

(2) *This Hadith is cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, The Book of The Beginning of Creation, the chapter of The Description of Hellfire– Hadith no. (3140), narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar. It is also cited by Muslim in his Sahih, The Book of Repentance- Chapter of Encouraging Repentance– Hadith no. (2619), narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

It is also worthy to note that the prepositional phrase '...to Allah ...' that is part of the predicate comes in the Arabic text of the verse at the beginning of the sentence, so it literally translates: 'To Allah alone true devotion is due...' (*az-Zumar*: 3). This reversal of the subject and predicate in the Arabic style is meant to add more emphasis to the point that this predicate is strictly confined to the subject with which it is associated. Thus, the verse means that true devotion is solely and strictly due to Allah alone.

Now, why is true devotion due to Allah alone? What are the grounds based on which Allah is the One God and the only One Worthy of being worshipped? Religion is the Law of Allah which He has ordained for us. This guidance is from Him, and both reward and punishment are in His Hands alone. Who else then has any claim to be worshipped by that Law and that guidance? Allah *the Most High* has guided us to the Straight Path for our prosperity in this life and the Hereafter. Therefore, none is worthy of our devotion but Him *the Exalted*.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the polar opposite of sincere worship of Allah by saying: '[As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him...' (*az-Zumar*: 3); they say—in order to justify their position when you make it clear to them that worshipping other than Allah is a lie, when you, O, Muhammad, tell them that those gods cannot see or hear nor benefit or harm and when you tighten the grip around them—they say: '...‘We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allah’ (*az-Zumar*: 3).

If you want to get close to Allah, you should do so through His Law which He approved for you and to which the false gods which you worship besides Him *the Almighty* do not belong. Rather, they are made by you, carved using your own hands. If the wind knocks it over, you put it up again in its place, and if its arms are broken, you yourselves repair them.

So, your worship of them is futile and pointless, and it is actually a lie: '...Allah Himself will judge between them regarding their differences ...' (*az-Zumar*: 3). The word 'judgment', when it belongs to Allah *the Almighty* is alarming since His judgment is the truth that shows no favouritism to anyone. However, when a believer hears this, he feels peace of heart because a day will come when the judgment will be only Allah's as Allah *Glorified is He*

says: '... judgment is only Allah's ...' (*al-An'am*: 57); this means that it will be only His and no one else's. This is why you do not say to your opponent, 'May Allah judge between us!' unless you are absolutely certain that you are in the right.

For this reason, some people become angry if you say to them, 'Allah is the Best Disposer of affairs (between us).' If he were in the right, he would have no fear of anything and would say, 'I am content with His making the decision, and I accept it.' Getting angry when you try to suggest Allah as a judge between the two of you indicates that he is frightened of that judgment because he is in the wrong. Then, there is the fact that Allah's judgment will come at a time when there is no other judgment but His: '... judgment is only Allah's ...' (*al-An'am*: 57).

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says: '... Allah does not guide any ungrateful liar.' (*az-Zumar*: 3) Yes, indeed. Allah *the Almighty* does not guide an ungrateful liar because he is unworthy of being given the gift of guidance. Another reason for this is that Allah guides everyone in the sense of pointing out to them the right way to go. Then, if anyone amongst them believes, He increases him by giving him the guidance of success and support, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path and given them their awareness [of Him].' (*Muhammad*: 17)

A good example to illustrate this is one we previously had given when we said to take a traffic policeman who stands at an intersection directing traffic and pointing out to people the way to go. If you ask him the way to Alexandria, for example, he says to you, 'It is that way' and you turn in the direction he points out to you. Then, before you leave him, you say, 'May Allah reward you! I almost got lost. I would have gone some other way if Allah had not facilitated things so that I had met you!' He replies, 'By Allah, you are a good man and deserve every good that comes your way, but there is a dangerous region through which this road passes. So, I will ride with you to help you pass by it safely.' Thus, when you obeyed him by accepting the first guidance that he gave you, he increased that by offering you aid and assistance. The same is true of the True Lord *the Most High* if anyone accepts the first level of guidance by which Allah points out the right path to him and believes in that,

He will increase the level of guidance, along with granting him the guidance of success and support. An ungrateful liar is the one whose ingratitude is so strong that he does not benefit at all from guidance or from the right way being pointed out to him.

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

لَوْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا لَأَصْطَفَىٰ مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ
سُبْحَنَهُ ۖ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

**God could have chosen any of His creation He willed
for offspring, but He is far above this! He is the One,
the Almighty [4] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 4)**

This verse informs us of another type of *shirk* (associating others with Allah). These people did not worship idols, nor worship the sun or the moon. Instead, they chose other things that they deemed connected to Allah. They thought that this was somehow better and more reasonable than worshipping idols.

These people were like those who said that Ezra *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah, or those who said that the Messiah *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah or those who said the angels were the daughters of Allah, etc. Allah *Glorified is He* answers them with His Words: ‘If Allah had willed for offspring, He could have chosen any of His creation ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 4); this also means that this is a matter of which you have no say and about which you have no choice. It is not for you to choose a son for Allah. If—supposedly—Allah *the Almighty* had wanted that, He would have chosen whomsoever He willed from His creation, and it would not have been for you to make the choice for Him.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* addresses His Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Words, ‘Say [O, Prophet], "If the Lord of Mercy [truly] had offspring ..."' (*az-Zukhruf*: 81), which means ‘that Allah had chosen and whom He had informed us about "... I would be the first to worship [them] ..."' (*az-Zukhruf*: 81); this also means ‘I would be the first to affirm him and believe in him, and I would do so gladly.’ However, this is not something which Allah informed us of but was something of which He Himself disapproved.

It has been mentioned in a Hadith: 'All creatures are dependants of Allah, and the most beloved of creatures to Allah is the one who is best to his dependants.'⁽¹⁾ Thus, filiation does not extend to Allah *the Exalted* even when it comes to the filiation to messengers *peace be upon them*. Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it filiation of blood nor bodies; rather, He made it filiation of religion. The clearest example of this is the story of our master, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his son.

When Nuh's (Noah's) son refused to go and disobeyed the command of his father, Nuh (Noah) knew, for certain, that he would be amongst those destroyed. He, then, called on Allah *Glorified is He*: '... Nuh (Noah) called out to his Lord, saying, "My Lord, my son was one of my family, though your promise is true, and You are the most just of all judges."' (*Hud*: 45) However, the True Lord *the Most High* set him straight regarding filiation by saying: 'Allah said, "Nuh (Noah), he was not one of your family. What he did was not right."...' (*Hud*: 46) Our master, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* thought that filiation is that of blood, but in reality, filiation to prophets is a filiation that is based on accepting their call and following them.

The particle *law* in Allah's Words, 'If Allah had willed for offspring ...' (*az-Zumar*: 4) is a conditional particle that introduces *imtina'a li imtina'a* (impossibility for impossibility) because either the impossibility of the condition causes the impossibility of the consequence or the impossibility of the consequence causes the impossibility of the condition. Allah *the Exalted* did not take a son because He did not want to. If He had wanted to, what He willed would have come to pass.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* argues with those who propagate this lie, using the voice of logic: '... How could He have children when He has no spouse? ...' (*al-An'am*: 101) Why is offspring produced? It is

(1) Abu Ya'la narrated it in his Musnad 6/ *Hadith* 3315 from Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* with the wording, 'All of creation are Allah's dependants, and those who are most beloved to him are those who bring the most benefit to their own dependants.' Likewise, Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi in *Tarikh Al-Baghdad* 6/332 from 'Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him* with another wording, 'All of creation are Allah's dependants, and those people who are most beloved to him are those who act best towards their own dependants.'

to carry on the name of the father and keep it alive after his death. The True Lord *the Most High* is the Self-Sufficient and Exalted in Might and above any need of His creation, and He is the Eternal and the Everlasting. Then, why would he have offspring? Those who ascribe a son to Allah *Glorified is He* in the latter stages of the history of religion, such as those who say that the Messiah *peace be upon him* was His son, do they think that He has been without a son since the time that He created creation until 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* came to take him as a son?

Then, what about when the time came after He took 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* out of existence, did Allah remain thus, as we say in Egypt, 'conquered and cut off from the tree' (lonely) by being without a son? How can this claim make sense to you? This is a matter that can never be the case with respect to Allah *the Almighty* for He does not have any need for someone to carry on His Name, nor does He need the support of a son. This is due to the fact that He created the entire creation, from the first one to the last. He created them all with His perfect Power and by His Attributes of perfection. They (creation) have not increased one bit nor have they given Him a single attribute that He had not had before.

Therefore, some of the people who went far with their interpretation of the Quran said that this verse, 'If Allah had willed for offspring, He could have chosen any of His creation ...' (*az-Zumar*: 4) means 'If the All-Merciful were to have a son, I would have more right to be that son since I am the first of His worshippers.'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with what declares Him to be above such lies: '...Glory be to Him! He is Allah, the One and the Almighty.' (*az-Zumar*: 4); this means to glorify Him and declare Him to be transcendent and exalted above a matter such as this since it does not befit Him. Moreover, declare Him transcendent above resembling any of His creation, even if you were to come upon a matter that your intellect could not comprehend, still say 'Glory be to Allah!', just as He says: 'Limitless in His glory is He Who has created opposites...' (*Ya Sin*: 36). He also says: 'Therefore, glorify Allah when you enter upon the time of the evening and when you enter upon the time of the morning.' (*ar-Rum*: 17) He also says: 'Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night ...' (*al-Isra'*: 1).

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that, in matters such as this, we should disassociate Him from them and declare Him exalted above them. This is because the intellect is totally bewildered when it comes upon events such as these. The events here are attributed to Allah *the Exalted* so there is nothing astonishing about them since the time an event takes place has an inverse relationship to the power that brought it about: the greater the power, the less time it takes. Thus, if you attribute the action to the Power of all powers, you will find that it takes no time at all.

Therefore, disassociate anyone in worship with Allah and declare Him exalted above having a son since ‘...He is Allah...’ (*az-Zumar*: 4) Who has all of the Attributes of Perfection, ‘...the One...’ (*az-Zumar*: 4), and the One with Whom there is no one else: ‘...the Almighty.’ That is to say that He is the One Who has no need of anyone to carry on His Name or of anyone to help Him.

خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ يُكَوِّرُ اللَّيْلَ عَلَى النَّهَارِ وَيُكَوِّرُ النَّهَارَ عَلَى اللَّيْلِ
وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ أَلَا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ ﴿٥﴾

He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose; He wraps the night around the day and the day around the night; He has subjected the sun and moon to run their courses for an appointed time; He is truly the Mighty, the Forgiving [5] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 5); this means that He did not create them frivolously; rather, He created them *bil haqq* (for a true purpose). As we said before, *Al-haqq* (truth) is that fixed matter that does not change, as the True Lord *the Most High* said in another verse: ‘When We created the heavens and earth and everything in between, We were not playing a pointless game.’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 38) On the contrary, Allah *Glorified is He* created them with truth, wisdom, precise calculation, and marvellous construction to perform the task that He, the Creator, wanted from them. The proof of this is that they still perform their task and have done so from the moment they were created without any disorder or any of their components working against each other.

As for Allah's Words '... He wraps the night around the day and the day around the night ...' (*az-Zumar*: 5), I say that *kawwaratu al-immama* (a man's headdress of cotton or silk wound round the head) means that I have wrapped my turban around my head, for it has become round like a ball. When a turban is wrapped around, each layer is covered in turn by the layer that comes after it. The same is true of the night and day—a part of the night covers a part of the day, and the night increases until it prevails, or a part of the day covers a part of the night, and the day increases until it prevails.

This is the reality of the night and day. However, do the night and day divide up the twenty-four hours between themselves equally, with each of them being twelve hours long? No! Instead, the night becomes longer, and the day becomes shorter in winter, while the night becomes shorter, and the day becomes longer in summer. This indicates that the cosmos is not governed by rigid mechanical laws as scientists claim but is governed by the Power and the Wisdom of the Creator.

If you were to reflect on how long the night is in winter and how short it is in summer, you would find that things in creation do not happen in a random and haphazard manner; rather, there is wisdom behind every single movement. When the day is short in wintertime, workers must work harder to finish their work in the shorter amount of time available to them, and so they exhaust themselves.

Out of Allah's Wisdom, He gives them a longer period of time to rest from the exhaustions of their day. It is necessary that the period of rest correspond to the period of effort exerted.

As for summertime, the day is long and so the work can be distributed over this greater period of time. So, a person can fulfil his task with less effort, add to this the fact that he can even rest siesta little during the day. So, he does not need a long night to rest. This is why summer nights are short. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* makes the night wrap around the day, and the day wrap around the night, for a wisdom connected to the activities of day-to-day life.

This meaning is expressed in another place in the Quran when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He makes the night merge into the day and the day into

the night ...' (*Fatir*: 13); this means that He makes each go into the other, and this is why the night and the day are not equal in length except for a very short period in the year that is made necessary by the interchangeable move.

Another thing we understand from the word *yukawwiru* which Allah uses in this verse is that the earth is a ball since the night and day are phenomena that appear on the surface of the earth. Indeed, scientists have proven this fact by the photographs that they have taken of the earth from space. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks, truthfully when He says: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth ...' (*Fussilat*: 53).

In Allah's words in this verse, '... He has subjected the sun and moon to run their courses for an appointed time ...' (*az-Zumar*: 5), the word *Al-ajal*, (appointed time) means the Day of Judgment. The True Lord *the Most High* is reassuring people that the sun and moon are both signs from Allah, and they will remain for as long as this world remains. Furthermore, they will come to an end along with it. In spite of this, each of them is self-sustaining, powered by the Power of the Creator and having no need of 'fuel', 'maintenance' or 'spare parts', etc.

As for Allah's Words, '...He is truly the Mighty, the Forgiving.' (*az-Zumar*: 5), we have said that *ala* is an introductory particle whose function is to alert the listener to what comes after. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were saying, 'I have created this perfect marvellous creation for you and have provided for you the basic ingredients of life. I am the One Who has no need of you, the Mighty Who overcomes and cannot be overcome and has no need of anyone.' However, why is 'the Forgiving' mentioned in the verse at hand?

Scholars said that it is used because Allah *the Almighty* has graciously bestowed these signs—the sun and the moon, and the night and the day—upon His creation and given them the basic ingredients they need for life. Despite this, He does not look at their wrong deeds or the fact that they fall short with respect to what is His due since He is the Forgiving and pardons much.

This particular point is made clear by Allah elsewhere, and when we reflect upon what He says, we find it amazing. This is when Allah *Glorified is He*

says: ‘... If you tried to count Allah’s favours, you could never calculate them...’ (*Ibrahim*: 34). The beginning of this statement appears identically in two verses in the Quran, though the second part is different. For in One place, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... If you tried to count Allah’s favours, you could never calculate them. Man is truly unjust and ungrateful.’ (*Ibrahim*: 34) In another place, He says: ‘If you tried to count Allah’s favours, you could never calculate them. He is truly Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.’ (*an-Nahl*: 18)

First, we notice, in these verses, concerning the counting of the favours of Allah *the Exalted* the use of the particle *in* (if), which indicates doubt. This is due to the fact that the counting of the favours of Allah is something that will never happen since one only takes it upon himself to count something when he has the ability to do so. Concerning the favours of Allah, despite the advances made in the field of statistics and despite its being used in many different disciplines, the blessings of Allah are still so numerous that man would not even dream of trying to count them, just as he would not think of counting the number of grains of sand in the desert. The Words ‘... If you tried to count ...’ (*Ibrahim*: 34) mean that suppose you were to attempt to count them: ‘... you could never calculate them ...’ (*Ibrahim*: 34).

Second, we notice that the verse uses the singular form of the word *ni'ma* (favour), even though it is only things that are in the plural and can be divided into parts that can be counted; for example, you can say, 'one, two, three, four,' etc. Then, how can a single favour be counted? Scholars said that indeed, it is a seemingly single blessing, but when you reflect on it, you will see that there are many other blessings included within it. Take an apple, for example. On the surface, it seems to be a single blessing, but when you analyse it, you will find that it has colour, shape, taste, elements from which it is made, along with many other nutritional qualities. Each of those things is a favour from Allah.

Third, when you reflect on the concluding part of the two verses—and it is about that we wish to speak—you will find the first verse saying: ‘...man is truly unjust and ungrateful’ (*Ibrahim*: 34); what this means is that he rejects and denies the favours of Allah and is heedless of them, failing to show due gratitude for receiving them. Thus, it talks about the state of those who

receive the favours with respect to the Bestower of the favours and how they accept them with ingratitude. If the Bestower of favours had recompensed them in the way that they deserved, He would have withheld His favours from them. However, the concluding part of the other verse says: ‘... He is truly most forgiving and most merciful.’ (*an-Nahl*: 18) This means that He forgives you for your ingratitude and denial of His favour. Then, after forgiveness, He shows you mercy.

Allah *Glorified* is He says:

خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَأَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ
ثَمَانِيَةَ أَزْوَاجٍ يَخْلُقُكُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ خَلْقًا مِّنْ بَعْدِ خَلْقٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ
ثَلَاثٍ ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَآفَىٰ تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٦﴾

He created you all from a single being, from which He made its mate; He gave you four kinds of livestock in pairs; He creates you in your mothers' wombs, in one stage after another, in threefold depths of darkness. Such is God, your Lord; He holds control, there is no god but Him. How can you turn away? [6] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 6)

The verse makes clear the nature of the human being whom Allah *the Almighty* wanted to be His vicegerent upon the earth, for He says: ‘He created you all from a single being...’ (*az-Zumar*: 6); this is referring to Adam *peace be upon him* ‘... from which He made his mate...’ (*az-Zumar*: 6) which is Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her*. From both of them came the offspring, and thus, reproduction started.

Given the fact that Allah *the Exalted* created this being to be a vicegerent who builds the earth and harnesses its resources, it is incumbent that all vicegerents be from the same species so that they can live in intimacy and harmony with one another and can be joined together by the rigours of everyday life.

If it were not so and were these vicegerents from many different species, a group made up, for example, of a man, a jinn and an animal, life would not have been right, and their day-to-day living would not have been of help to one another. By contrast, a single species has within its members the intimacy,

love and harmonious relationships that are needed. This is because each species has its own rules, system, and laws of interaction and social interplay. Were the vicegerents to be made of lots of different species, it would prove almost impossible for them to unite, work together, or live together.

The True Lord *the Most High* also created mankind from a single species so that everybody could come into life on an equal footing, with no one starting out with an advantage over anyone else due to his being created from a higher species. The only basis for one person being superior to another is how closely they follow Allah's Way. This matter is one that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* made abundantly clear in the Hadith: 'There is no virtue of an Arab over a foreigner, and nor a foreigner over an Arab except by *taqwa* (being mindful of Allah).' ⁽¹⁾ Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... In Allah's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him ...' (*al-Hujurat*: 13); another way of saying this is 'None of you can claim superiority to any other except if it be on the basis of how well he acts with respect to what he has received from His Lord.'

The different colours and shapes that people have are to match the different environments in which they live. So, people who live in hot environments tend to be darker, while people who live in cold environments tend to be lighter. The languages that people speak also vary according to their environments. However, in terms of our origin, we all go back to Adam *peace be upon him* and Adam *peace be upon him* was created from clay, and his descendants after him were created through procreation.

Even when it comes to the Message, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A messenger has come to you from amongst yourselves ...' (*at-Tawba*: 128); in other words, he is not alien to you, nor is he from another species. He was not

(1) In the midst of the days of *tashriq* (the days immediately following *Eid Al-Adha*), the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered a *khutba* (sermon) to the people, saying, 'People, your Lord is One, and your forefather is one. No Arab is superior to any non-Arab, nor any non-Arab superior to any Arab. No white man is superior to any black man, nor any black man superior to any white man, except on the basis of *taqwa*.' The Hadith is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 5/411 from one who heard it from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. In *Hilyat Al-Awliya'* 3/100, it is mentioned that the man was Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him*.

an angel, for example, for although that is a higher form of species, an angelic messenger would not be someone whose example people could follow, nor was he Persian or Roman or spoke a language that was different to your own; rather, he was an Arab from the noblest of you and the greatest of your tribes.

Thus, the entire human race comes from a single being, and that being is Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Exalted* has made it clear to us how He created Adam *peace be upon him* in his known form by saying: 'When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, bow down before him' (*al-Hijr*: 29).

However, He does not mention anything about how Hawwa (Eve) was created. Some of the people of knowledge, however, have said that He created her in the same way as Adam *peace be upon him* while others said that He created her from one of Adam's ribs, so she was embedded within Adam *peace be upon him* when he was created. This indicates that women are subsequent to men, concealed within them, even when it comes to how they were created.

Those who hold this opinion rely upon the meaning of the words: '... from which He made his mate (*wa ja'ala minh*) ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6). For in them, *minha* means from a part of him or from his species. This is because the verb *ja'ala* contains no indication of being of a different race as in Allah's Words: 'He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful (*wa ja'ala lakum*)' (*as-Sajda*: 9); what this means is that from a piece of us is formed our hearing, from a piece of us is formed our sight and from another is formed our hearts.

Similarly, when the Quran talks about action, the woman is kept concealed within the man, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, exhort one another to the truth and exhort one another to steadfastness.' (*al-'Asr*: 1-3) In many places, He says: 'O, you who believe, be mindful of Allah...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 35); He does not address women directly except when the matter is one that relates specifically to them.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says, enumerating some of the favours He has bestowed upon His creation: '... and He produced for you from the grazing livestock eight mates ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6). We previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that when it comes to the word *inzal* (sending

down), one does not just look to its being sent down from on high, as in the sending down of the Divine Program and values, but also to the One Who sends down. *Inzal* has the meaning of 'bringing into existence'. Grazing livestock is amongst the favours that are existent on the earth, but who brought them into existence? It is Allah *Glorified is He*. So, it is as if He sent them down. The *inzal*, in this case requires the use of the corresponding preposition in *lakum* (for you) and not *alaykum* (upon you) since cattle are something that is separate from man.

These eight types of cattle are detailed more fully in the chapter of *al-An'am*. Despite the fact that Allah's favours granted to us are plentiful in number, He singles out cattle because they are the species that are most closely related to human beings in terms of their physical make-up. Then comes plants and finally comes the inanimate minerals. Some people claim that the word *zawj* means two together, but this is a mistake, for *zawj* actually means one that has another like it with it. An example of this is found in His Words: 'and We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note...' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49). Another word that is just like *zawj* (one of a pair) is *taw'am* (twin).

As for the Words, 'He creates you in your mothers' wombs, a creation after a creation, in threefold depths of darkness...' (*az-Zumar*: 6), He specifically mentions, '...a creation after a creation...' (*az-Zumar*: 6) which is a clarification of the different stages of creation through what an embryo passes while it is inside its mother. First, it wriggles around inside her, surrounded by base fluid; then, it settles as a drop in her womb. Then, it becomes a clot, then a lump, then its bones are formed and then those bones are clothed (covered) in flesh. These are the stages of creation to which Allah *Glorified is He* is referring when He says: '... a creation after a creation ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We created man from an essence of clay, then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place, then We made that drop into a clinging form, and We made that form into a lump of flesh, and We made that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with flesh, and later We made him into other forms. Glory be to Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun*: 12-14)

These are the stages through which the human being passes after arriving at the womb of his mother. This means that there must be a stage that comes before these stages. This is the particular stage at which the male element encounters the female element, or, to put it another way, when the sperm encounters the egg and impregnates it, for the only thing that reaches the womb is the impregnated egg into which the male microbe has entered.

In the chapter of *al-Hajj*, The True Lord *the Most High* makes it clear that a *mudghah* (embryonic lump) can be either *mukhallaqah* (shaped) or *ghayr mukhallaqah* (unshaped): 'People, [remember,] if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped, We mean to make Our Power clear to you. Whatever We choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time ...' (*al-Hajj*: 5).

A *mudgha mukhallaqah* is that lump from which the limbs and organs are created, while a *mudgha ghayr mukhallaqah* is the lump which settles into the body without having a form, so it remains as reserve for the body. It is as if it were a reserve or a pharmacy for preservation. So, if anything goes wrong in the body, that unformed lump is what repairs it, just as we see when it comes to wounds, for after a time wounds heal up, tissues are rebuilt, and skin goes back to how it formerly was. Where do these tissues come from? They come from the unshaped lump.

What is really amazing is that when you leave the body to its own devices and do not interfere with it by placing chemical substances over the wound, it heals itself and goes back to how it was, leaving no mark or scar. It is only when we interfere by using remedies and introducing chemical substances that of a necessity affect the cells and tissues of the body, thus, a mark or scar is left.

This is why science has been able to prove that there are two stores of nutrients within a human body: one store contains one's daily nutrients, while another is kept in reserve from which he takes nutrients when those in the first store run out. This is because a person eats in proportion to the energy his body requires. Then, he eats a bit more. This additional amount that he eats is transformed into fat in the body. Then, when a person starves or suffers from acute thirst, he extracts the nutrients he needs from the fat that exists in his

body. It is quite astonishing that that fat transforms into whatever substance the body requires.

Because of the existence of this storehouse of nutrients in the human body, we see men who are able to survive without food for a whole month, while at the same time not being able to survive without water for more than ten days. Why is this? Because when someone starves and can find no food to eat, food is extracted from the reserves stored in his body.

As for Allah's Words, '...He creates you in your mothers' wombs...' (*az-Zumar*: 6), they refer to the second creation, for the first creation was the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* from clay. This particular creation was one that Allah *the Exalted* tells us about, for none of us was there to see it, as He Himself makes clear:

'I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf*: 51)

If someone appears amongst us who thinks that humans were originated from apes that evolved into human beings, we know that he is one of those people Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about in the verse above, who lead men astray. Know for sure that he is a liar. It is easy to refute such nonsense, for if humans really had evolved from apes, why did all the other apes not also evolve? Why, over the course of all the centuries we have been here, have we not seen a single ape evolve into something resembling a human being?

Thus, it is no more than falsehood and lies, for the Creator created all species and made each of them in pairs so that they could procreate, propagate and be sorted. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note.' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49)

Concerning His Words, '...in threefold depths of darkness...' (*az-Zumar*: 6), they are to clarify the secure receptacle into which a human being settles inside the womb of his mother. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Which We housed in a safe lodging for a determined period?' (*al-Mursalat*: 21-22) *Makin* means settled into a place. So, a mother's womb is the place, and the embryo is securely settled inside of it.

When the people of knowledge speak about what is meant by these three types of darkness, they say that they are the darkness of the abdomen, the darkness of the womb and the darkness of the placenta. There are a number of things that can be understood from the word *dhulmah* (darkness):

Firstly, darkness means lack of light, and that is inextricably linked with the night.

Secondly, the night is cooler than the day since during the day there is heat generated by the sun, and heat generated by the fast breathing that stems from movement and hard work. As for people's breathing at night, it is slow and measured since its only purpose is to ensure the preservation of life, and it does not stem from hard work or expended effort.

Thirdly, there is calm and stillness in darkness and that is not available in the day.

So, in darkness there is coolness, stillness and a lack of light—and these three things are essential for an embryo to grow, for its limbs and organs to form while it is in its mother's womb. This is because, while it is in the womb, its constitution is weak, and its limbs and organs are incomplete. Moreover, it is unable to cope with heat, light or disturbing sounds. Therefore, the Creator has created insulators to protect it from those things, which is why He says: '... in threefold depths of darkness ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6).

However, the most correct view is that these three types of darkness are all in the womb, and the darkness of the abdomen is not included in them since the True Lord *the Most High* is informing us in this verse of the secure receptacle that is specific to the embryo. As for His Words, '... in your mothers' wombs (*fi butun ummahatikum*) ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6), they simply clarify to us that the general receptacle, *botun* (literally abdomen) is that in which the specific receptacle (the womb) lies. The abdomen is a large receptacle which contains the womb, the intestines, the stomach, the liver, the kidneys, the pancreas, etc. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the receptacle that is specific to the embryo immediately afterwards by saying: '...in threefold depths of darkness ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6). Thus, '... the threefold

depths of darkness ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 6) is simply a way of describing the three levels of insulation that surround and protect the child—and all three of them are inside of the womb. When a man is grown up and fully mature, he can be bothered and disturbed by sounds, and such sounds can even cause his eardrum to burst. Very bright lights can cause him harm, so that sometimes he cannot even look directly at them. Then, how could a child whose organs have not yet fully developed be expected to cope with such things?

It is well known that children are born with skin that is so delicate it cannot bear heat and that they are born with some organs and limbs that are not yet fully formed. The nervous system, for example, does not become fully developed until after a number of years; the mental faculty does not fully mature until after puberty, while the eye does not become capable of seeing properly until after three days.

Thus, the embryo is in dire need of protection and that Allah *the Almighty* caused it to be inside an enveloping layer inside an enveloping layer inside an enveloping layer. It is similar, for example, to when you put your most important document inside a file, that file is put inside a safe, and that safe is inside a strong room. The preposition *fi* (in) proves the great care that is taken over this creation and indicates that it has been provided with the enveloping layers that suit it best.

Concerning His Words, ‘...Such is Allah, your Lord; to Him belongs dominion...’ (*az-Zumar*: 6), the word *dhalikum* is a compound of the demonstrative pronoun *dha* and the second person plural pronoun. The demonstrative pronoun points to the True Lord. If you were addressing a single person, you would say *dhalika*; if you were addressing two, you would say *dhalikuma* as in His Words: ‘... this is part of what my Lord has taught me ...’ (*Yusuf*: 37); if you were addressing a group of males, you would say *dhalikum*, and if you were addressing a group of females, you would say *dhalikunna*, as in the following: ‘... This is the one you blamed me for ...’ (*Yusuf*: 32).

This demonstrative pronoun pointing to Allah *the Exalted* comes immediately after He talks about some of His secrets relating to the creation of the human being and about the three levels of darkness in the mother’s womb. All these

things relate to creation, rearing and initial shaping of human beings. Such matters relate most closely to Allah's attribute of Lordship through which He attends to rearing and creation, for the Lord is the Creator and the One Who rears and raises. As for the word, '... Allah ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6), it is related to His Divinity. Divinity is holding man responsible of performing religious duties. This is because the word 'Allah' means the One Who is worshipped by His Commands being obeyed and His prohibitions being avoided. An embryo in the belly of its mother is far removed from having any responsibility for its actions, so why does the True Lord choose in this verse concerning this particular matter to use the word indicating Divinity, when He says, '... Such is Allah, your Lord...' (*az-Zumar*: 6) and does not say, 'Such is your Lord, Allah' as some of the orientalists say?

Scholars said He does that in order for us to understand that Allah does not create us and raise us up for us to be like cattle; instead, He creates us and raises us up for a purpose: to follow His Way in which one is held responsible for his actions. This is so that we get on intimate terms with the word 'Allah' before the word 'Lord'. Moreover, there is an indication in that this is the goal behind us being made responsible for what we do, for it is for the wellness of society and in order for us to become righteous. The True Lord *the Most High* did not create us on a whim and did not leave us to our own devices, lost and wandering around aimlessly.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear to us in the beginning of the chapter of *ar-Rahman* that the Way was taught before creation was formed and that creation may only be considered a blessing when it is completed in the shade of the Way of the Creator, for a craftsman must always define what it is he wants to make before making it. He says: 'It is the Lord of Mercy Who taught the Quran. He created man and taught him to communicate.' (*ar-Rahman*: 1-4)

Concerning His Words, '... to Him belongs dominion ...' (*az-Zumar*: 6), they stem from the root letters *malaka* in which the words *mulk*, *milk* and *malakut* are derived: *milk* is what you own or possess, even if it is but something small, while *mulk* is to possess or own those who own. Both, these two, *mulk* and *milk*, apply to the Seen World, but as for *malakut*, it is that of Allah's

dominion that we do not see. The only ones to whom Allah *Glorified is He* shows His *malakut* are those He has chosen from amongst His Prophets, Messengers and righteous people of obedience whose nature and belief are pure and to whom He has granted the right type of receptors that can receive from Allah. Such are the people to whom Allah *the Almighty* reveals some of His *malakut*. This is why Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he fulfilled his duty and complied fully with the Command of his Lord, Allah showed him this *malakut*: ‘In this way We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) [Allah’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth ...’ (*al-An‘am*: 75).

Just like *mulk* and *malakut*, we say *rahma* and *rahamut*, and *rahba* and *rahabut*.

‘... to Him belongs dominion ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 6) means ‘if you have seen an expansive kingdom before you, know that it belongs to the One Who created you.’ It is amazing that this kingdom is created for you, humans, and Allah *the Exalted* created it for you even before creating you. This is clearly the case, for the first human being came upon a world ready to receive him and equipped with all the necessary ingredients for life from the very first moment he stepped upon it, such as the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, right down to the very smallest things in existence.

What follows are Allah’s Words, ‘...there is no deity but He...’ (*az-Zumar*: 6), which mean that this amazing creation belongs solely to Allah, and there is no one else there to lay claim to it. Since no one else claims it for himself, no one else may claim to have set up a programme showing mankind how to live in the world, for the One Who created is the One Who sets up the programme, and the One Who makes something is the One Who makes up the rules by which His making is maintained.

Then, there are the Words: ‘... How can you turn away?’ (*az-Zumar*: 6) They mean, ‘How did you turn from worshipping Allah, the Creator, to worshipping others apart from Him who played no part whatsoever in creation? How did you turn aside from a Lord who created you and taught you and still does so, not leaving you alone for a moment; neither does He hand over any part of the creation process to anyone else, nor is He ready to ever hand it over to anyone else.

إِنَّ تَكْفُرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا يَرْضَىٰ لِعِبَادِهِ الْكُفْرَ وَإِنْ تَشْكُرُوا
 يَرْضَهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ مَرْجِعُكُمْ
 فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٧﴾

If you are ungrateful, remember God has no need of you, yet He is not pleased by ingratitude in His servants; if you are grateful, He is pleased [to see] it in you. No soul will bear another's burden. You will return to your Lord in the end and He will inform you of what you have done: He knows well what is in the depths of [your] hearts[7] (The Quran, az-Zumar: 7)

After showing His compassion for His creation, He mentions the Lordship by means of which He created, taught and commanded, and He mentions the Divinity by which the well-being of the land and the servants is guaranteed. Allah *Glorified is He* then makes it clear that He is the One Who is totally without need of His creation by saying: 'If you are ungrateful, remember Allah has no need of you ...' (az-Zumar: 7); this means that He has no need of your belief and does not benefit from you obeying Him.

He set the obligations for our own good, not so He can derive some benefit from them. You are His creation and of His making, and He, in His role as Creator, wants to see what he has created in the best possible state. He wants to see believing servants living in believing societies in which people work together and not against each other, living in harmony and not in conflict. Allah *the Exalted* does not want to see His creation in conflict: one building, while the other destroys.

So, this is the purpose of creation and the purpose of the Divine Programme. Thus, by the Attributes of Perfection that He possesses, Allah created the creation, and yet that creation did not increase Him by so much as a single attribute that He did not already have. He has no need of you. You are of His making, and for whom He wishes good. This is why when Allah *the Almighty* offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up, for, verily, he has always been unjust and ignorant.

The refusal of the heavens, earth, and mountains was not a refusal of Allah nor was it an act of opposition against Him; rather, it was an act of submission, for Allah *the Almighty* had given them the choice, and they chose not to have free will.

However, man accepted it, and so He described them as being unjust and ignorant. How can someone who accepts the Words of Allah be unjust and ignorant?

Scholars said that he is described as such because he wronged himself and was ignorant of the consequences of his decision, for the fact that he has been granted free choice means that he is free to believe and free to disbelieve, free to obey and free to disobey. When the trust was offered to him, he accepted it because it was Allah *the Most High* Who had given him that choice, and he felt confident in himself that he would be able to carry out what would be required of him. Actually, he was ignorant of the incidents that would befall him and the whims and desires that would overtake him. Thus, he wronged himself by taking on that burden. He was also ignorant of the time when he would have to pay it back. He hurried to take it on at the time of accepting it, but he should have reckoned on the cost of carrying it out and paying it back.

With respect to the trust, there is a difference between taking it on and giving it back. This is because entrusting something to someone depends basically on his consciousness. However, if a receipt is written for it or there are witnesses, then it is not called a trust. When people take on a trust, they generally have the intention of holding on to it and giving it back, such as, for example, when you give a friend of yours a sum of money to look after for you until you get back from your travels, and he welcomes it and accepts it. However, circumstances may arise whereby your friend finds himself in need of that money and so helps himself to it. So, when you come back from your travels, you do not find your money; rather, you find yourself greeted by either denial or temporising.

So, man wronged himself, was ignorant of the time of giving the trust back, and was ignorant of the fact that he is subject to vicissitudes, so much so that even his heart is subject to change. As for the heavens, earth and mountains, when they were given the choice, they chose to not have free will,

having nothing whatsoever to do with the matter, or in essence, wiping their hands free from it.

The meaning of Allah's Words 'If you are ungrateful, remember Allah has no need of you ...' (*az-Zumar: 7*) is clearly expressed in a Qudsi Hadith 'O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in anything, and were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, any more than a needle decreases the sea if put into it. This is because I am the Most Generous, Majestic. I give with a word. When I will something, all I do is say to it "Be!" – and it is.'⁽¹⁾

His Words, '...He is not pleased by ingratitude in His servants...' (*az-Zumar: 7*) act as evidence of His Love for His creation. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, 'I have no need of you, but still I do not like for you to be ungrateful since I want to boast of you to those angels of Mine who said about you: "...Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood? ..."' (*al-Baqara: 30*)

It has been narrated that the True Lord *the Most High* said to His angels, 'Do you know that My servants obeyed Me?' Thus, they replied, 'They obeyed You for the blessings You had bestowed upon them.' The True Lord *the Most High* said, 'Even if I were to take My blessings away, they would have obeyed Me still.'

This is why He makes them ill, and they obey Him; He makes them poor, and they obey Him; He causes them to be defeated, and they obey Him; He grants them victory, and they obey Him. So, 'My slaves obey Me because of

(1) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 5/154 & 177; At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2495; and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan 4275 in a Hadith from Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. And At-Tirmidhi said, 'This is a hasan Hadith.'*

Who I am and because I deserve to be loved and obeyed regardless of whether I bestow blessings upon them or not.'

Allah *the Exalted* says, rebuking those of His creation who worship Him out of fear of the Hellfire or desire for Paradise, 'If I had not created Heaven and Hell, would I not have been worthy of being worshipped?'

A good example of this is the one we gave of a man who had a servant who worked for him and served him in exchange for a hundred pounds every month. Then, one month, the man's circumstances became so constrained that he found himself unable to pay the servant that amount, so he said to him, 'By Allah, I am no longer able to pay you this amount. I can give you no more than fifty pounds, so take care of yourself and go and see if you can find another job.' In spite of this, the servant replies, 'I agree to work for fifty pounds.' Then, the man's circumstances continued to get worse until he is no longer able to pay the servant more than twenty pounds. Yet, the servant was content with that. Then, it went down to ten, but the servant was content and even said to him, 'By Allah, the way you treat me makes you worthy of being served, even if that were to be for no wage whatsoever.' This is how Allah wants us to be connected to Him.

Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* is not pleased with ingratitude in His servants because they are His creation, and He desires only what is best for them; He desires for them to be believers so that their affairs can be set in order and so that His favours can extend from being given to them in this world to also being given to them in the Hereafter. Just as He bestows temporal favours upon them in this world, He also wants to bestow favours upon them in the Hereafter. The favours of the Hereafter are eternal and lasting.

Therefore, it has been narrated in a Qudsi Hadith: 'The earth keeps saying, "My Lord, grant me permission to swallow up the sons of Adam, for they have eaten from your good and have neglected to thank You." Also, the sky keeps saying, "My Lord, grant me permission to make the sky fall upon the sons of Adam in lumps, for they have eaten the good things You have given them and have neglected to thank You." Thus, the True Lord says to those things in creation that express their zealous concern for their Lord, "Leave Me and My creation be! If you were to have created them, you would have shown

them mercy. If they repent and come back to Me, I am their beloved, and if they do not repent, then I am their doctor."⁽¹⁾

Allah says '... if you are grateful, He is pleased [to see] it in you ...' (*az-Zumar*: 7); this means that if you are thankful, He will be content with that thankfulness of yours, for He is pleased with you for it. He loves to find it in you and rewards you for it with good. The only reason that it pleases Him to find gratitude in you is due to the fact that gratitude is the cause of your being happy in this world and the Hereafter as He says: '...If you are thankful, I will give you more...' (*Ibrahim*: 7). Thus, being thankful for a favour actually gives us more of that blessing—we thank Him for it, and He gives us more. By means of this, the gratitude remains forever, and the favour remains forever.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... No soul will bear another's burden ...' (*az-Zumar*: 7); in other words, it is like He is saying, 'No wrong-acting soul will carry the burden of another's wrong action.' Or in other words, 'I will be just by not burdening anyone with another's wrong actions. Everyone will be held accountable for their own actions.'

A number of orientalist have raised objections to this verse, saying that there is a contradiction between this verse and Allah's Words: 'They will bear their own burdens and others besides ...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 13). Yes, it is true that the two verses seemingly contradict each other, but they have not understood the reason behind the wrong action.

The general rule is that no one carries the burden of another's sins; these people carry their own sins and those of other people because the verse is talking about the chiefs of misguidance, the leaders of disbelief, who were misguided in themselves, and at the same time misguided others. So, the first

(1) It is transmitted by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum Ad-Din* 4/52 as a statement of one of the men of the right-acting early generations with the wording, Whenever any slave disobeys Me, his place on the earth seeks permission from Me to swallow him up while the portion of the sky that is immediately above him seeks permission from Me to fall down upon him in lumps. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says to the earth and sky, 'Keep away from My slaves and give them respite, for it was not you who created them. If you had created them, then you would have shown them mercy. It is possible that he will repent and come to back to Me so that I can forgive him, and it is possible that he will do a right action in exchange, so that I can change it into good actions.'

sin is the sin of them being misguided, while the other sins are those of the people whom they misguided, led astray and made misguidance seem fine to them. Thus, the meaning of this verse is different.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...You will return to your Lord in the end ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 7); this is like He is saying, ‘If I have started My creation of you by honouring you, and you have met My honouring of you with rejection and not given it its due by believing in Me and following My Way, then know that you will come back to Me in the end and will not escape My grasp.’ ‘... and He will inform you of what you have done...’ (*az-Zumar*: 7); this means He will inform you of all that you have done. ‘... He knows well what is in the depths of [your] hearts.’ (*az-Zumar*: 7); what this means is that always remember this matter and take yourself to account before it is too late.

This verse is a warning to us from the True Lord and a clarification of the issue of punishment in order to deter people from doing wrong action, in which case punishment does not happen at all. This is out of the Mercy of the Creator towards His creation, for He wants only good for them and wants them to enjoy His favours in the Hereafter, just as they enjoy His favours in this world.

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلَهُ نِعْمَةً مِّنْهُ
نَسِيَ مَا كَانَ يَدْعُو إِلَيْهِ مِن قَبْلُ وَجَعَلَ لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا لِّيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ
قُلْ تَمَتَّعْ بِكُفْرِكَ قَلِيلًا إِنَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ

When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him, but once he has been granted a favour from God, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to God, to make others stray from His path. Say, ‘Enjoy your ingratitude for a little while: you will be one of the inhabitants of the Fire’ [8] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 8)

'Affliction' (*durr*) is the harm that undermines safety and security of a person, his family or property. When harm afflicts man, it reduces extremely his feeling of pride and arrogance (*'antaza*); this is so because man knows that he cannot relieve himself nor removes that harm simply by himself; rather, he needs Allah's help. So, he seeks Allah's support and stops deceiving himself.

We have made this matter abundantly clear by making reference to the barber-surgeon who once lived in our village and who used to have a similar role amongst us as that of a doctor. Then, when education became more widespread and a few doctors began to graduate from the college of medicine, this man became frightened about his livelihood, fearing that one of those doctors would pull the rug from under his feet. Thus, the barber began to belittle the doctor who had been appointed to our village by saying, 'He (the physician) does not know anything whatsoever!' He said this wanting to prevent people from going to see him. However when his own son became ill, what did he do? Did he deceive himself as well? No, rather, that barber wrapped his son up in a piece of cloth at night and took him to the doctor about whom he had been speaking disparagingly for so long by telling people how inept he was. Yet, now, because the ill person was his own son, he comes back to the truth and stops deceiving himself.

Similarly, when man is touched by harm and things become difficult for him, he takes refuge in none but his Lord. This is after losing the basis of arrogance as revealed in the verse: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient.' (*al-'Alaq*: 6-7) This is after his mask of superiority and self-importance has fallen away.

We have said this is something that it is possible for each one of us to notice in himself; for you might, for example, give your son his daily allowance every day before he goes to school, but then one day you forget to give it to him. What would he do? He would present himself to you and try to pass backwards and forwards in front of you, as if he were trying to remind you of what you had forgotten. Then, he would greet you or say something like, 'I am off to school, Dad!' However, if you were to give him his allowance once a month, he would not behave in such a manner throughout the other twenty-nine days. Yes, indeed, it is true: 'Nay! [It is not at all as these people think;] this human being does indeed indulge in transgression because he thinks himself to be independent [of Allah].' (*al-'Alaq*: 6-7)

When men are afflicted by harm and know that no one can remove it except for Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, they will not turn to anyone but Him because they unconsciously believe that Allah is the only

One capable of taking that harm away. Even though a person does not believe in Allah, but when he is afflicted by harm, he seeks salvation from Him, and he calls out, 'O, my Lord, save me!' Strangely enough is that Allah responds and helps them and does not ignore them: '... Who is it that responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him and Who removes the ill [that caused the distress] ...' (*an-Naml*: 62).

Is it not enough that you can find no one to help you but Allah? Furthermore, you cannot help saying, 'O, my Allah!' Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those [powers] that you are wont to invoke forsake you, [and nothing remains for you] save Him ...' (*al-Isra'*: 67); that is if you call on anyone other than Allah, he will not be able to reach you and will get lost on the way. The only One Who will respond to you is Allah.

The meaning of '... turning unto Him [for help] ...' (*az-Zumar*: 8) is coming back to Him. '... but as soon as He has bestowed upon him a boon by His Grace ...' (*az-Zumar*: 8) means that as soon as He *the Most High* has given welfare to the human being: '... he forgets that which he invoked before ...' (*az-Zumar*: 8). Scholars have raised a great controversy about the relative pronoun *ma* (which) that is used in this verse; they said that, assuming *ma* is referring to Allah, why did He not say, 'he forgets the One Whom...', using the relative pronoun *man* (whom)? For in Arabic, *man* is the relative pronoun that is used for beings who possess the ability to reason, while *ma* is the one that is used for beings that do not possess the ability to reason, including the non-living.'

Our answer is that the Quran has a different point of view. You can read the holy verses: 'Say: "O, you who deny the truth! I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship."' (*al-Kafirun*: 1-3) In these verses, *ma* refers to Allah. So, *ma* is used in its correct sense here, even if the wisdom behind that is hidden to you. Yes, it is true that *man* is used for those with intellects, while *ma* is for those without intellects; however, the True Lord *the Most High* does not describe Himself as having intellect. Rather, intellect is one of your attributes, so the True Lord describes Himself in a way that does prohibit the non-existence of intellect. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* were to have said *man*, He would have been including

Himself amongst those who have intellects, and He does not describe Himself as being intellectual but as being knowledgeable and All Knowing.

It is also possible to avoid this problem completely by interpreting *ma* in a different way so that the verse means 'he forgets the harm that was the cause of him turning back to Allah' instead of meaning 'he forgets the One Who saved him and took the harm away'. If we interpret it this way, then *ma* can be used in its ordinary linguistic sense of referring to something non-sentient

As for Allah's Words, '... claims that there are other powers that could rival Allah and thus leads [others] astray from His Path ...' (*az-Zumar*: 8), *andad* (rival powers) is the plural of the word *nid*, which means a peer, equal or counterpart. These disbelievers ascribed rival powers to Allah despite them knowing that He is the True deity, Allah, and despite them knowing that all those who call on other than He are astray. They did so in order to gratify the natural stirrings of belief present in themselves, for they desired to have a deity to worship, but a deity that suits their own whims and desires, a deity who did not obligate them to do anything and whose worship did not entail any difficulty. They wanted a deity that had no programme, one that did not tell them what to do and what not to do.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and thus leads [others] astray from His Path...' (*az-Zumar*: 8); some reciters recited it *yadilla* with a *fatha*⁽¹⁾ on the *ya'*; that is the phrase 'leads [others] astray' is read 'leads [himself] astray'. However, we say that a person would not lead others astray unless he is already astray himself. Thus, it is more appropriate to recite it *yudilla* with a *damma* on the *ya'* which means 'leads others astray'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Say ...' (*az-Zumar*: 8); this means for Muhammad to respond to them and say: '... enjoy yourself for a while in this your denial of the truth. [Yet,] verily, you are of those who are destined for the Fire!' (*az-Zumar*: 8) Truly, where can enjoyment be found in disbelief? We said that their enjoyment lies in worshipping a deity who has no system and does not demand anything from them, a deity who does not prevent them

(1) This recitation of a *fatha* on the *ya'* is the narration of Ad-Duri from Abu 'Amr. As for the narration of Hafs from 'Asim, it has a *damma* on the *ya'*.

from drinking alcohol and does not put a leash on their appetites, a deity who does not order them to be truthful nor to be trustworthy, etc., but who instead leaves them to go about the earth and enjoy themselves in any way they wish.

He says, '... for a while ...' (*az-Zumar*: 8) because the enjoyment of this world is temporary and lasts only as long as we remain in it. We also said that this world lasts, in relation to any particular human being, for only as long as he remains in it. The rest of the time it has been here, from the creation of Adam to the coming of the Hour, is totally irrelevant to him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... of those who are destined for the Fire!' (*az-Zumar*: 8) The phrase 'destined for the fire' is the translation for the phrase '*ashab an-nar*', which literally means 'companions of the fire'; it bears an indication of acquaintance and intimacy between hellfire and its inhabitants. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, when addressing the Fire: 'On that Day We will ask Hell, "Are you filled?" And it will answer, "[Nay,] is there yet more [for me]?"' (*Qaf*: 30); it is as if the fire says, 'Bring me my lovers and companions. I want more of them!'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says⁽¹⁾:

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَنِيتٌ ءَانَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُوا رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۗ قُلْ
هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولَٰئِكَ الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٩﴾

What about someone who worships devoutly during the night, bowing down, standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, hoping for his Lord's mercy? Say, 'How can those who know be equal to those who do not know?' Only those who have understanding will take heed [9] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 9)

The word *amm* (or) indicates that there is a choice between two things. You say, 'This or (*amm*) that.' The word indicates that there must be a counterpart

(1) Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi says in *Asbab An-Nuzul* (p.210), 'Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him said according to the narration of 'Ata', 'This verse was revealed about Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him.' Also, Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'It was revealed about 'Uthman ibn 'Affan Allah be pleased with him.' Furthermore, Muqatil said, 'It was revealed about 'Ammar ibn Yasir Allah be pleased with him.' As-Suyuti mentioned this in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (7/214) with a number of different narrations.

to the choice presented to us; so what is counterpart of 'one who devoutly worships [Allah] throughout the night ...' (*az-Zumar: 9*)? The bad equivalent is mentioned in Allah's Words immediately before it: 'Now [thus it is] when affliction befalls man, he is likely to cry out to his Lord, turning unto Him [for help], but as soon as He has bestowed upon him a boon by His Grace, he forgets Him Whom he invoked before, claims that there are other powers that could rival Allah and thus leads [others] astray from His Path ...' (*az-Zumar: 8*).

Thus, the meaning is 'Which is better: one who entreats Allah when he is afflicted by harm but then ascribes partners to Him once the harm is removed, or one who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating and standing, mindful of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord?'

'...One who devoutly worships ...' is the translation for Arabic word *qanit*, meaning a person who is constant in his humility to and worship of Allah. The Arabic word *ana'* (throughout) is the plural of *inw*, like *himl*, (singular for load) and its plural *ahmal*. The word *inw* means a portion of night, and its plural, morphologically-speaking, would be *a'naw*, but the *hamza* is changed to a long vowel, and the *waw* is changed to a *hamza* because it comes immediately after an additional *alif*, so the word becomes *ana'*.

As for '... ever-mindful of the life to come ...' (*az-Zumar: 9*), this means a believer who is fearful of the Hereafter, along with implying the constraint he may be subjected to in order to get there. '... and hoping for his Lord's Grace...' (*az-Zumar: 9*) means His mercy precedes His anger, for He does not say here 'feeling safe about receiving his Lord's Grace', which would have been the opposite of being 'ever-mindful of'. Instead, He first mentioned the frightening things of the Hereafter that await people if they disobey; what is meant in this verse is 'being wary of the fire in the hereafter'. Then, Allah talks directly about His Mercy by saying, '... and hoping for his Lord's Grace...', and not saying, 'hoping for paradise'.

When a believer places his hopes in his Lord, he does not reckon upon his deeds and actions in this world; instead, he hopes for and awaits the Mercy of Allah. This is because it is not a believer's actions that save them; indeed, every person, when called to account meticulously for his actions in this life, will inevitably be found guilty.

So, the first and utmost bail and means of salvation for us all is the Mercy of Allah; this is mentioned in the Noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'There is not one of you who will enter paradise by his actions.' They (his companions) asked, 'Not even you, Messenger of Allah?' He *peace and blessing be upon him* replied, 'Not even me, except if Allah encompasses me with His Mercy.'⁽¹⁾

Therefore, you should take care not to be filled with self-conceit concerning your actions; all the religious assignments (*takaleef*) primarily benefit you, and they are no favour to Allah. When He rewards you for such deeds in the Hereafter, it is from His Grace and Bounty.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?"...' (*az-Zumar*: 9) After having made a comparison between a person who calls on his Lord and turns back to Him when he is afflicted by harm but then forgets Allah's favour when he is granted a blessing by Him, and a person who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating and standing, both being mindful of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord. Allah *the Almighty* wants to emphasise this point and makes it clear to us that those who have real knowledge are not the same as those who have false information: '...Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?" ...' (*az-Zumar*: 9). So, the one who returns to disbelief after Allah has removed the harm from him is lacking real knowledge; if he had real knowledge, he would not have returned to disbelief. Furthermore, had he weighed fairly the duties required from them in this world against the reward prepared for them in the Hereafter, surely he would see these duties such a less and slight work.

However, as for the one who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating, and standing, being mindful of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord, he does have real knowledge. Most certainly, spending the night hours in prayer has many benefits. First, it keeps a worshipper far removed from showing off or gaining fame. Second, it means that all limbs and organs of a worshipper are devoted to the meeting of his Lord; the eye, for example, in

(1) *An agreed upon prophetic Hadith (saying) that is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6463) and Muslim in his Sahih (2816) from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

the darkness of night is relieved from having to look at all those things that distract man's attention in the daytime. The reason for this is that everything appears to your eyes takes a portion of your thinking. You note it to yourself when someone goes out, someone comes in or someone says something, etc.

However, at night, there is stillness and nothing to distract you; so all the limbs and organs are directed purely towards Allah, free of the distractions of extraneous sights and sounds. This type of atmosphere allows you to stand before your Lord in true sincerity and humility.

When you stand for a long time in prayer, you leave behind sleep and deny yourself its rest in order to stand before your Lord and prostrate to Him. This is why a poet says:

I dedicated myself to My Lord and felt rapture on account of my closeness to Him

And felt so light that it was as if I had no body.

There I recited the Book of Allah, O, what a wondrous thing,

I have been given in exchange for the blessing of sleep!

I wished that my night could grow longer so that I could reach

The sin of *wa'n-nas* and connect it to the *ba'* of *bi-smi*.

This is the state of the people of devoted worship who spend their nights in intimate conversation with their Lord. This is the state of those who make their journey through the Book of Allah; no sooner do they reach, in their recitation of the Quran, the letter *sin* of the word *wa'n-nas* which is the last in order of the Quran verses, than they resume recitation right back to *bi-smi-llahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim*, which is the beginning of the Holy Book. We said previously that the Quran in its entirety is based upon connected recitation, and not upon stopping.

Is the person who experiences such a state equal to one who disbelieves in Allah? The former has gained knowledge and turned it into action, while the latter has no knowledge at all or he has knowledge but does not use it in a way that benefits him. Then, there is the fact that when a person puts his knowledge into action, Allah *the Exalted* elevates his level of perception to the level of unveiling (*mukashafa*) and the emanation of knowledge (*faid*) as an act of Mercy and Grace from Him. We see an example of that in the story of

the righteous man whom Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* accompanied and about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... on whom We had bestowed Grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge [issuing] from Ourselves.' (*al-Kahf*: 65) Likewise, the Grace mentioned in Allah's Words, '...and hoping for his Lord's Grace ...' (*az-Zumar*: 9), refers to the special emanations from Allah to those who dedicate themselves to Him. A clear example of this in our life is when you have a friend who accompanies you everywhere; you inevitably single him out for special favour and treatment. So, how do you think it must be for one who always stays close to his Lord? Would Allah *the Almighty* reward him without singling him out for any special favour? Would He treat you the same as someone who only does the obligatory acts and nothing else?

Therefore, Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'The best devotion My servant submits to Me is performing the obligatory duties I decreed for him. My servant continues to get closer to me by means of supererogatory acts until I love him. When I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his legs with which he walks, and if he were to ask anything of Me, I would give it to him.'⁽¹⁾

Thus, a dedicated believer enters into the state of being a devoted man of Allah such that he is granted the ability which says to something 'Be!' and it will be. This is one of the emanations that are granted to those who keep prostrating and praying to Allah, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of their Lord. They worship Allah without simulation or seeking reputation and deny themselves sleep and rest because they have become intimate with their Lord; they find rest in being near to Him.

Allah's Words, '..."Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?"...' (*az-Zumar*: 9) prove that there is a type of knowledge called the knowledge of unveiling which Allah *the Exalted* grants to those

(1) It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6502); and Abu Nu'aym in *Hilyat Al-Awliya'* (1/4) in a hadith from Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him*. The beginning of the Hadith proceeds as follows: 'Allah says, "If anyone shows enmity to one of a devoted worshipper of Mine, I will declare war on him (the aggressor) ...' It has also been narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6/256) in a Hadith from 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and in her version it begins, 'If anyone humiliates one of My devoted worshippers, it becomes lawful for Me to wage war upon him ...'

whom He wills from amongst His righteous slaves, those who are deserving of such a position. Thus, a pious man who was a companion of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* worshipped Allah according to the Way brought by Musa (Moses), and he was not a messenger. However, despite that, he, in some aspect excelled a messenger because Musa (Moses) guided him to his Lord, and he became closer and closer to him until he became one of the people of unveiling, achieved a direct connection to Allah and was shown things by Him that He had not even shown His Prophet Musa (Moses).

Therefore, at the end of the period he spent with Musa (Moses), this pious man said, '... And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord ...' (*al-Kahf*: 82). So, the task of a messenger is to connect creation with the Creator. Then, when they do connect with Allah, the line that links them to Him becomes more direct; each worshipper is rewarded according to the degree of his devotion to Allah.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... [But] only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind!' (*az-Zumar*: 9) This means that those who have thinking intellects that examine the world around them and reflect on Allah's signs know this truth. In other words, people have senses by means of which they perceive and an intellect by means of which they weigh their perceptions up and make choices. They use hearing in processing sounds, sight for visions and nose for smells, etc.; then they put those things before their intellect which examines them to weigh advantages and disadvantages. If the intellect is sound, then it falls on the side of what is good and chooses what is the most useful and most beneficial.

قُلْ يٰعِبَادِ الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا اَتَّقُوْا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِيْنَ اَحْسَنُوْا فِيْ هٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا
حَسَنَةً وَّاَرْضُ اللّٰهِ وٰسِعَةٌ اِنَّمَا يُوَفِّي الصّٰبِرُوْنَ اَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Say, '[God says], believing servants, be mindful of your Lord! Those who do good in this world will have a good reward – God's earth is wide — and those who persevere patiently will be given a full and unstinting reward'[10]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 10)

Being conscious of Allah (*taqwa*) is guarding oneself against doing acts of disobedience, putting a barrier between yourself and Allah's Attributes of

Majesty. Allah is the Compelling, the Subjugating, and the Vengeful; so, put a barrier between yourself and those Attributes as a form of protection.

'... who have attained to faith' (*az-Zumar*: 10) refers to those who believe in the Doctrines of Faith; '... Be conscious of your Lord!' (*az-Zumar*: 10) This is in reference to the assignments, or orders, He requires from you. '...Ultimate good awaits those who persevere in doing the good in this world...' (*az-Zumar*: 10) means the good in the Hereafter awaits them, for Allah *the Almighty* does not say, 'Good in this world awaits those who persevere in doing good'. This is because even disbelievers enjoy a great many good things in this world such as wealth, fame, information, etc.

If we interpreted the word 'good' as meaning 'bliss', that bliss that causes a person to turn away from his Lord cannot be considered a good thing but must instead be considered a bad thing. Thus, the good that is referred to in this verse must be that which awaits us in the Hereafter. '... And [remember] wide is Allah's earth ...' (*az-Zumar*: 10). However, what is the connection between '... And [remember] wide is Allah's earth ...' and '... Be conscious of your Lord', which precedes it?

Scholars say that if you encounter hardships regarding your devotion to Allah in the land where you live, Allah's earth is wide, so search for the means to protect yourself and your faith in a different land; Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of Allah shall find on earth many a lonely road, as well as life abundant ...' (*an-Nisa*': 100).

In the same respect, He also says: 'Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves, [the angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer, "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say, "Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?"...' (*an-Nisa*': 97).

So, when you feel caged and extremely oppressed in your own land, go and look for another land in which you can feel safe regarding yourself and your religion, and with respect to putting Allah's programme into practice without anyone objecting.

If you were to have paid full notice to a verse in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, you would have found in it the solution to all the problems of the modern world. This verse is the following, 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings' (*ar-Rahman*: 10) which means that Allah *the Almighty* has placed the earth, that is to say the entire earth without restriction, at the disposal of all living beings, again without restriction. Thus, every human being has a share in Allah's earth. Therefore, if one place becomes too narrow for a person, he has the right to go elsewhere. However, the laws and interests of the human race has changed this picture, putting obstacles, impediments and complicated procedures in the way, which block the path of this freedom that the True Lord *the Most High* guarantees us of being able to move about the earth.

Furthermore, this is why we find that the world's big economic problem is the existence of large swathes of land without people and many people without land. If we were to leave the land to Allah in the way that He created it for His slaves and if we were to place the whole of the earth at the disposal of all living beings, we would bring an end to the problems of this world.

Look, for example, at Sudan, our neighbour to the south; it is a country that contains millions of acres that no one benefits from, while we here in Egypt have millions of idle labour force. If it were not for the borders that we ourselves put in place, Sudan alone could have solved the problem of food for the entire Arab world. Instead, we make things even more wretched and bitter for ourselves by disputing and jostling amongst ourselves concerning where those borders should fall, even if it is by as much as a single inch. Indeed, this matter has been the cause of great crises and even led to the outbreak of wars between different nations. Thus, this is the natural result of going against the Command of Allah and His order in creation.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[and] verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning!' (*az-Zumar*: 10) The fact that Allah *the Exalted* encourages us to have patience after saying, '...And [remember] wide is Allah's earth, [and] verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning!' (*az-Zumar*: 10), indicates that there must be difficulties, problems and hardships that demand our patience. A poet once said:

By your life, no land has ever become too narrow for its people,
Rather, it is the manners of its men that have become too narrow for it.⁽¹⁾

The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to take on the burden of Allah's Way and put it into practice in order to bring ourselves happiness, and then to practice sublimation in our faith in order to bring happiness to others. This is the way to make welfare prevail evenly in society. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* says: 'May Allah illuminate the man who hears my speech and pays heed to it, and then conveys it to someone else who did not hear it, for it is possible that the one who is told of it will pay more heed to it than the one who heard it.'

Thus, passing on good to others is also useful for you, and it will bring you benefit since if you concealed the knowledge of what is good from someone else, you would leave that person embroiled in evil. Furthermore, that evil would inevitably have impacted upon you and worn you down. So, it is in your best interests that good things spread to others, enabling others to become good people, and not being ones stealing, cursing, cheating, or infringing upon the rights of others. Thus, the actual act of passing on knowledge of what is good is a source of benefit to the one who passes it on since at the very least it stops evil people from harming him.

A patient person (*sabir*) is the one who is patient and steadfast in the face of those trials and hardships that negatively impact his health, wealth, or family. This patient person is the one who is confident of the fact that the pain and harm he suffers will be the source of more good for him than the comfort and bliss he enjoyed before that pain and harm arrived since Allah says: '[and] verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning!' (*az-Zumar*: 10)

Allah *the Almighty* has designated certain amounts of rewards for performance of all the obligations that which He charges us; for the prayer, we will be rewarded with a certain amount of blessings and the same is true for *zakat*,

(1) The line is from a poem written by Ibn Ar-Rumi and is in the (*tawil*) metre and is composed of four lines. Ibn Ar-Rumi is 'Ali ibn Al-'Abbas ibn Jurayj, a major poet from the same generation as Bashshar ibn Bard and Al-Mutanabbi. He was born in Baghdad in the year 221 AH; he grew up and died there, killed by poison in the year 283 AH at the age of 62.

etc. Concerning patience, it is something whose reward is not accounted for. In other words, its reward is unknown. Some have even said that when people are shown their stations in paradise, there will be some who are not known to have done a great deal of right action but still have lofty stations in paradise. When people ask who they are, they will be told that they are those who had patience in times of difficulty, trial and adversity; therefore, they obtained those lofty stations as a result of such.

Patience means negation of doubt in the Mercy of Allah, as well as not objecting to His Judgment and Decree. However, this is not the case with certain people whom, for example, we see at the time of *Hajj* presenting their lesions and woes to others. Some of these people go to perform *Hajj*, and then they reveal their tribulations to society at large by showing people a crippled leg or a crippled arm, for example, and as a result, begging them on account of their injury. It is as if they were complaining about the Creator to creation. However, if they were to conceal their tribulation instead, along with being content with Allah's Decree, boon of Allah would come to their doors, and He would give them what they needed without any effort on their behalf.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said: 'If you are tested, then conceal it.'⁽¹⁾ If a person reveals his complaint to creation, it is as if exposing the Creator and saying to people: 'Look at what Allah did to me.'

In the stories that are related about the Companions of Prophet Muhammad and the first generations of this *ummah* (followers of Islam), we are told about a woman who did not find it acceptable for her husband to complain of poverty to Prophet Muhammad, despite the fact all they only owned a single garment that was used by the two of them. The man put the garment on and then goes to the mosque to perform the prayer with Prophet Muhammad at the

(1) *It is narrated by Al-'Ajuni in Kashf Al-Khafa' (Hadith) 211 with this wording, and Al-Hakim narrated in Al-Mustadrak (4/244) from Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah after stoning Al-Aslama and said, 'Keep away from this filth from which Allah prohibits you. If you do any of them, however, then keep them hidden with the veil of Allah and make repentance to Allah. For if anyone reveals their page to us, we will implement (the punishment decreed in) the Book of Allah upon him.'* Furthermore, he said that the Hadith was correct (*sahih*) according to the preconditions of the two sheikhs, although neither of them narrated it.

beginning of pray time. Then, as soon as the prayer finished, he would hurry back home so that his wife could put the garment on and offer her own prayer.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* noticed⁽¹⁾ the fact that the man always came at the beginning of the prayer but did not see him afterwards. The Prophet waited for the prayer to end and then quickly turned in the direction of the man, only to see him in the process of leaving the mosque. So, he called out to that man, saying, ‘I always see you at the beginning of the prayer but then never see you afterwards. Is it that you do not like sitting with us?’ He replied, ‘No, Messenger of Allah, it is simply that my wife is waiting for this cloak of mine in order to offer her prayer in it.’ So, Prophet Muhammad asked Allah for good for the man.

Then, when the man went home, his wife said to him, ‘You are late by the amount of a single set of prayer beads’, for that was how they measured time. He replied, ‘The Messenger of Allah stopped me and asked me about my affair, and I was compelled to tell him that I had a wife at home waiting for this cloak of mine to pray in.’ So, she said, ‘What is the matter with you! Do you complain about your Lord to Muhammad?’ This was the level to which the Companions demonstrated patience, patience free of anxiety, complaint, or objection to the Decree of Allah.

Therefore, knowing the reward that the patient will receive in the Hereafter, some of the righteous people say, ‘If people were to know the reward that the people of patience receive, they would wish that they could come back to this world and have their bodies cut so that they could obtain that position.’

قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ ۚ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

Say, ‘I have been commanded to serve God, dedicating my worship entirely to Him [11] and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto God [12] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 11-12)

We notice in these two verses that the verb *umirtu* (I am bidden) is repeated. This indicates that we are being given two commands; each of them is separate

(1) The story of the woman who told her husband, 'Do you complain to the Prophet Muhammad from poverty?'

and independent from the other. The first command is 'Say [O Muhammad]: "Behold, I am bidden to worship Allah, making my faith sincerely to Him alone, and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Allah."' (*az-Zumar*: 11-12) This is a command to have certainty in our faith and certainty in our worship, meaning that we do them solely and sincerely for the sake of Allah.

There are different degrees of true sincerity to Allah; a person may worship Allah in expectation of a reward and out of a desire for paradise, another may worship Him out of fear of the fire and a third one might worship Allah for they believe He deserves to be worshipped and loved.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says at the end of the chapter of *al-Kahf*: '... whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting his Lord [on Judgment Day] ...' (*al-Kahf*: 110); this does not mean the paradise of his Lord or His reward; it means that he only wants to meet Him and be close to Him. His heart is not preoccupied with the blessings. Rather, it is only preoccupied with being in close proximity to the Bestower of blessings: '... let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe unto anyone or anything a share in the worship due to his Lord!' (*al-Kahf*: 110) Paradise is one of those things.

Thus, the first command is specifically to belief. As for the second command, 'and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Allah.' (*az-Zumar*: 12) It is related to the Islamic assignments and the duties Allah commands us to do and not to do. Therefore, how come Prophet Muhammad says: 'and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Allah' (*az-Zumar*: 12)? Is he not already the foremost amongst them? He says as such because the first time anything was made obligatory in Islam was when the revelation was first sent down to him, and that was before he had conveyed any part of it to his Companions. So, there was a period of time when he was the first to surrender to Allah and the first to submit fully to the Order of Allah, before he conveyed that order to anyone else. That is it, referring to first, or 'foremost', in the true literal sense of the word.

However, there is also another interpretation for first, or 'foremost', in this verse; it is that Muhammad is the first to put the rulings of Allah into practice in front of the people after having conveyed the Divine Order to them. He did

this so that they can know that the Message was simply not something to corroborate messengers; rather, it was to make those messengers the perfect examples for people to follow. Thus, by putting the Order of Allah into action, messengers taught all of mankind that that order was good for them. This is proven by the fact that they imposed its implementation upon themselves before they imposed it on anyone else and, thus, realising the saying, 'I will not command you to do anything that I do not do myself.'

Another thing is that Allah denies the Messenger and his family something that He grants to the rest of the Muslims. When a person dies, his family inherits from him. However, when it came to Prophet Muhammad, none of his family was permitted to inherit from him. Moreover, the poor amongst the Muslims may receive charity and *zakat*, but the poor amongst the family of the Prophet are not allowed to receive charity or *zakat*.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad endured great hardship in delivering the Message and was not coddled or granted a comfortable life on account of it. Furthermore, his family also endured a degree of the same hardship alongside him. If it had not been for their being certain about Allah's reward which gave them trust and hope of paradise, a certainty of trust that made it seem to them as if they were actually physically looking upon the people of paradise being blessed and the people of the fire being punished, if it had not been for that, they would not have been able to endure hardships and difficulties with such patience.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the wives of Prophet Muhammad by saying: 'O, wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the [other] women...' (*al-Ahzab*: 32). This is due to them being the wives of Prophet Muhammad, and so they must be the first ones to put his order into practice so that they can become living examples of it. This way, people can come to know that the Messenger did not come as a tyrant, commanding them to do things while not doing them himself, and forbidding them to do things while doing them himself. On the contrary, he was the first amongst them to put the Divine Orders into practice. He and his family led the way so that people might learn from their example. Thus, he really was the first of Muslims.

Scholars have deeply examined the issue of 'being the first of Muslims' because the Quran also mentions Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying the

same phrase: '... and I shall [always] be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Him.' (*al-An'am*: 163); this means that he was the first of Muslims of his time, but as for Prophet Muhammad, he was the first of Muslims during his time and the times of others. In order to make this matter more comprehensible, we say, that first, or 'foremost' is a first, or 'foremost', in the sense of surpassing everyone else and being superior. This superiority can be relative like when we say that so-and-so was the first in the College of Law this year. In this instance, his superiority is specifically linked to the year in reference, but in other years there be other students who surpass him and get even higher grades. Furthermore, superiority can be universal like when we say that so-and-so is first in the College of Law from the day it was established until today.

Thus, there is a first, or 'foremost', that relates to a specific period, and there is another first, or 'foremost', based on comparison between different time periods with each other. If one of the messengers said, 'I am the first of Muslims', he meant the first of Muslims during his time period, but when Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'I am the first of Muslims', he meant the first of all Muslims, from the time of Adam until the coming of the Day of Judgment. This is despite the fact that Muhammad came at the end of time, and he was the first in terms of the rank at the time of receiving assignment of the mission. Each of the other messengers were sent to a specific place at a specific time, but Muhammad has been sent to entire mankind, wherever and whenever they live. Then, there is the fact that he is the Seal of Messengers, for no Message will come after his, and no messenger will come after him. These are all factors as to why Prophet Muhammad is the first, and they are factors that are patently true, and that none can deny.

Therefore, we find this first is always repeated on the tongue of Prophet Muhammad as in the verse: 'Say [O, Prophet]: "If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son, I would be the first to worship him!"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 81) This means that I will be the first to affirm that.

Allah Glorified is He says:

قُلْ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾ قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ
 دِينِي ﴿١٤﴾ فَاعْبُدُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ قُلْ إِنَّ الْخَاسِرِينَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا
 أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَهْلِيَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَلَا ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٥﴾

Say, 'I fear the torment of a terrible Day if I disobey my Lord.'

[13] Say: Say, 'It is God I serve, dedicating my worship entirely to Him [14] you may serve whatever you please beside Him.' Say, 'The true losers are the ones who will lose themselves and their people on the Day of Resurrection: that is the most obvious loss [15] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 13-15)

Is it not strange that Prophet Muhammad said, '..."Behold, I would dread, were I to rebel against my Lord, the suffering [which would befall me] on that awesome Day [of Judgment]" (*az-Zumar*: 13)? It is as if he were saying, 'I have not attained to this station simply because I am an honoured prophet. On the contrary, I am just like the rest of you. If I disobey my Lord, I will also be subjected to punishment. The fact that Allah has made me the first and chosen me above everyone else will not mean anything if I commit acts of disobedience.'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing His Messenger: 'Say: "Allah alone do I worship, making my faith sincerely to Him alone' (*az-Zumar*: 14). This verse is also related to faith and the certainty of belief. Previously, Allah said, 'Say [O, Muhammad]: "Behold, I am bidden to worship Allah, making my faith sincerely to Him alone,"' (*az-Zumar*: 11) whereas in this verse He says: 'Say: "Allah alone do I worship ..."' (*az-Zumar*: 14). What is the difference between 'Allah alone do I worship' and 'I am bidden to worship Allah'?

'I am bidden to worship Allah' is in the normal structure for sentences in Arabic: verb, followed by the subject, followed by an object. When a sentence follows this order, however, it presents no impediment to another object being conjoined to the first. For example, if you were to say, 'Obey So-and-so', there is nothing to prevent you from adding '... and So-and-so'. However, if we were to place the object in front of the verb, as in 'Say: "Allah alone do I worship ..."', that act of placing the object before the verb gives us the sense of confinement and restriction. In other words, the word order restricts worship

to Allah alone, such as when you say, 'To Allah, I complain' meaning you complain only to Him and no one else.

The first verse follows the normal order for sentences, while the second verse makes use of the linguistic device of confinement. It is as if he is saying, 'I do not worship any other than Allah. But you, you worship whatever you want: '... "and [it is up to you, O sinners, to] worship whatever you please instead of Him!'" (*az-Zumar*: 15)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* makes clear to us what the outcome of associating others with Him is when He says: '... Say: "Behold, the [true] losers will be they who shall have lost their own selves and their kith and kin on Resurrection Day, for is not this the [most] obvious loss'" (*az-Zumar*: 15).

We understand from this that idolaters will have lost themselves on the Day of Judgment, and that is due to them wronging themselves by not believing in Allah and associating others with Him. However, how come they also lose their families? Scholars say that their families mean their children and descendants, and these children either become believers or remain in disbelief just like their ancestors. If they remain in disbelief, they are losers just like their ancestors, but if they believe, they will not be with those ancestors and will be prevented from seeing them since they will be in paradise while those others will be in the fire. So, whatever the case with their ancestors, they will be in loss.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasises the word 'loss' by making use of the cognate accusative *maf'ul mutlaq*: '... for is not this the [most] obvious loss?' (*az-Zumar*: 15) Then, He describes that loss as being obvious which means that it is clear and all encompassing, for when is a trader considered to be a loser? He is considered a loser when his capital is returned to him without any profit, for in such an instance he is a loser because all the effort and hard work he put into trading was for nothing or when the loss also eats into his capital, so he loses because all the effort and hard work he put in came to nothing and he loses a portion of his capital. This latter type of loss is the obvious loss, or in other words, the comprehensive loss. Thus, Allah's Words, '... for is not this the [most] obvious loss?' (*az-Zumar*: 15) mean the comprehensive loss that encompasses his family, wealth and efforts.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَهُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ مِنَ النَّارِ وَمِنْ تَحْتِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ ذَلِكَ
يُخَوِّفُ اللَّهَ بِهِ عِبَادَهُ، يَعْبادِ فَاتَّقُونِ ﴿١٦﴾

**They will have layers of Fire above them and below.’
This is how God puts fear into His servants: My servants,
beware of Me [16] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 16)**

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* makes clear to us what the outcome will be for disbelievers when He says: 'Clouds of fire will they have above them and [similar] clouds beneath them ...' (*az-Zumar*: 16). The word *thulal* (clouds) is the plural of *thulla*, which literally means a canopy or sunshade that provides a person with shade and protects him from the heat of the sun. Normally, it is in shade that a person looks for rest and fresh air. However, as for these people, they have clouds above them, not just a cloud but clouds that are made of fire. Indeed, fire can never provide shade.

So, this is an irony by which Allah is mocking disbelievers. Even more, these clouds will not afflict them from one direction but from above and beneath. Usually, when something bad approaches from one direction, people get away from it by going in the opposite direction, In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hell will be their resting place and their covering as well⁽¹⁾...' (*al-A'raf*: 41).

Then, the fire surrounds them on all sides, and they have no way of escaping from it. '... In this way Allah imbues His servants with fear. O, you, servants of Mine! Be, then, conscious of Me.' (*az-Zumar*: 16) Reflect on the Mercy Allah shows His slaves, even in those situations where He mentions punishment and hellfire. For the fire is not there to punish creation, but it is there to frighten and rebuke them so that they do not adopt such a position or

(1) *As-Suyuti said in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (3/457), 'Ibn Al-Mundhir narrated that Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him said about the Words, 'Hell will be their resting place...' (al-A'raf: 41), 'a carpet ', and about the Words, '... and their covering as well...' (al-A'raf: 41) 'a shroud'. Similar has also been narrated by Hannad, Ibn Jarir and Abu Ash-Sheikh from Muhammad ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazi.*

open themselves up to such a punishment. One only warns those whom they love, such as when you make your son afraid of failing his exams, you make it clear to him what the outcome of neglecting his studies will be; you warn him of the humiliation, scorn, and disdain to which he will be exposed if he fails his course.

Thus, Allah's purpose in mentioning the fire is to put fear in people's hearts so that they avoid doing any of those things that lead to it. A prudent person takes heed of warning, and he is deterred when rebuked. Therefore, the act of frightening must be considered one of Allah's greatest blessings.

This matter is made clear in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*. Those who try to emend the Words of Allah say: 'It is consistent that verses mentioning blessings conclude with Allah's Words: "Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?" (*ar-Rahman*: 13) This is the case in the verses: "He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?" (*ar-Rahman*: 14-16) However, where is the blessing that we should not deny in Allah's Words: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be let loose upon you, and you will be left without aid" (*ar-Rahman*: 35)?

Scholars reply that this torture is not actually taking place, but it is only mentioned to make us afraid. It means, 'If you do such-and-such, then Allah will let loose upon you a flash of fire and smoke, and you will be left without aid.'

By terrifying us and making us afraid of the punishment before it takes place, Allah *the Almighty* creates a barrier that prevents us from doing such things that will bring that punishment upon us, and as a result, this causes us to be fearful and conscious of Him. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says after that: '... O, you, servants of Mine! Be, then, conscious of Me' (*az-Zumar*: 16); this means to consider this frightening a mercy, not a cause for terror. If a person weighs things carefully and compares the state of the inhabitants of paradise with that of the inhabitants of the fire, he would almost certainly be deterred and return to the straight path, at which he would become worthy of the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allah. Thus, it is one of Allah's blessings to us that He frightens us and warns about evil before it happens. If He had not warned us, then He would have taken us unawares or left us in heedlessness.

وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادَ
الَّذِينَ يَسْمَعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ
وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

There is good news for those who shun the worship of false gods and turn to God, so [Prophet] give good news to My servants [17] who listen to what is said and follow what is best. These are the ones God has guided; these are the people of understanding [18] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 17-18)

'The powers of evil' is the translation for the Arabic word *taghut*, which is the hyperbolic form of the word *taghin*. A *taghut* is a tyrant who increases in tyranny the more respect people show him, and increases in arrogance and conceit the more they fear him. *Taghut* must have a directive order and an aspect of supremacy.

Therefore, idols are not called *taghut*; they do not have a supreme characteristic or a directive order. Rather, such stone idols gain supremacy from the people worshipping them. So, it is only human beings who can be *taghut*, even if they were simply governors. Otherwise, how do idols become tyrannical? Idols can neither speak nor oppress.

There is a proverb that people say in the countryside, and it goes as follows: 'O, Pharaoh, what has made you Pharaonic (tyrannical)?' He replied, 'I never met anyone who stopped me.' In other words, if people had challenged his claim of divinity when he made himself a deity, he would have stopped.

May Allah have mercy on Ahmad Az-Zayn⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾; when Egypt was still a monarchy, they wanted a national union that brought all the various parties and factions together to meet with the king to think about a way of resolving all of the country's problems. One of those who was invited was Mustafa

(1) Ahmad Az-Zayn was an Egyptian poet who was blind. He was called the 'narrator' because of the huge amount of things he had memorised. He was born in the 1900 AD, studied in the Azhar and took a job as a lawyer. Then he worked as an employee of the Dar Al-Kutub for around twenty years. He has a work of poetry called *Al-Qutuf Ad-Daniya* and a work done in the rajaz meter called *Qala'id Al-Hikma*. He died in 1947 at the age of 47. (Al-A'lam 1/129) He wrote 84 poems comprising a total of 2292 lines.

(2) The story of Ahmad Az-Zayn with Mustafa An-Nahaas and the king

An-Nahaas,⁽¹⁾ but he did not attend. When his followers asked him why he did not go to the meeting, he replied, 'Because I will be in the minority there'; this refers to the large amount of people who would have been there. Ahmad Az-Zayn took this position and wrote a poem about it, mocking the king. He said⁽²⁾:

All of them glorify their religion with personal whim,
 A thousand issuing legal opinions while Malik is in Medina!
 How many presidents, if not for the laws protecting...
 his ignorance, would be exiled by his own laws.
 He is insane, and is even more insane...
 to think that any rational person would follow his madness.

A *Taghut* only ever becomes a *Taghut* because people fear him and are not prepared to reject his oppression and stand up against him. Instead, they act like sycophants and voice their agreement of everything he does.

Some scholars think that *Taghut* refers to everything that is worshipped other than Allah, but a *Taghut* is not just that but also one who is content to be worshipped. So, based on that definition, not idols, 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* nor the saints of Allah cannot be considered to be *Taghut* as some people have claimed. This is due to the fact that people have been wrongly affected by them, and no blame can be attached to the idols, 'Isa (Jesus) or the saints for that.

(1) Mustafa An-Nahaas was an Egyptian leader and was born in Samanud in 1879 AD. He studied there and in Cairo; he graduated from the School of Law in 1900 AD. He worked as a lawyer until he was appointed as a judge, and he affiliated himself with the delegation of Sa'd Zaghlul, and was one of the leading members of the 'Youth for Independence' movement. He was arrested alongside Sa'd. He took up the office of prime minister on five occasions and was placed under house arrest after the revolution of 1952 AD until he died in 1965 AD at the age of 86 (*Al-A'lam* of Az-Zirikli, volume 7).

(2) These lines are taken from a poem of Ahmad Az-Zayn composed in the khafif meter; the total length of which was 51 lines. The first line of the poem goes as follows:
 All of them embellish their religion with personal whim,
 A thousand issuing legal opinions while Malik is in Medina!
 As for the final two lines quoted here, they are, according to *Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*, lines 44 and 45 of the poem.

'... and turn unto Allah instead ...' (*az-Zumar*: 17); what is meant is 'go back to worshipping Him alone without partners'. '... there is the glad tiding [of happiness in the life to come]...' (*az-Zumar*: 17); what this means is the promise to live in paradise because of the fact that they challenged tyranny and refused to accept oppression, Allah *the Almighty* wants a Muslim society to stand up in the face of every tyrant and despot, correct the behaviour of every deviant, and isolate the corrupt few, cut them from society and stop them interacting with the general populace.

An example of that is a bully who carries weapons and threatens people's lives, possessions, and dignity. He even dares to challenge law, state order, and powers. He would never have reached such a level if society had not abandoned its job of opposing the people who turn to evil and putting them right.

Before I start today's lecture,⁽¹⁾ I want to mention that I received a letter today from one of the brothers, asking me first about the poem that was written about praying in the night. I will not say who it was who wrote it. Instead, I will refer the asker to a man who is an authority on matters of this sort. This man is Doctor Muhammad 'Abd Al-Mun'im Khafaja, the former dean of the College of the Arabic language and the foremost authority on literature in the whole of Egypt. He also asked me about the disagreement of scientists with respect to defining the limits of the day and night, some excluding some of the night from the day and others excluding some of the day from the night. I will say, in response, and all success comes from Allah, 'The difference of opinion that exists with respect to the day and the night is one that rages between jurists and astronomers, for jurists consider the night to begin at sunset and finish at dawn, while astronomers consider the night to begin at sunset and finish at sunrise.'

Thus, there is a period of time over which they differ, namely the time between dawn and sunrise. Those who consider it not to be part of the night are the jurists, for they want to take precautions when it comes to fasting and make sure the correct time limit of the night is preserved and no part of the day is included within it. This is why they take precautions to ensure that does not happen.

(1) The story of the man who sent a letter to Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul* to ask him about the late night prayer.

The jurists' precaution is based on seeing the light that is visible in the sky at dawn and not considering the cause of that light, which is the sun. We see light before the sun rises.

As for astronomers, they consider presence of light and say that the light in question is a sign of the night. However, jurists responded that this is not right for there is a difference between light appearance and the source of light; since the light that exists between dawn and sunrise is a light where we cannot see the sun, that light is connected to the setting and the rising of the sun. It is normally said of the night to be 'dark night', or *laylun alyalu*, or a *laylatun layla* that means that it is a very dark one where the moon is in a period of waning. *Laylatun layla* can also mean a night of great hardship and difficulty.

Lovers often make the night something that is mentioned in their poetry, for when they are with their lovers, they want it to go on for a long time, and when they are separated from their lovers, they want it to be over quickly.

An example of that are the words of a poet⁽¹⁾:

We have gone long into the night and I have not slept,
for slumber has been denied me by a visiting spectre.⁽²⁾

Another poet said when he was reunited with the one he loved:

O, night, go on and on! O, sleep, go away!

O, dawn, stay where you are and do not appear!

Yet, another combines both states; I think it was Al-Buhturi⁽³⁾ when he said:

(1) The poet is Bashar ibn Barad Al-'Uqayli Abu Mu'adh, the most poetic man born without exception. He was born in 95 AH and was originally from Takharistan on the banks of the river Jayhun. He was blind, grew up in Basra and moved to Baghdad. His life coincided with both the Umayyad and the Abbasid eras. He was accused of heresy and died from the whipping he received. He was buried in Basra in the year 167 AH at the age of 72.

(2) This line is from a poem of seven lines composed in the *ramal* meter. In *Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya* the line appears in the following form:

My night was not long, but still I did not sleep,
for slumber was denied me by a visiting spectre.

(3) Rather, he is Ibn Zaydun Ahmad Ibn 'Abdullah Al-Andalusi Abu Al-Walid. He was born in 394 AH and was a vizier, a writer, a poet and one of the people of Cordoba.=

A lover bade goodbye to patience, and it bade goodbye to you,

Divulging the secrets which were entrusted to you,

Grinding his teeth that he did not spend longer

Taking footsteps in your company.

O, sister of the moon in brightness and splendour,

May Allah protect the time that gives rise to you.

If ever a night went on for a long time after you, how often

I spent those nights complaining of the shortness of my nights with you.⁽¹⁾

The night finds its opposite in the day, and this is why Allah says: 'Say: "Have you ever considered [this]: If Allah had willed that there should always be night about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection, is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you light? Will you not, then, listen [to the truth]?" Say: "Have you ever considered [this]. If Allah had willed that there should always be daylight about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection, is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you [the darkness of] night, wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see [the truth]?"' (*al-Qasas*: 71-72)

So, He makes the night the opposite of the day. You will notice here the precision and fineness of the expression used by the Quran, for the one doing the speaking here is the Lord and the linguistic expression is a Divine one. Also, this is shown by the fact that when He speaks about the night, he concludes what He says with the Words: '...Will you not, then, listen [to the truth]?' When He speaks about the day, He concludes what He says with the Words: '...Will you not, then, see [the truth]?' Hearing is the means by which one perceives at night since you cannot see anything, while during the day it is seeing.

= There are some who have nicknamed him Al-Buhturi of the West. He devoted much of his poetry to Ibn Juhur, one of the kings of one of the city-states of Al-Andalus. He has letters that he wrote to him to win his friendship, and he wrote a story about the birth of Bint Al-Mustakfi. He died in 463 AH at the age of 69.

(1) This is a poem of Ibn Zaydun composed of four lines written in the *ramal* meter (*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-shi'riyya*).

Some of the people of knowledge had to research the relationship of the word *yawm* (day) to *layl* (night) and *nahar* (daytime), and said, 'The True Lord says: '... Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day!' (*Saba'*: 18); Allah makes *yawm* the equivalent of *nahar*. However, astronomers consider the day to be something else; they consider it to be measured as the period between one time and the equivalent time of the following day. Thus, if you begin at 'Asr, you will have completed a day when you reach 'Asr on the following day. Likewise, when they talk about time, they say 'in the morning' and 'in the evening'. So, if I were to have woken up for my pre-dawn meal two hours after midnight, I would say that I had eaten my pre-dawn meal at two o'clock in the morning, despite the fact that I was still experiencing nighttime. Furthermore, the opposite is the case in the daytime, for I would say, 'five o'clock in the evening', despite the fact that I was still experiencing daytime. These are all examples of the way the jurists differ from astronomers.

Yet, *yawm* (the day) does refer to many different things in many different places in the Quran, for the True Lord says in His Book, 'This day (*Al-yawm*) I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion' (*al-Ma'ida*: 3), and uses *yawm* to refer to any moment in time.

Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... and remind them of the Days of Allah!' (*Ibrahim*: 5) The 'Days of Allah' are those days upon which events are attributed, regardless of whether these events are blessings or disasters. We would say, for example, 'The day of Badr', for Badr was a blessing for the believers and a disaster for the disbelievers. Thus, with that we end our answer to the question the brother posed to me.

Therefore, let us now return to the verse that we were in the process of discussing: Allah's Words: 'seeing that for those who shun the powers of evil lest they [be tempted to] worship them ...' (*az-Zumar*: 17). We have said that the *taghut* is the one who tyrannises and whose tyranny is sanctioned by the people since they are not standing up against it. The word *taghut* is in the feminine form in this verse, as is proven by the feminine pronoun *hiya* (her) in Allah's Words: '... lest they [be tempted to] worship them [in Arabic "her" (*hiya*)]...' (*az-Zumar*: 17). However, the word comes in the masculine form in

another place of the Quran in Allah's Words: '[and yet] are willing to defer to the rule of the powers of evil – although they were bidden to deny it ["him" in Arabic] ...' (*an-Nisa*: 60).

The word *Taghut* is one of those words that can be used to refer to singular, dual or plural and masculine or feminine. So, we would say, 'This man is a *Taghut*', 'this woman is a *Taghut*', 'these two are *Taghut*' and 'These are *Taghut*.' In this verse, it is being used to refer to the plural as is proven by Allah's Words: '... lest they [be tempted to] worship them ...' (*az-Zumar*: 17).

A *Taghut*, as we said, must be one who issues instructions. This is why the word is ever used for only tyrants from amongst mankind or from amongst jinns. As for angels, they do not approve of being worshipped instead of Allah. In the same respect, unjust oppressors are called *Taghut*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '... and turn unto Allah instead...' (*az-Zumar*: 17) which means 'go back to Him'. We understand from these Words that they were with Allah in the first place, but then turned away. How can that be? This can be due to it being said that every single human being in their original natural state was a believer when Allah *the Exalted* made His covenant with all of mankind, saying to them: '... Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf*: 172) Then, some of them kept to their covenant and remained in their natural state, while others deviated and forgot their covenant.

Also, this is why the Quran always says, 'Remind', which means for them to remember that first covenant. Therefore, '...and turn unto Allah instead...' means 'they returned back to the natural state of belief and the first covenant they made', or it means 'they returned back to Allah for account on the Day of Rising'.

Concerning Allah's Words, '... there is the glad tiding (*bushra*) [of happiness in the life to come] ...' (*az-Zumar*: 17), a *bushra* is a happy piece of news we tell others of something that has yet to happen. There are two types of glad tidings: one that tells of some injury or pain being removed and one that tells of some aim or objective being realised. Both of these things await those who shun the powers of evil, refusing to worship them and return back to Allah, for first they are kept out of the fire and not subjected to its torments, and second their aim of entering paradise is realised, just as Allah says:

‘...whereupon he who shall be drawn away from the Fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph ...’ (*Al- ‘Imran*: 185). This is why He says after that, ‘... Give, then, this glad tiding to [those of] My servants’ (*az-Zumar*: 17); this means ‘Give this good news to My slaves’ "who listen [closely] to all that is said, and follow the best of it..." (*az-Zumar*: 18). If there is something said, then there must be someone who says it. Thus, when they hear someone saying things, they follow the best of what is said; the best things are said by the best speaker, and the best speaker is none other than Allah *the Almighty* So, when Allah issues a judgment and commands us to obey it, they follow it because Allah’s Words are the best of Words, and Allah’s command is the most beneficial of commands.

The True Lord *the Most High* does not benefit from the commands to you, nor is he harmed by your disobedience; rather, it is you who benefits from that programme and gains from putting it into action.

Then, there is the fact that you are His living beings created by Him, and He does not like to see these living beings deviate and be punished as a result.

Then, there is the fact that Allah *the Exalted* wants His programme for you and His Laws to be the means for bestowing His gifts upon you on a continual basis and for the blessings of this world to be resumed in the Hereafter. Furthermore, this is why He says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If you were to have created them, you would have shown them mercy.'⁽¹⁾

The best of what is said may also refer to Islam. For when Islam came, it found people of all kinds: disbelievers who did not believe in any deity or Allah, idolaters who believed in other deities alongside Allah and followers of other religions that had Divine Scriptures and to whom previous messengers

(1) It is mentioned by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya’ ‘Ulum Ad-Din* (4/52) as a statement of one of the men of the right-acting early generations with the wording, 'Whenever any slave disobeys Me, his place on the earth seeks permission from Me to swallow him up while the portion of the sky that is immediately above him seeks permission from Me to fall down upon him in clumps.' So, Allah says to the earth and sky, 'Keep away from My slaves and give them respite, for it was not you who created them. If you had created them, then you would have shown them mercy. It is possible that he will repent and come to back to Me so that I can forgive him, and it is possible that he will do a right action in exchange, so that I can change it into a good action.'

were sent, such as Jews and Christians. Those who lived contemporaneously with Islam listened to words that were spoken, either from this group or from that. They listened to the disbelievers, the atheists, the idolaters, and the people of previous Books.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying, ‘Use your intellect to examine all that is said by all the various groups, and then choose the best of them. Furthermore, do not cling fanatically to what one group says without first researching what others say and comparing them. If you do that, while being objective, then you will find that the best things are said by Islam, and that it is the most worthy of being followed, for it is the religion that gathers people to all that is good and distances them from all that is evil.

It is the religion that confirms and has authority over the religions that came before it, and its Book is the book that confirms and having authority over the Books that came before it. Islam is the universal religion that came for everyone, at every time and at every place. This is why it is the final religion after which no other religions will come; it came with the final Book after which no Books will come, and the final messenger after which no messengers will come.

Such a religion must also fulfil all of the preconditions of perfection as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Today have I perfected your religious law for you, have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 3). Therefore, Islam is the best of religions; it says the best things and is the best thing we can follow.

Then, the verses continue their description of believers who shun the worship of *Taghut*, who return back to Allah, who listen to what is said and who follow the best of it by saying: ‘...[for] it is they whom Allah has graced with His guidance (*hadahum*), and it is they who are [truly] endowed with insight!’ (*az-Zumar*: 18) By *hadahum*, Allah *the Exalted* means point out the way to them and guides them towards it. When they follow such directions and have no objection to doing so in their hearts, He then grants them the guidance of success and belief, leading to their believing in Him.

We have said before that guidance is of two types: the guidance of pointing out the way and the guidance of providing aid and assistance. Thus,

we clarified what this meant before by using the example of the traffic policeman whom you find at a crossroads giving people directions. If he points out the way to you, and you follow his directions and thank him for the service he has done for you, he does even more for you by accompanying you so that you are not harmed by any of the obstacles along the way. He did as such because he found you worthy of being helped, and so he helped you.

In the same respect, it is Allah Who is the highest example. The True Lord gives His slaves the guidance of pointing out the right way, giving that guidance to believers and disbelievers alike. Then, whoever follows the first form of guidance will be granted the second, which is the guidance of aid and assistance. This will only be given to believers and not disbelievers. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* says to His believing slave, 'You have believed in Me, heard My Words and obeyed Me, so I will help you to obey and make it easier for you to do so, and I will make disobedience hard for you.'

It is one of the greatest blessings Allah bestows upon His slave that He makes obedience easy for him and helps him overcome its difficulties, while at the same time locking the doors to disobedience and the things that lead to it. Likewise, this is the meaning of Allah's Words: 'just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes their piety to grow.' (*Muhammad*: 17) 'He causes their piety to grow' means 'He assists them in belief'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and it is they who are [truly] endowed with insight!' (*az-Zumar*: 18); this means that those who possess intellects capable of reflection and discernment are the ones who spread out all of the different things that are said in front of them, then weigh them out, compare and choose the best one which will bring about happiness and welfare for them, along with bringing harmony to their lives and their everyday routines. Indeed, acting in a way that is straight, along with cooperating and supporting others, keeps people's hearts pure of rancour, spite, and envy and prevents them from taking the path of deviation, whether the means be through stealing, cheating, bribing, usurpation, etc.

Who would oppose a programme such as this? Who would refuse to live by it? It is the straight way to which no healthy intellect could fail to submit

and the path that none could fail to follow. Therefore, this is why Allah calls ones who choose this way those ‘...who are [truly] endowed with insight!’ (*az-Zumar*: 18) This means those who possess intellects. Furthermore, the role of intellect is to keep one’s thoughts tied down so that they do not stray; instead, one’s intellect looks over the different options and choosing the one that best fits him. However, the bane of thought is caprice, for it is caprice that turns you from what is said by the intellect to what is said by one’s whims, opinions, and desires.

There is another view of what is meant by Allah’s Words: ‘who listen [closely] to all that is said, and follow the best of it...’ (*az-Zumar*: 18); this refers specifically to those who listen to the different things Islam has to say and then follows the best of them. This is why Allah *the Almighty* makes use of the comparative form *ahsan* (better): it is as if Islam says things that are good as well as things that are better. So, this opinion does not consider the verse to have a general meaning but considers it to be limited to what Islam has to say. Everything that Islam says is good, but some of what it says is good, and some of what it says is better. Those with discerning intellects choose what is better.

A good example of this is that Islam legislates for a person to take the life of a killer as a form of retribution, but it also legislates for him to take blood money instead or to pardon the killer entirely. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness, and restitution to his fellow-man shall be made in a goodly manner ...’ (*al-Baqara*: 178). Thus, those who take the option of retribution or blood money take the position that is good, while those who rise above that and pardon him take the position that is better.

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well, but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you...’ (*al-Baqara*: 271). By giving charity openly you are not perpetrating a wrong; rather, you are doing something good, but it is better to give it secretly.

Another example is found in Allah’s Words: ‘But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil. Hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah, for verily, He does not love evildoers.’ (*ash-Shura*: 40)

In each of these places, we find the True Lord encouraging His slaves to take the path of pardoning and forgiveness. However, pardoning is only an option on those matters for which you alone bear the price, and if they result in harm, then that harm affects you alone. If it is matter which brings harm upon a community and society at large, then pardon is not an option.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has taught us this lesson, for he never once became angry on his own account but only became angry when one of the commands of Allah was violated. Thus, pardon when a matter is one that is connected to you, but if a matter is one that is connected to Muslims in general, no one has the right to pardon.

The True Lord *the Most High* directs our attention to the fact that choosing the best option is always the thing that is best for us personally, for in the story of the slander against 'A'isha Allah *be pleased with her*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... [For] do you not desire that Allah should forgive you your sins?...' (*an-Nur*: 22) What this means is 'Do not be sad that you have forgiven those who do you wrong, for Allah will treat you in the same way and forgive you if you do wrong, and who does not want for Allah to forgive him?' Therefore, as long as you want to be forgiven yourself, you should forgive your companions but only on the condition that it does not bring harm or trouble to society.

﴿١٩﴾ أَفَمَنْ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ أَفَأَنْتَ تُنْقِذُ مَنْ فِي النَّارِ

What about the one who has been sentenced to punishment?

Can you [Prophet] rescue those already in the Fire? [19]

(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 19)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* loved his people and was determined upon guiding them and taking them by the hand. As a result, this caused him great pain to see even a single one of them not following the right path or actively oppose it. The Quran states that on more than one occasion, for Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara*: 'Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they [who live around you] refuse to believe [in it]?' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3) Also, Allah says in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: 'But would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf*: 6)

Furthermore, Allah says in the chapter of *Fatir*: ‘... Hence, do not waste yourself in sorrowing over them ...’ (*Fatir*: 8). So, the True Lord *the Most High* reassures His Messenger and consoles him by saying, ‘O, Muhammad, do not be sad on account of these people, for they fully deserve their punishment, and Allah has passed judgment that they will be punished: ‘could one on whom [Allah’s] sentence of suffering has been passed (*haqqa*)...’ (*az-Zumar*: 19). *Haqqa* in this verse means ‘to be established with Allah’ as in Allah’s Words: ‘... that word of Mine has come true: "Most certainly will I fill Hell with jinns as well as with humans, all together!"’ (*as-Sajda*: 13)

Thus, given the fact that their punishment is something that is firmly established with Allah, why are you sad: ‘...Could you, perchance, save one who is [already, as it were,] in the Fire?’ However, the fact that Allah’s decree of punishment will come to pass does not mean that He compels His slaves to take that course of action; rather, He knows that they will do so. Allah *the Almighty* knows everything that they are going to do and has written it down in their accounts. This truth is not a necessary truth of existence willed by Allah but simply means that He knew beforehand the options they were going to choose.

We previously dealt with this issue when we discussed Allah’s Words: ‘Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him and all what he has gained? [In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing.’ (*al-Masad*: 1-3) This is Allah passing judgment on Abu Lahab that he will be burnt in the fire. This judgment was revealed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and he conveyed it to the people. Furthermore, Abu Lahab heard it while he was yet alive. But could Muhammad feel safe that Abu Lahab would not stand up in an assembly of people and say, ‘I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’? Could he be sure that he would not utter those words, even without sincerity, pretending to be a believer when he was with them and thereby showing Allah’s Words to be untrue?

Abu Lahab was a disbeliever, in the same way that Khalid, ‘Amr and ‘Ikrimah were, and it was possible for him to become a believer just as they did, but Allah *Glorified is He* knew that he would never believe, even after

being told of his fate in a miraculous Quran that is memorised by those who read it and will be recited until the Day of Rising. Therefore, this verse proves that Allah knew beforehand that he would not believe and did not compel him to disbelieve.

Allah *the Exalted* says to His Messenger that he should not to waste himself in sorrowing over them because He has judged them based on the knowledge He has of what they are going to do. He knows that they will be people of the fire. Therefore, how can you save someone over whom Allah has passed a judgment such as that?

You will notice when you look at the construction of the verse ‘On the other hand, could one on whom [Allah’s] sentence of suffering has been passed ...’ that the verb *haqqa* does not have the female ending attached to the end of it despite the fact that its subject, *kalimah* (word) is feminine. This is because, they say, the female ending pertaining to this particular use of the word is not actual feminine, and so it is permissible to leave off the female ending from the verb.

The question that is asked by the Words, ‘... could one on whom [Allah’s] sentence of suffering has been passed...’ requires an answering clause with the implied meaning being, ‘As for those upon whom Allah’s decree of punishment has been passed, do you want to save them or protect them from it by begging them to believe? Do you want to save them from the fire when Allah has passed judgment that they will be amongst its inhabitants?’

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَكِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ عُرُفٌ مِّنْ فَوْقِهَا عُرُفٌ مَّبْنِيَّةٌ تَجْرِي
مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ لَا يَخْلِفُ اللَّهُ الْمِيعَادَ

But those who are mindful of their Lord will have lofty dwellings built for them, one above the other, graced with flowing streams. This is a promise from God: God does not break His promise [20] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 20)

We have said that one of the characteristics of the linguistic style of the Quran is that it often mentions opposites side by side, for something’s excellence

is often indicated by its opposite. An example of this is found in Allah's Words: 'Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire.' (*al-Infitar*: 13-14)

Therefore, after mentioning the disbelievers upon whom Allah's decree of punishment has been passed, the True Lord then mentions their opposite, the God-fearing people of piety (*taqwa*): 'But for those who take their Lord as a shield, there awaits them lofty mansions, storey upon storey with streams running beneath them.' (*az-Zumar*: 20) This combination of opposites puts the self in a better state of readiness to be able to see how horrible the bad side is and how beautiful the good side is.

Ghuraf (mansions) is the plural of the word *ghurfa* (mansion) which means a stand-alone private space within a house, but it is derived from a word meaning a scoop of water. '...there awaits them lofty mansions, storey upon storey ...'. Then, he describes those that are above as being *mabniyya* (built), for it is usual when building to take special care of the lower rooms and their foundations since it is they that will have to bear the weight of all the other floors. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants to draw our attention to the fact that the upper levels have had as much care devoted to them and that they are just as well built. They do not lack any of the features of the lower rooms. Each room, whether it be on the lower levels or the upper levels, is as distinguished as any other.

Then, you must reflect on the miraculous nature of Allah's Words: '...with streams running beneath them ...' for which of them do they flow beneath? They flow beneath both of them, the upper, and the lower rooms. If you were to ask, 'How?', we would reply, 'Read what the Prophet says when describing paradise': 'It contains what no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard. What is in it has never even crossed the mind of any human being.'⁽¹⁾

In another part of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... beneath which running waters flow...' (*at-Tawba*: 100). There is a difference between saying

(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2824); Ahmad in his Musnad (2/466); and Abu Nu'aym in Al-Hilya (2/263) in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra. The complete version says, 'I have set aside for My slaves what no eye has seen nor ear has heard, and what has never even crossed the mind of any human being.'*

tahtaha, (beneath it) and *min tahtiha* (from beneath it), for if we were to say that rivers flowed under it, that would mean that those rivers came from somewhere else and passed by it; in such circumstances, it would be possible for those who lived on the higher ground to block the water from reaching those on the lower ground.

However, as for when they flow from under it as in Allah's Words, '...with streams running beneath them ...', that means that springs from which the water comes flow beneath those rooms, meaning that their waters are an intrinsic part of them and is not something that is provided to them from outside. Their waters are self-produced.

You are amazed by this because you measure things according to your own capacity for engineering, but your Lord's capacity for engineering is something entirely different, something you are not even able to imagine since it is something no eye has seen nor ear has heard, nor has the thought of it even crossed the mind of any human being. No words exist in any language to indicate it, for the concept and sense of what something is must be there before any words can be coined describing that thing. If the concept does not exist, then from where can we get the words to describe it?

Today, for example, we know the word 'television', and we know what it is, but before it was invented, did any of us know what it was or even the name for it? Of course not, and this is why I said before that when people say that Allah is non-existent – may Allah protect us from saying that. We say to them in response,

'What you have said is refuted by your own words, for the word 'Allah' is the subject of the sentence you uttered and 'non-existent' is its predicate. So, how could you have known to use the word 'Allah' if Allah were non-existent? Thus, the fact that you said, 'Allah is non-existent' proves that He does exist, for things that do not exist do not have words to describe them. Things that no eye has seen, no ear has heard of and no mind has dreamt about do not have names.'

This is why our Lord says when He describes paradise to us: '[And can] the parable of the Paradise which the God-conscious are promised...'

(*Muhammad*: 15); what this means is that He does not describe it to us but only its likeness. The reason for this is because our language does not possess the words necessary to give expression to what truly lies within paradise. However, despite that, even when He merely describes its likeness to us, He describes things in it that go against what we know of those things in this world. For example, when He *Glorified is He* describes the wine of the Hereafter, He says: ‘no headiness will be in it, and they will not get drunk thereon.’ (*as-Saffat*: 47) This means that it will not affect the intellect nor cover it up in the manner that the wine of this world does. Every human being possesses a gland that is responsible for maintaining his equilibrium, but when he drinks alcohol, that alcohol overpowers that gland, causing him to lose his equilibrium, along with interfering with his intellect causing him to sway backwards and forwards and speak words that are garbled and meaningless.

However, the wine of the Hereafter is not like that. The wine of the Hereafter gives you happiness and pleasure without affecting the intellect: ‘...and they will not get drunk thereon (*Yanzifun*).’ (*as-Saffat*: 47) *Nazf* and *nazh* both have the same meaning; you would say, ‘I did the action of *naz* to the well’ which means that you took the water that was in it out of it, while *nazf* is taking what is inside something out. When a person is of a healthy and sound constitution, his body performs a process that is called excretion, whereby it excretes substances such as earwax, sweat and urine. Also, it is by this excretion that the health and soundness of the human body is maintained.

Yet, there are other kinds of excretion that is not healthy for it, such as, for example, when you eat something and then vomit up what you have eaten. Likewise, sometimes, one even vomits up blood from internal wounds—may Allah protect us from that. Furthermore, sometimes urine can come out of the body on a constant basis, such as when someone suffers from incontinence. Yet, another example of that is the *nazf* (excretion) that happens to the drunk person when he regurgitates the contents of his belly.

Similarly, there is water in this world and water in the Hereafter, and there is milk in this world and milk in the Hereafter, but there is a great difference between the water of this world and that of the Hereafter, and the milk of this world and that of the Hereafter. Allah says in clarification: ‘[And can] the

parable of Paradise which the God-conscious are promised—[a Paradise] wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters, rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed and the enjoyment of all the fruits...' (*Muhammad*: 15).

One of the amazing things about these rivers are that they are rivers without banks and flow alongside each other with their contents of water, milk, wine and honey and yet never mix with each other. This is something so amazing that we must place under the category of those things that no eye has seen nor ear has heard nor has it passed through the mind of any human being.

So, when The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a simile for the Garden, He takes some of those things that are in this world and negates the harms that affect it in this world. The curse of water in this world is that it becomes brackish, meaning that it changes in such a way that makes it no longer fit to drink. However, as for the water of the Hereafter, it never changes because it is water that flows in a river, and when water is flowing, it is protected from ever becoming brackish, and the same with the milk. As for the honey, it is described as being purified because the honey of this world is never free of contaminants.

As for the wine of the Hereafter, it is a delight for those who drink it. It is so pleasurable to drink that those who drink it sip it slowly because of how amazing it tastes. As for the wine in this world—and May Allah protect us from it—people drink glasses of it in a single gulp since it tastes and smells horrible.

Another example of that is when Allah describes the comforts and blessings of paradise by saying: '[They, too, will find themselves] amidst thornless fruit-laden lote-trees ...' (*al-Waqi'a*: 28). The lote tree is a tree that is well known amongst Arabs, and its fruits were considered by them to be one of the most precious commodities around, but the problem with them was that their thorns harmed those who tried to eat them. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* removes that problem from the fruits of that tree in the Hereafter by saying: '[They, too, will find themselves] amidst thornless fruit-laden lote-trees' (*al-Waqi'a*: 28); this means with its thorns cut off or plucked out so that they are no longer there to harm those who partake of its fruits.

So, the True Lord, when He describes paradise, says: ‘But for those who take their Lord as a shield, there awaits them lofty mansions, storey upon storey with streams running beneath them. [This is] the promise of Allah; [and] Allah will never fail in [His] promise.’ (*az-Zumar*: 20) So, do not be astonished by how rooms can have other rooms built on them with water flowing underneath, for Allah is able to engineer things in special ways that no eye has seen nor ear has heard nor human being has even dreamt of. They are things that our languages do not even have the words to describe.

However, there are other things that are no different, such as the jugs, cups, glasses, cushions, rugs, and couches. These are all blessings bestowed to us by Allah in paradise that also exist in this world, but there is one vital difference; the ones in this life are fashioned by man for man, while the ones in the Hereafter are fashioned by the Creator of man for man.

This is why, when we went to San Francisco, saw a magnificent hotel there built on the top of a hill and found inside of it all manner of devices for our comfort and convenience, capturing the hearts of all who entered it, we said to them, ‘If you are amazed by this, something that man has created for man, then what do you think of what the True Lord has created for His creation?!’

Things such as this turn our attention and direct it towards the blessings of the Hereafter. So, when you see the blessings of this world and see something splendid and beautiful, do not feel envy or spite towards the one who owns it but, instead, remember the blessings that Allah has set aside for His slaves in the Hereafter. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were using the blessings of this world to encourage us to seek the blessings of the Hereafter.

Furthermore, what we have mentioned in this verse concerning the reward awaiting the God-fearing people of (*taqwa*): ‘...[This is] the promise (*wa’d*) of Allah; [and] Allah will never fail in [His] promise (*wa’d*).’ (*az-Zumar*: 20). A *wa’d* (promise) is giving someone some happy joyous news of something that is yet to happen. Furthermore, by telling of something good before its time, you motivate and encourage people to do the things that lead to that promise coming true. The opposite of *wa’d* (promise) is *wa’id* (threat) which is threatening of something bad or painful that is yet to happen, aiming at warning people

against doing any of things that lead to that coming true. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* makes promises and threats to fill His creation with longing for the rewards, warn them about the punishments and make wrong actions and the punishments that await those who do them seem so horrible that we do not do them.

Allah never breaks a promise; His Promise is true and will come to pass because He has all the means of fulfilling it. No one can stand against Him nor prevent Him from fulfilling His Promise. This is because those who break promises are exposed to things that take away their capacity to fulfil them. Humans are fickle beings, constantly changing, and things often happen to man that prevent him from fulfilling what he has promised to do. However, as for Allah *Glorified is He* He is the Truth that never changes, and nothing is difficult for Him. He is capable of doing anything and has Absolute Power.

The True Lord shows us how His promises in this world always come true so that we can acknowledge the truth of what He promises us in the Hereafter. For example, Allah has made a promise to the believers by saying: ‘and that, verily, Our hosts, they indeed, would [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat*: 173)

He also says: ‘... And Allah will most certainly succour him who succours His cause ...’ (*al-Hajj*: 40). Thus, Allah’s Promise to the believers came true, and they were victorious, even though they had been persecuted and oppressed in the beginning of the affair. Furthermore, the fact that this promise came true makes even more confident and certain about the promise of the Hereafter whose time is yet to come.

This is why, when ‘Umar heard Allah’s Words, ‘[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!’ (*al-Qamar*: 45), he said, ‘Which host is that? We are scarcely able to defend ourselves!’ Then, when Badr came and the Muslims proved victorious, he said, ‘Allah has spoken the truth: "[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!"' (*al-Qamar*: 45)

So, The True Lord has fulfilled His promises whose times became due so that we can be more confident that His promises whose times have yet to

come will also come true. Another example of that is what Allah says about disbelievers: ‘Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And Allah decides; there is no adjuster of His decision. And He is swift in account.’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 41); in other words, it is like Allah is saying, ‘O disbelievers of Quraysh! O, you who stubbornly oppose Muhammad and stand against him! Have you not seen that your broad stretch of earth is getting smaller gradually and that Islam is taking a bit more of it from you every single day?’ So, the meaning is that We are decreasing the size of the lands of disbelief and increasing the size of the lands of Islam. We have got to say that Allah has spoken truly with respect to the first promise, so He must also be speaking truly with respect to the second promise, namely the Day of Rising.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* teaches us to always make our promises conditioned by the Will of Allah. In other words, we must say, ‘If Allah wills’ when we promise something: ‘And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow, without [adding], "If Allah so wills."...’ (*al-Kahf*: 23-24) For if it proves impossible for you to fulfil what you promised, you can say, ‘I willed it, but Allah *the Exalted* did not will it.’ It is as if Allah releases you from this burden and says, ‘The slave willed it, but I did not will it.’ In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* spares you from finding yourself in an embarrassing situation and protects you from being a liar. The True Lord assumes our burdens just as He assumed the burdens of His Messenger when He says to him, ‘We do know that what such people say grieves you indeed...’ (*al-An’am*: 33) which means when they say that you are a magician or a soothsayer or a liar or a madman!... yet, behold, it is not you to whom they give the lie ...’ (*al-An’am*: 33) because you have always been truthful and trustworthy in their eyes: ‘...but Allah’s Messages do these evildoers deny.’ (*al-An’am*: 33)

Therefore, He made the whole matter to do with Him and took upon Himself the burdens of His Messenger.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَلَكَهُ يَنْبِيعَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ
يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَنُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيْجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ
حُطَّلًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرًا لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢١﴾

Have you not considered that God sends water down from the sky, guides it along to form springs in the earth, and then, with it, brings forth vegetation of various colours, which later withers, turns yellow before your eyes, and is crumbled to dust at His command? There is truly a reminder in this for those who have understanding [21]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 21)

When Allah *the Almighty* tells us of the good things with which He provides us, whether such good things are connected to the basic needs of life in this world or the blessings that are set aside for us in the Hereafter, He always speaks of them as being sent down. This word *anzala* (sent down) indicates coming down from high and that these gifts come from someone higher, even if they come from inside of the earth as is in Allah's Words: '... and We bestowed [upon you] from on high iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man ...' (*al-Hadid*: 25).

So, a blessing comes from one who is higher than you not one who is your equal. In the course of your life or the course of your work when you come upon an issue that you are not physically or mentally capable of resolving on your own, you go to someone who is higher up than you in your field, one whom you trust and whose counsel you value, and ask him to help you resolve it. Furthermore, you do so willingly since you have handed your affair to one in whose abilities you trust.

So, when the True Lord *the Most High* says *anzala*, He means, 'Take My judgements on the basis that they come down from one higher than you and are the best thing for you, for they come from your Creator who knows what is best for you.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: 'Do you not see that it is Allah Who sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs? ...' (*az-Zumar*: 21)

When Allah says, ‘from the skies’, He means from the direction of the sky, for the storehouses of water are all on earth: in seas and oceans. This water is prepared chemically in such a way that preserves water and prevents it from changing, becoming brackish or becoming a breeding-ground for bacteria.

This is why we find the percentage of salt in seas protects and preserves it. Thus, when dead bodies and other contaminants are thrown into it, the waves expel them out and the water remains clean. It is the water of the seas that is taken up by the process of evaporation to form the clouds, which then release rain that provides water to human beings, animals, and plants.

Rainwater is the purest form of water that exists. The process of evaporation is very much like the process of distillation that we carry out in our laboratories in order to obtain purified water. Reflect on how much it costs to distil a single bottle of water, so how much do you think it would be for all the rain that pours from the sky?

This is why Allah, out of His wisdom, has made water three quarters of the earth and only one quarter as land, so that the area from which water may be evaporated can be as extensive as possible so that there can be enough rain to provide the earth with all the fresh water it needs. Previously, we clarified the difference between water that is deep with a small surface area and water that is shallow with a large surface area, for the amount that can be evaporated depends upon the extent of the surface area of water—the greater the area is, the more water evaporates. Likewise, the example we gave was a glass of water. If you were to leave that glass of water and then come back to it a month later, you would find it nearly as it was, with the amount of water in it only having decreased by a tiny amount. However, if you were to have poured that water on the floor of the room, it would have dried out and evaporated almost before you stepped out the door.

The True Lord wants the salt water to evaporate in order for it to be purified of its saltiness, and then to come back down to earth as fresh water that is good to drink. This process of evaporation happens without any of us noticing that. It is one of the signs of Allah and one of the greatest blessings He has bestowed upon us.

When water comes down from the sky, it does not come down everywhere but only falls in places that are cold.⁽¹⁾ The evaporated water that is gathered together in the form of clouds thickens and becomes condensed when it passes over an area that is cold in the same way that we condense distilled water. Take the water that comes to Egypt in the form of the river Nile: where does the water that forms it fall? It falls on the mountains of Abyssinia, and is carried to us by the rivers, while some of it leaks inside the earth where Allah creates passages for it flow along.

This is the meaning of Allah's Words: '... and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs' (*az-Zumar*: 21). Thus, He creates special passageways for it to travel along so that it does not mix with the salt water. It is possible, for example, for there to be a fresh water spring in the midst of an area of salt water, but despite that it still does not become intermingled with it. It is as if the fresh water were flowing along special pipes similar to the arteries and veins of a human body.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see ...'. As long as a matter is one that Allah has granted you the possibility of seeing, if you do see it, you will know that His Words are true, like when I see rain falling from the sky. Likewise, if you do not see it, you must affirm what Allah tells you just as you would affirm what you see with your own two eyes, for Allah's Words are truer than anything your eyes can see.

An example of that is what Allah says, addressing His Messenger: 'Do you not see how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil*: 1) It is well-known that our master, the Messenger of Allah, was born in the year of the Elephant, meaning that he did not actually see that event. Thus, it is the meaning of 'Do you not see' or 'Do you not know by means of a knowledge from Me that is superior to the knowledge obtained by seeing it with your own eyes?'

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '... And then He brings forth thereby plants (*zar'*) of various hues ...' (*az-Zumar*: 21). *Zar'* (plants) is what is grown in a

(1) Inaccurate information. From linguist: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

single plot of earth and watered by a single source of water. Yet, despite that, fruits come from it in all different colours, shapes, and flavours.

When people of knowledge talk about this matter, they say that plants have a peculiar property known as 'selective absorption', whereby these plants use their roots to absorb the necessary elements and nutrients they need from the soil. However, if we were to bring a container full of water, put a variety of colours into it, and then put in the narrow hair-like pipes by means of which water flows upwards on account of this property, we would find such pipes sucking up the water in a general way, not differentiating one colour from another.

However, that is not how plants absorb the necessary elements and nutrients from the soil, for they only suck up the substances that they need and that correspond to their nature. The hair-like follicles in their roots absorb purposefully, taking one element from the soil and leaving another. The soil is the same, and the water is the same, but despite that, the plants that grow in it have different flavours, shapes, colours, and smells.

Thus, this is not the selection to which the scientists refer; rather, it is a divine selection based upon the natural capacity that Allah places in the seeds from which plants grow. If you were, for example, to grow chilli peppers next to sugar cane and next to pomegranate, you would find the one to be hot, the other to be sweet, and the other to be sweet and sour.

Then, plants move into a different stage, which the True Lord describes with His Words: '... and then it withers. You can see it turn yellow, and in the end He causes it to crumble to dust ...' (*az-Zumar*: 21). The word *yahij* means to dry out, break apart, and crumble into pieces. In other words, it does not remain green and ripe forever. It is as if Allah were using what happens to these plants as a way of teaching mankind an important lesson. For plants are living things, just like human beings, thus, human beings will pass through that stage where they wither up and crumble to pieces in exactly the same way as they.

Allah *the Almighty* strikes this metaphor for us so that we do not become deceived by our own bodies, along with the strength, intelligence, and thinking

we find therein, nor by the power, wealth or fame we acquire. Our Lord encourages us to look at our mother, the earth, and the crops that come out of it; what is it that happens to them in the end? Well, the same will happen to you, for you are also subject to change, so do not fall prey to self-delusion.

This is why they say, 'Do not get angry or sad if your circumstances change, for you are subject to change. Hence, what do you expect to happen when you get to the top of the mountain? Do you really expect to stay there? How could you when you are given to change?' No, it is inevitable that you will come back down. So, when you receive a blessing, always be ready for it to be taken away. It is just as a poet said:

When something reaches completion, its diminishment begins,

So expect its removal when people say it is complete!⁽¹⁾

Therefore, if you see yourself as being well-endowed with knowledge, strength or any other manifestation of Allah's blessing, know that tomorrow you will become older and weaker, until you eventually become like a child, crawling along the ground and needing others to assist and support you, just as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... just as many a one of you is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well...' (*al-Hajj*: 5). Therefore, learn this lesson well, both from what you see in your mother, the earth, and what you see in yourself.

'... Verily, in [all] this...' means what you yourself have witnessed of all the things we have mentioned in this verse; '...there is indeed a reminder...' means a reminder and a lesson '... to those who are endowed with insight!' (*az-Zumar*: 21), or to those who have discerning intellects capable of reflection.

(1) This line was composed by 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* as is mentioned in *Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya* and is taken from a poem written in the mutarib meter, containing eleven lines. The wording of the line is as follows:
When a matter reaches completion, its diminishment begins,
So long for its removal when people say it is complete.

أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَى نُورٍ مِّنْ رَبِّهِ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْقَاسِيَةِ
 قُلُوبُهُمْ مِّنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَوْ لَيُنَاكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

What about the one whose heart God has opened in devotion to Him, so that he walks in light from his Lord? Alas for those whose hearts harden at the mention of God! They have clearly lost their way [22] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 22)

The implied meaning in this verse is ‘Could, then, one whose bosom Allah has opened wide with willingness towards self-surrenders unto Him ...’ be like those whose breasts have been tightened up so that Islam cannot get in? So, it is necessary for the opposite to be mentioned since the two are not alike and not the same: ‘...Woe, then, unto those whose hearts are hardened against all remembrance of Allah! ...’ Their hearts hardness is a reason for its being tightened up. Thus, when someone’s heart is too constricted to admit Islam, it is because his heart is hardened.

This is much like when Allah says: ‘Or [do you deem yourself equal to] one who devoutly worships [Allah] throughout the night, prostrating himself or standing [in prayer], ever-mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord’s Grace? Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?"...’ (*az-Zumar*: 9). The meaning is, in other words, ‘Is this person the same as one who does not stand the night in prayer?’ Then it is upon you to answer the question: ‘Is he whose breast is opened to Islam and who therefore is illuminated by his Lord like he whose heart is hardened and whose breast is too constricted to let in Allah’s guidance and religion?’

The meaning of ‘... whose bosom Allah has opened wide ...’ is ‘has made wide what was narrow’. You might say to a companion of yours, ‘Open your heart’, which means ‘Make it wide enough to encompass all the sides of the argument’. Another meaning of opening the heart is not filling it with idle tales nor packing it with lies and falsehoods till it becomes accustomed to. Therefore, when it is filled with such idle garbage, that idle garbage forces out the truth as we said previously when we talked about a single space. For a single space can contain no more than one single thing at one time. Water, for example, displaces and expels the air from a bottle when that bottle is filled with water.

One consequence of one's breast being opened and expanded is that it allows you to be fair and impartial when you choose between different alternatives. First, you must purify your heart and expel from it all that preoccupies and distracts it, and then consider carefully all of the options presented before you. Then, you must put whatever you find suitable into your heart so that it takes root and becomes a firm doctrine of belief that cannot be argued about ever again.

Thus, this is because Allah *the Almighty* has created for us senses by means of which we perceive, such as the eyes that see, the ears that hear and the tongue that speaks.

Therefore it is by means of these senses that we gather information. Then, we present that information to the intellect so that it can look into it and choose between it. Then, whatever the intellect finds wholesome and sound, it sends it down to the heart. That, in turn, becomes a belief that takes root in the heart not to be analysed again. This is why you must beware of the rust that forms around the heart until it closes it off completely and leaves no place for the truth to enter. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us some indication of this matter in a Hadith of Abu Dharr. He mentioned that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Tribulations come over the heart like a reed mat, reed by reed (in another version, it reads 'we seek Allah's protection from them'). Any heart that takes them in starts to develop a black spot, and any heart that rejects them starts to develop a white spot. Thus, this continues until they develop into two separate hearts: one that is white like a smooth polished rock and will not be harmed by tribulation for as long as the heavens and earth shall remain and the other which is black and clouded over with ash, and to whom Allah refers when He says: "Nay, but their hearts are corroded by all [the evil] that they were wont to do!" (*al-Mutaffifin*: 14) It is like an upturned cup, not recognising what is right and not rejecting what is wrong."⁽¹⁾

The tribulations he refers to in this prophetic saying (Hadith) are doubtful matters with which people are presented in Islam. The Messenger *peace and*

(1) It is narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (144); and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (5/386 & 405) in a Hadith from Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman.

blessings be upon him compares them with a reed mat, a mat that is made by tying one reed next to another reed next to another reed until enough of them are tied together to form the mats upon which we sit. Or he said '*awdhan*, which means 'We seek refuge in Allah from these tribulations', or '*awdan* which means time after time.

Therefore, if you want to look into the matters of belief first expand your breast and open your heart so that you can expel from it all the (false) beliefs that clog it up. This is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Could, then, one whose bosom Allah has opened wide with willingness towards self-surrender unto Him so that he is illumined by a light [that flows] from his Lord, [be likened to the blind and deaf of heart]? ...' (*az-Zumar*: 22) Light has a number of different sources: it can be physical, such as the light that comes from the sun, moon, and stars, besides the light sources that man has discovered in recent times. Or it can be metaphysical, which is the type of light that is being referred to in this verse. Thus, by that, we mean the light of values and the light of the Divine Programme '... so that he is illumined by a light [that flows] from his Lord...' (*az-Zumar*: 22); this means the light of guidance which the Noble Quran has in mind when it says: 'In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His limitless Glory at morn and evening. People whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of Allah ...' (*an-Nur*: 36-37).

In these houses in which Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned and in which Allah is glorified is a place where one can receive outpourings of light directly from Allah and where His blessings and mercies descend. That is proven by the fact that the verses that immediately preceded these ones were talking about the light of Allah and provided a metaphor for the way He illuminates the heavens and the earth: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light.' (*an-Nur*: 35)

Allah *Glorified is He* does not strike a metaphor for us of His Light, but rather strikes a metaphor of the way He illuminates: 'Allah is the Light of the

heavens and the earth,' (*an-Nur*: 35) i.e. He is The One Who illuminated the heavens and the earth by creating them. A niche is a limited source of energy that does not penetrate through walls. It is limited in size and narrow, and does not go all the way through, which is why light is collected in it and is not dispersed. This means that there is no space left for darkness within that niche.

And then there is the fact that the lamp is not a normal one, but rather one that is encased in glass for there are lamps that are not encased in glass and which we ourselves call 'torches'. Such lamps have blackened flames because of the fact that the wind and the air tickle it from every side and direction. But when there is glass, it cleans and purifies the flame since it stops any air reaching it except for the amount necessary to keep the flame alight. This allows the flame to be pure and smokeless, which is the first step of its purification.

Then there is the fact that the glass itself is not an ordinary type of glass, but rather is one that is so clear, 'as if it were a pearly [white] star' (*an-Nur*: 35), reflecting light in every direction.

Then there is the fact that this lamp is not fuelled by ordinary oil, but rather, it is: 'lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire.' (*an-Nur*: 35) It is an oil that has special characteristics and that has been blended in a perfect way.

It is by means of something like this that Allah *Glorified is He* sends light to the heavens and the earth. So, the metaphor is of how He illuminates, not of His Light. This light to which Allah is referring is a physical form of light. It is only when you read these verses that you find what He really means by 'light' in His Words: '[Such niches are] in mosques which Allah has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned therein.' (*an-Nur*: 36) It is that light to which He refers to as: '... and he is upon a light from his Lord.' (*az-Zumar*: 22)

So Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down upon you physical light that helps you in carrying out your day-to-day tasks so that people can see where their feet are treading and not to bump into things or crush them. Likewise, He has illuminated your souls and values by (moral) light.

When Allah *Glorified is He* strikes this metaphor for us and shows us that the lamp does not ever leave any darkness whatsoever in the niche, He gives

us an indication that His metaphysical light also does not come into contact with any flaw or imperfection except that it fixes it. Light comes to you to guide you and save you.

When Allah says: ‘Then woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah. Those are in manifest error,’ (*az-Zumar*: 22) He means that there is woe for them because of the hardness of their hearts, which has created a barrier between them and belief. The woe comes to them in the moment they learn that they do have a Lord whom they rejected, and that reality that they denied for so long will come as a surprise to them.

The Noble Qurann tackles this matter when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The example of those who disbelieve in their Lord is [that] their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing.’ (*Ibrahim*: 18)

The meaning is that all their deeds will turn to nothing and all their efforts will be met with failure.

Allah also says: ‘But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.’ (*an-Nur*: 39)

The woe comes upon them in the moment they learn that they had rejected Allah and that their hearts had been constricted and closed in such a way that the light of belief could find no way to enter. The woe had come upon them before the punishment arrived.

In another verse, Allah says: ‘Those are in manifest error,’ (*az-Zumar*: 22) i.e. clear and plain. That error (wandering) is the lack of guidance to find a clear path to travel along, like a traveller in the desert who strays from the path. His wandering started by him deviating from the right path, even if he only deviated from it by mere centimetres for even that will end up causing you to stray away from the path.

Have you seen railway semaphores and how they switch a train going, for example, to Port Said, Ismailiyya or Tanta and direct it elsewhere? Simply by moving a rail point a matter of millimetres, the train is redirected from going

from one place to another a long way away from it. So the meaning of: 'Those are in manifest error,' (*az-Zumar*: 22) is that they will never be guided to anything.

اللَّهُ نَزَلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانٍ نَقْشَعُرُ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ
يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ هُدَى
اللَّهُ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُضِلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God's guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves to stray [23] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 23)

Allah *Glorified is He* means to say that since you have decided to follow and choose what is best, I will reveal the best speech to you. Indeed, it is the best of speech because it is the speech of Allah, and His speech is one of His attributes, perfect, complete, and absolute. Allah made it a miracle and took it upon Himself to preserve, not leaving that task to creation.

It is part of human nature that people only memorise and preserve things when they are a proof for them, not a proof against them. Whereas Allah *Glorified is He* preserves the Quran, which is a proof for His creation against Him. This is because everything that is mentioned in the Quran, Allah guarantees that it will come to pass in exactly the way He says it will as He is the One Who sends it down and preserves it.

So, what is meant by the best of speech is the Noble Quran? As for: '...a consistent Book...' (*az-Zumar*: 23) it means different parts of it are like each other in terms of the beauty and eloquence of their composition and in terms of their subject matter. So, beware of saying that this verse is more eloquent than that one, since every verse deals with its subject matter in the most eloquent way.

If we were to take, for example, being similar in terms of subject matter, we would read in one place concerning the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘And the family of Pharaoh picked him up [out of the river] so that he would become to them an enemy and a [cause of] grief,’⁽¹⁾ (*al-Qasas*: 8) and we would read in another place: ‘[Saying], “Cast him into the chest and cast it into the river, and the river will throw it onto the bank; there will take him an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.” And I bestowed upon you love from Me that you would be brought up under My eye.’ (*Ta Ha*: 39)

Some might think that this was repetition, but anyone who reflects deeply on the respective meanings of the two verses will find that each verse tells us things that the other does not. For example, in: ‘...so that he would become to them an enemy and a [cause of] grief,’ (*al-Qasas*: 8) it is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who is to display enmity to Pharaoh’s household, whereas in: ‘...there will take him an enemy to Me and an enemy to him,’ (*Ta Ha*: 39) it is Pharaoh who is to show enmity to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. No battle is fought fiercely when there is only enmity from one side, for the other side might pardon the other, or surrender to it. But when there is enmity on both sides, the battle gets brutal.

We said previously that the orientalist raised an objection to Allah’s words in the following verses: ‘...and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.’ (*Luqman*: 17) And in ‘...indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination,’ (*ash-Shura*: 43) saying, ‘Which of these two is more eloquent than the other? And if one is eloquent, then the other one is not’.

(1) In his *Zad Al-Masir*, Ibn Al-Jawzi, while commenting on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And Pharaoh’s family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them...’ (*al-Qasas*: 8) said that Allah *the Almighty* caused the family of Pharaoh to take Prophet Moses so that this result of being an enemy and grief for them would be eventually achieved. This meaning is deduced from the use of the Arabic particle *Lam Al-‘Aqibah*, which tells about the consequences of an act. As for the other exegetes of the Quran, some of them believe that the meaning is that (the family of Pharaoh, by the Will of Allah, took Moses) so that the goal of being an enemy to their religion and a grief for them will be obtained; while others opine that the meaning is that Moses will be their enemy who will cause their men to be drowned, and that Moses *peace be upon him* will be a grief for their men and women by enslaving them.’

Misconceptions of this sort result from a lack of understanding of the linguistic style of the Quran, and a lack of linguistic ability on their part. Every verse is eloquent in its own context and in a manner that best befits the meaning that is expressed within it. In this regard, the first verse talks about afflictions that strike no one else but you, and in such instances it is easy to be patient.

It is perfectly normal, for example, for you to endure illness with patience since there is no rival against you in such circumstances. But if the affliction is caused by another party, that other party makes you angry, and sets light to the fire of malice, and makes you seek revenge. So, it is fitting for the *lam* of emphasis meaning 'indeed' to be used in the other verse: '...indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*ash-Shura*: 43)

The orientalist also raised objections to Allah's words: 'We will provide for you and them' (*al-An'am*: 151), and His Words: 'We provide for them and for you,' (*al-Isra*': 31) saying, 'What is the difference between the two verses?' We say, 'If you were to look at the beginning of each of the two verses, you would find that the endings fit perfectly with them, as there are two reasons people kill their children for: the first of those is poverty, for a poor person is needy and not even able to provide for himself, let alone his children. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and do not kill your children out of poverty'⁽¹⁾ (*al-An'am*: 151). Because poverty is already there, 'We will provide for you and them,' (*al-An'am*: 151) and He mentions the parents before the children because the first thing they are preoccupied with is providing for themselves.

The second cause is when someone has enough for himself but fears that poverty would strike if he were to have children. To these people, Allah says: 'And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you,' (*al-Isra*': 31) and mentions the children before the parents. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* will provide sustenance for those children on whose account you fear poverty before He provides for you. So each verse is completed with the words that fit it best.

(1) "The Arabic word *Imlaq* means 'to turn from richness to poverty.' Arabs use the expression '*Amlaqa Ar-Rajulu*' to indicate that he turned poor after being rich. The verbal noun *Imlaq* originally means 'to unwisely squander money to the extent that the person becomes poor as a result.' See *Ibn Manthur, Lisan Al-'Arab*, the root M-a-l-q.

Similarly, we talked about the matter of hearing and seeing when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you light? Then will you not hear?”’ (*al-Qasas*: 71) Here, Allah mentions hearing because it is the means of meeting in the darkness of the night, and it is by it that a man is summoned when he is sleeping.

But as for the verse that deals with the day, Allah says: ‘Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you a night in which you may rest? Then will you not see?”’ (*al-Qasas*: 72) Seeing cannot happen except in the light of day.

And as for: ‘reiteration,’ (*az-Zumar*: 23) i.e. once, twice or three times, or it means to do something twice in the prayer, for we recite the chapter of *al-Fatiha* (The Opener) and a short verse in the first *rak’a*⁽¹⁾, and then recite the same in the second.

When Allah says: ‘The skins shiver therefrom of those who fear their Lord,’ (*az-Zumar*: 23) it is a description of the slave who fears his Lord, watches out for Him and takes into account the fact that He sees him. This is because he places his behaviour before his Lord and then if he sees that it goes against His teachings, he goes back to what He says and remembers His threat. His skin then starts to shiver as a result of his fear of his Lord, and that shivering to which we refer to is when the skin dries up and rattles and the body starts to shiver as a result of his fear of punishment and Allah’s displeasure. Then he comes back and remembers the mercy of his Lord that precedes His anger, and His pardon that comes before His punishment, and so he goes back to his initial state: ‘...then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of Allah.’ (*az-Zumar*: 23)

So, a believer combines both fear and hope, and his heart fluctuates between these two states. When he recalls the punishment that results from going against Allah’s Commands, his skin shivers with fear, and when he recalls

(1) *Rak’a* consists of the prescribed movements and words followed by Muslims while offering prayers to God. It also refers to a single unit of Islamic prayers.

Allah's mercy, his skin becomes soft and his heart becomes calm. And why should it not be so when His Lord has said: 'Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."' (az-Zumar: 53)

'That is' (az-Zumar: 23) – and this is what happens to believers – '... the guidance of Allah by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom Allah leaves astray - for him there is no guide.' (az-Zumar: 23)

Many have raised objections to this verse, saying, 'If Allah is the one who leads people astray, then why does He punish those who go astray?' We say that: 'And one whom Allah leaves astray...' (az-Zumar: 23) means that Allah *Glorified is He* knows them to be astray, and knows that they will not listen to His Words nor follow His way. Allah created us with free will, able to believe or disbelieve if we so wanted. So, non-believers are not forced by Allah to disbelieve nor does Allah approve of them doing that.

As to: '...for him there is no guide,' (az-Zumar: 23) it means, 'Beware of seeking to emend Allah's words by human laws that are created for you by intellects that are too proud to follow Allah's orders. As long as something is said by Allah, it is, and you cannot by any means oppose it, since it is not possible for anyone to find guidance better than Allah's guidance.

It is necessary at the very least to understand that one who legislates laws with the purpose of governing people's affairs must himself derive no benefit from those laws, so that he can be impartial and objective. This is because if he were to derive benefit from those laws, it is inevitable that his heart would incline towards doing that and he would make the laws that bring the most benefit to him.

For example, if workers were to make the laws, they would choose socialism, and if capitalists were to make the laws, they would choose capitalism. This is why it is a precondition for those who make the laws that they do not benefit from the laws themselves. And that condition can only truly be fulfilled when the One who makes the laws is Allah *Glorified is He*.

And that is why Allah causes certain cases to arise in existence—even among those who disbelieve in Him—that prove that Allah's Law is the best.

People often come across problems for which they can find no solution to in their own laws, so they are forced to resort to Allah's religious laws. They do not do that because they believe in Him, but rather because some problems they come across in their lives can only be resolved this way.

أَفَمَنْ يَنْتَقِي بِوَجْهِهِ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ
وَقِيلَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ ذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

What about the one who will only have his bare face to protect him from his terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection? It will be said to the evildoers, 'Taste what you have earned' [24] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 24)

The question that is asked in: 'Then is he who...' (*az-Zumar*: 24) is much like the one asked prior to it in: 'so is one whose breast Allah has expanded to [accept] Islam...' (*az-Zumar*: 22), so it is necessary here as well to understand the contrast in meaning. Thus, the meaning in: 'Then is he who will shield with his face the worst of the punishment on the Day of Resurrection...' (*az-Zumar*: 24) is like the one who will not be punished. Or we could say, 'like the one who is blessed.' That is for you to decide.

Consider also the meaning in: 'the worst of the punishment,' (*az-Zumar*: 24) where Allah means the severe and terrible punishment. And reflect on: '... is he who will shield with his face the worst of the punishment.' (*az-Zumar*: 24) It is well known that the face is the noblest part of the human body, and it is by it that a person's mood and expressions can be identified. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...their marks are on their faces...' (*al-Fath*: 29).

If it were not for facial features, all the bodies would appear alike, and it would not be possible to tell them apart. This is why people take great care of their faces by protecting them first before any other part of their body. For example, imagine there was a man walking along the road when a car passed by him and splattered him with mud; what is the first thing from which he seeks to clean and remove the muck? The first thing he wipes is, of course, his face. Then and only then does he move on to his clothes, and the reason why is that the face is the noblest and most noteworthy part of the body, and the one that is protected first before all the other parts.

So, how bad do you think a punishment has to be for a human being to find nothing to protect himself from but his face?! Yes, he wards it off with his face because his hands are shackled and his feet are manacled. There is no escape from the punishment and no deliverance. He has no alternative but to use the most valuable thing he possesses to ward it off and protect himself. He has no alternative but to use the noblest part of his body: his face.

‘And it will be said to the wrongdoers, “Taste what you used to earn.”’ (*az-Zumar*: 24) Allah tells them to ‘Taste’ the punishment in order to mock them, and for that purpose He chooses ‘taste’ which is the function of the tongue, one of the organs of the human body that carries out a specific task just like the eyes and the ears. The only reason He specifically chooses taste is because it is the sense that is inseparable from a human being. It is the sense by means of which he maintains his life, for it is by the sense of taste that we put food and drink into our bodies, enjoying a pleasure that supersedes all other pleasures.

As for the eyes and ears, by means of them you might see or hear something you do not like, whereas with taste, you choose what you like and what gives you pleasure. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to indicate that the action of tasting encompasses the entire body. In other words, the whole body tastes punishment.

We have previously mentioned that the tongue is the organ of taste in all stages and that the area surrounding it tastes and distinguishes between flavours.

So unless food goes beyond that area, one will not be able to taste anything. Consequently, the manufacturers of medicine coat their bitter medicines in a substance that is palatable and easy to swallow, in order to help the medicine pass by the area of taste without us sensing its bitterness.

If you were to look at all the organs, you would find that they have some connection to others. For example, I can hear, see, touch or feel others as well as parts of myself. Whereas taste’s connection is to the person himself, for no one can taste anyone else. This is why Allah chose this organ to show us the severity and painfulness of the punishment, saying: ‘Taste’ (*az-Zumar*: 24) once in the plural form and ‘Taste’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 49) in the singular form. He does not use sight, hearing, smell or touch, but rather uses taste, the sense that relates solely to the individual who has it. So, it is as if every one of us is going to have a sense of taste that corresponds to the punishment he will receive.

If taste had a specific area in the body, it would be the tongue in all its aspects and the area surrounding it. In other words, it will not be just the area of taste that tastes the punishment, but rather the entire body. This is proven when Allah says: ‘Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment.’ (*an-Nisa*: 56) So, their capacity to taste spreads beyond the area of tasting to encompass the entire body.

If we were to look in this regard at the town that was secure and at ease but still refused to show gratitude for Allah’s blessings, about whom Allah says: ‘So Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear...’ (*an-Nahl*: 112), it is as if the tasting encloses and surrounds them from every side.

Poets usually exaggerate a thing by causing it to go beyond the usual area for sensation until it encompasses every area. And it is customary for poets to talk about the heart and its being the place where love resides. An example of this is what the poet⁽¹⁾ said:

A caller called out when we were in the area of Mina,
and caused the griefs of the heart to well up, and what would you know,
he called out to another using the name of Layla, and it was as if,
‘Layla’ woke up a bird that resided in my chest.⁽²⁾
And another⁽³⁾:
It is as if the heart were a night,

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- (1) The poet is Mohammad ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Namir Ath-Thaqafi An-Namiri, a love poet who ranked among the poets of the Umayyad age. He was born, brought up and died in At-Ta’if. He died in 90 AH and has a collection of poetry that is published.
 - (2) These two lines are from a poem of an-Namiri made up of seven lines and composed in the tawil metre. In (*Al-Mawsu‘a ash-Shi‘riyya*), it has ‘anguishes of the heart’ instead of, ‘griefs of the heart’. An-Namiri Used to write love poetry about the sister of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yasuf Ath-Thaqafi, but Al-Hajjaj threatened him and so he fled to Yemen where he lived for a number of years in Aden (*Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya*).
 - (3) The poet is Tawbah ibn Al-Humayr Al-Khafiji Abu Harb, a well-known great Arab love poet. He used to love Layla Al-Akhiliyya and asked for her hand in marriage. But her father rejected him and so he married another. And so he used to rhapsodise and celebrate her in verse. He was killed by the Banu ‘Awf ibn ‘Aqil in the year 85 AH (*Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya*).

told to come and go at the mention of Layla Al-‘Amiriyya
a sandgrouse caught in a trap so it spends the night,
struggling with its wing having become caught up in it.⁽¹⁾

But as for the poet who wanted to exaggerate this matter, he said⁽²⁾:

The passing thoughts that recall you to me stir up my love,
and I feel as if it were flowing out of my heart,
leaving no part of my body except that it fills it,
as if all my limbs and organs were made of hearts.⁽³⁾

So, for him, love went beyond its area until it came to encompass all of his limbs and organs. In the same way, taste goes beyond the area of tasting to encompass the entire body.

And this is why when Allah says: ‘Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment,’ (*an-Nisa*: 56) it must be considered one of the greatest scientific miracles in the Noble Quran, to say nothing of the miraculous nature of its language, eloquence and literary style. That is a miracle only Arab-speakers can appreciate. So, for non-Arabs, Allah provides another miracle that befits them, telling them of matters and scientific facts that had not even occurred to people at the time the Quran was revealed and was not known to science for centuries after that.

Today, after more than 14 centuries have passed since the Quran was revealed, contemporary science has proven what Allah told us about in the

(1) The two verses are from a poem made up of four lines and composed in the wafir metre. In the encyclopaedia, it has, ‘fumbling around’ instead of ‘struggling’. The wording, ‘struggling’ is transmitted by Al-Asfahani in ‘(*Al-Aghani*)’, as well as by Abu‘Ali Al-Qali in his *Amali* and Abu Hilal Al-‘Askari in ‘(*Diwan Al-Ma‘ani*)’.

(2) He is Abu Al-Ma‘ali ibn Abu Ja‘far Al-Wa‘izh, one of the people of Hurat. He had knowledge of the sciences of tafsir and literature and was skilled in preaching as well as having memorised a great deal. He was born in the year 490 AH and died in the year 560 AH at the age of 70.

(3) These verses are mentioned by Salah Ad-Din As-Safadi in ‘(*Al-Wafi ibn Al-wafiyat*)’, and by Ibn Shakir Al-Kutabi in ‘(*Fawat Al-wafiyat*)’. As for Ibn Khalkan in ‘(*Wafiyat Al-A‘yan*)’, he attributed the two verses to Prince Shams Al-Ma‘ali Abu Al-Hasan Qabus ibn Abu Tahir.

Quran to be true, and that He knows what choices will be made by His slaves in the universe He created.

We have mentioned that when the First World War came to an end and Germany was defeated, one of their economic experts, a man called Schacht, came with the aim of putting his country back on its feet and helping it to recover after its defeat. As he was not able to serve in the army because he was cripple, he put his intellect to use in the service of his country, and promoted scientific research with such success that it was their scientists who invented the cylinder for splitting the single molecule, the thing that philosophers had called the indivisible part, by which they meant the atom.

As soon as they succeeded in splitting the atom and dividing it into smaller parts, some of the enemies of Islam took that as an opportunity to cast aspersions on the truthfulness of the Noble Quran, saying, ‘Allah used the example of the atom when He said: “So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.” (*az-Zalzala*: 7) “And whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it.” (*az-Zalzala*: 8) and yet here we find that science has discovered something smaller than the atom!’

But the people of sound knowledge quickly refute the words of these scientists and tell them to slow down and read the whole Quran before making such comments and not to take from it what appears to back up their attack on it. For Allah says in another verse: ‘And not absent⁽¹⁾ from your Lord is any [part] of an atom’s weight⁽²⁾ within the earth or within the heaven or [anything] smaller than that or greater but that it is in a clear register.’ (*Yunus*: 61) So, the Quran makes provision for this matter and does not say, ‘small,’ but rather says, ‘smaller than small’ regardless of the number of times they split it, the Quran has made provision for that.

In such a manner is the miraculous nature of the Quran for non-Arabs—the way it describes these scientific phenomena before mankind discovered them.

(1) Absent: When something becomes absent, it is away and not present. Absent from means went away. Allah has made him absent means he made him go away. [*Lisan Al-‘Arab* (The language of Arabs)]

(2) An atom’s weight: The way the Quran uses the word ‘atom’ synonymous with ‘weight’ is indeed one of its miracles. This is accurately used in the chemical expression ‘atomic mass’.

Another example is the sensory loci in the body. First they said that the brain was the sensory locus. Then others said that it was the spinal cord, proven by the fact that human beings can feel things even without touching their bodies, such as when you put your finger in front of someone's eye and an automatic reflex causes him to close his eye.

Then, when they reflected on the needle or injection that is given to someone who is ill, they noticed that he felt no pain except in the moment that the needle penetrated the skin, and so they said that the skin was the sensory locus of the body. This is proven in the Quran when Allah says: 'Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment.' (*an-Nisa'*: 56)

Allah says: '...what you used to earn.' (*az-Zumar*: 24) The root *kasaba* (gained), as we have said before, appears in the Noble Quran in two distinct forms: *kasaba* (gained) and *iktasaba* (earned), and Allah makes it clear to what each of them refers to when He says: 'It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned.' (*al-Baqara*: 286) So, (*kasaba*) is used for good and (*iktasaba*) is used for evil, and this is because (*kasaba*) has the form *fa'ala* (did) and good is something that a person does naturally, without affection or artifice. As for (*iktasaba*), it has the form *ifta'ala* (made) which suggests the presence of falseness and artifice, and artifice is only present in evil. For when you do good, you have no need to use artifice or fabrication, but rather, unlike evil, it comes to you naturally. This matter is clearly shown by the fact that when a man sits with his wife and daughters, he looks upon their beauty naturally, without caution or fear of the consequences. However, if that same man were to look at a beautiful woman in the street, he would do so stealthily and surreptitiously. This is what we mean by artifice.

The Noble Quran itself goes against this rule in a number of places, including this verse we are currently discussing: 'And it will be said to the wrongdoers, "Taste what you used to earn."' (*az-Zumar*: 24) It does not say *taktasibun* (to earn) as might be expected. Instead, it uses (*kasaba*) for evil. And it does the same in another place when Allah says: 'Yes, whoever earns evil and his sin has encompassed him - those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.' (*al-Baqara*: 81)

Why does the Quran turn aside from using *iktasaba* and use *kasaba* instead? Because, they say, a person can become accustomed to doing acts of disobedience and going against the commands of Allah that it becomes second nature for him and so natural almost as if he were doing an act of obedience. We call such people unscrupulous and totally lacking in morals because of the fact that they have become so accustomed to committing wrong actions and taking such delight in it. The Quran uses the word (*kasaba*) that is normally used for good, and moves (*iktasaba*) to the place that is normally reserved for (*kasaba*). This is why the Quran differentiates between those who premeditate wrong actions and do them intentionally and those who fall into wrong actions without prior planning or preparation in the following verses: ‘The repentance accepted by Allah is only for those who do wrong in ignorance [or carelessness] and then repent soon after. It is those to whom Allah will turn in forgiveness, and Allah is ever Knowing and Wise,’ (*an-Nisa*: 17) ‘But repentance is not [accepted] of those who [continue to] do evil deeds up until, when death comes to one of them, he says, “Indeed, I have repented now,” or of those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful punishment.’ (*an-Nisa*: 18) The meaning of: ‘...in ignorance...’ (*an-Nisa*: 17) is without intention, preparation or forethought. And if they do a wrong action, they do not delight in it, but instead experience pain and regret. As for the other type of people, they do wrong actions intentionally and are not bothered in the slightest. In fact, they might even take delight in them and boast about them.

كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَنْتَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾
فَإِذَا فَعَهُمُ اللَّهُ الْحِزْبَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلِلْعَذَابِ الْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Others before them also disbelieved, and the punishment fell on them unawares [25] God gave them the punishment of disgrace in this world to taste; the punishment will be even harder in the Hereafter, if only they knew [26] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 25-26)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Those before them denied...’ (*az-Zumar*: 25), i.e. from previous peoples: ‘... and punishment came upon them,’ (*az-Zumar*: 25) i.e. their suffering and punishment in this world by them being defeated and the

religion they had fought against and opposed being victorious. And that is also what happened to the non-believers when Allah gave victory to Islam and made its principles and rulings win out over those of disbelief. And that is, in itself, a type of punishment in this world. So, when they return to Allah in the Hereafter, there is another punishment awaiting them, one that is more painful and severe. They closely resemble those who came before them from among the rejecters, and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: '[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh...' (*Al-Imran*: 11).

And so in the following verses: 'Those before them denied...' (*az-Zumar*: 25) and: '[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh...' (*Al-Imran*: 11), the Quran highlights for us something important, i.e. preservation and memorisation of the Quran should not be in the hands of the scholars, especially those whose speciality is language and rhetoric. And the reason why is that when a scholar is stopped by a word or phrase, it is possible that he might make use of his linguistic knowledge and complete his recitation. As such, when he recites: 'O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate...' (*al-Hujurat*: 6), he might say *tathabbatu* (get proof) or *tahaqqaqu* (to verify) instead of *tabayyanu* (investigate). It is possible that the meaning might be correct, but Allah intends to use a specific word to give a specific meaning, and it is not permissible for us to substitute it for another. Whereas, those who specialise in the memorisation of the Quran without having that level of linguistic ability, when they stop in their recitation or forget what comes next, they stop completely. In other words, they are not able to go on by substituting something similar in meaning. That is exactly what is required of memorisers of the Quran, and that is an example of its grandeur.

And that is why we have said that the perfection of the Quran does not extend beyond it. How so? If we were to ask a person to improve his linguistic style and strengthen his creativity, we would advise him to read the great works of literature, such as those of Al-Minfaluti, Ar-Rafi'i and others. Then after he has read a great deal of those works, we begin to notice an improvement in his style and composition.

But if you were to ask someone who had memorised the Quran well to write an essay, you would find that he would not be able to write it eloquently. Why is

that? This is because the perfection of the Quran does not extend beyond it, but rather it is only the eloquence of people that can extend to other people.

Consider also the meaning in: ‘and punishment came upon them from where they did not perceive,’ (*az-Zumar*: 25) i.e. it comes from where they do not expect. In other words, they are seized by a punishment that they did not expect and that did not cross their mind, like when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account,’ (*an-Nur*: 39) i.e. they were taken by surprise by it, for they had reckoned something else. And that is because they rejected the resurrection and the reckoning in this world, and so they are now surprised to find the Reckoning that they rejected happening to them.

Then Allah says: ‘So Allah made them taste disgrace in worldly life.’ (*az-Zumar*: 26) Here, He takes the word ‘taste’ away from its original physical sense and uses it in a metaphorical sense. Ignominy and humiliation are forms of punishment, and the pain they cause is worse than physical pain. There are people who are not pained by being hit but are pained by harsh words that detract from their honour and good name.

But why does Allah make them taste ignominy in this world before the punishment of the Hereafter? He makes them taste ignominy because they acted haughtily and arrogantly against the truth, came with all their strength and might to the Battle of Badr to fight Islam, and thought that they were courageous heroes and that it was their fight. Thus, the meaning is that the heads of Quraysh and the leaders of disbelief, like ‘Utba, Shayba, Al-Walid and others, came well prepared and in large numbers, while the Muslims only went out to raid the caravan. Despite that, Allah strengthened His army and humiliated His enemy, so that those of them who were killed were killed and those of them who were captured were captured and humiliated. For these people, humiliation was a worse fate than death.

So, they had humiliation in this world while in the Hereafter, they will have another punishment there: ‘But the punishment of the Hereafter is greater, if they only knew.’ (*az-Zumar*: 26) Yes, the punishment of the Hereafter is greater and more severe than the ignominy of this world. ‘... if they only knew’ (*az-Zumar*: 26) because those who did know that reality, stopped what

they were doing and became believers, while the others obstinately opposed it, denied it and rejected it.

وَلَقَدْ صَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾
 قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا غَيْرَ ذِي عِوَجٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

In this Quran, We have put forward all kinds of illustration for people, so that they may take heed [27] an Arabic Quran, free from any distortion – so that people may be mindful [28] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 27-28)

When we analyse the way the root *madhala* (humiliation) is used in the Noble Quran, we find that sometimes it comes in the form of *mithl* (like), which is used to draw a comparison between one thing and another, such as when you say, ‘In terms of his courage, Zayd is like a lion’, or ‘In terms of generosity, the man is like rain.’ An example of that is found in the following verse: ‘... then produce a surah the like thereof.’ (*al-Baqara*: 23)

As for *mathal* (the example of), it is used to compare an image made up of a number of separate elements with another image made up of a number of elements. In other words, it compares one state with another. An example of this sort of comparison in the Noble Quran is the example that Allah draws of this world when He *Glorified Is He* says: ‘And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability.’ (*al-Kahf*: 45)

The life of this world does not resemble water alone, but rather resembles the process by which water falls from the sky, mixes with the soil, from which grows plants, which all too quickly wither, turn yellow, dry out and disintegrate so that they turn into dry stubble which is blown here and there by the wind. That is the life of every person in this world; his life blossoms and thrives but then ultimately ends up in death. This image is one that compares a number of elements with a number of other elements. As long as this world is like this, you must beware of it, not rely on it and not be deceived by it.

Other similes involving the comparison of one image made up of a number of elements with another include what Allah says about who were given the Torah to bear, but did not themselves benefit from it: 'The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books].' (*al-Jumu'a*: 5) These people are not like donkeys alone, but rather like donkeys that carry books on their back without understanding their contents. It is not the task of donkeys to understand, however, their task is to carry. As for these people, they are asked to both carry and understand what they carry - that is how they distinguish themselves from donkeys.

Another example of this type of simile is found in: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah, and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers - so that Allah may enrage by them the disbelievers. Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among them forgiveness and a great reward.' (*al-Fath*: 29)

Reflect upon this simile and you will find that Allah compares Muhammad and his Companions to something spiritual and metaphysical in the Torah because the Jewish mindset is dominated by materialism, and He compares them to something material in the Gospel because the Gospel only talks of spiritual matters. So, because the Jews have gone to excess in materialism, He provides them with a metaphysical metaphor, and because the Christians have gone to excess in spiritual matters, He provides them with a material metaphor. Because of this, it was essential that Islam strike a balance between materialism and spiritualism.

Similarly, Allah says: 'And We have certainly presented...' (*az-Zumar*: 27). The word *darb* (to hit), as we have said, is bringing something down upon something else with strength and force so that it leaves a mark. An example of this is incurring *darb* upon the earth, meaning, ploughing it and taking care of

it in such a way that it gives forth what is good in it. As for setting an example (*darb*) of a parable, we use the word because on the surface it is something strange, so we say, 'Do not be astonished by this for it is like such-and-such.' So the statement becomes clear and surprise is removed. A simile compares something that is disagreed upon with something that is agreed upon, as in the previously mentioned simile: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him.' (*al-Fath*: 29)

The root *mathala* (example) appears 41 times in the Quran in the form *mathal* (the example of), 22 times in the form *mathalan* (for example) and 3 times in the form *mathaluhum* (their example is of).

A very fine example of an extended metaphor is the description a poet gives of a hunchbacked man, creating a mental image of him for you as if you could see him with your own eyes:

Short of neck with skull sunken

as if he were expecting to be slapped.

And it was as if he had been already slapped on the nape once,

and was expecting a second slap so he scrunched his neck down.⁽¹⁾

Allah's words: '...from every [kind of] example... (*az-Zumar*: 27) indicate that the meaning is general. In other words, 'We have drawn these parables for them to make the principles of Islam clear to them by means of the material things they see about them: '...that they might remember.' (*az-Zumar*: 27) In other words, so that they might reflect upon these parables and place each parable opposite those like it so that they might find in what they see in the Seen world a proof for the Unseen, and in what is agreed upon a proof upon which is disagreed

Then Allah says: '[It is] an Arabic Quran...' (*az-Zumar*: 28). That is, these parables came in the form of a clear explanatory Arabic Quran with no

(1) These two verses are mentioned by 'Abd Ar-Rahim Al-'Abbasi in 'Ma'ahid At-tansis' and by Shihabu-Din in 'Rayhanat Al-Alba' as being from a poem written by 'Abdullah Ibn An-Nattah. Al-'Imad Al-Asfahani named him in 'Kharida Al-qasr' (Abu Muhammad 'Abdullah Ibn At-Tabbakh Al-Katib), and in it, it says, 'It was as if he had tasted the first slap'.

distortion in it. It is a book that is read, written, and recited repeatedly in acts of worship. And it is preserved so that its words can never be perverted or altered. The One Who preserves it is the One Who spoke its words. In this way, these parables will remain so long as the Quran remains, and since it will last forever, they will last forever. They will remain there before you so that you will always be able to benefit from them, and every time you find yourself confronted by a problem in your lives, you will find its solution there.

As for His words: ‘...without any deviance...’ (*az-Zumar*: 28), they mean that this Book is not biased, does not prefer something to another, but rather follows the Straight Path. This is because the true legislation comes from Allah Who does not side with anyone or favour anyone, not even His Messengers. As proof of that, read the verse with which Allah addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the best of His Messengers: ‘Then [if you had], We would have made you taste double [punishment in] life and double [after] death. Then you would not find for yourself against Us a helper.’ (*al-Isra*’: 75) And in the chapter of *al-Kahf* (The Cave), Allah describes the Quran, saying: ‘[All] praise is [due] to Allah, who has sent down upon His Servant the Book and has not made therein any deviance. [He has made it] straight...’ (*al-Kahf*: 1-2).

The phrase ‘... that they might become righteous’ (*az-Zumar*: 28) means so that they might guard themselves against Allah’s Attributes of Majesty and the various types of punishment that might come about as a result.

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَكِّسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ
هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

God puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to God, though most of them do not know[29] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 29)

This is a metaphor that Allah sets forth in order to bring clarity to the matter of His Oneness, i.e. monotheism. Through it, Allah *Glorified is He* aims

to clarify the difference between the slave who has a single master and the slave who has many masters. The image in this metaphor is composed of a number of elements. The man is owned by several partners, who are in disagreement with one another, with each one commanding him to do something different. So, if he satisfies one, he enrages another, and if he obeys one, he disobeys another. How can he divide himself up? And how can he rest when he is always in a state of confusion regarding what he should do?

As for the other, he is slave to one master and he receives his commands from one source. He is inextricably linked to his master and he serves him alone.

‘...Are they equal in comparison?’ (*az-Zumar: 29*) Allah asks the question and leaves it up to you to answer. When He says: ‘...are they equal in comparison?’ (*az-Zumar: 29*) we have no alternative but to reply that they are not and can never be equal; we have no option but to affirm this reality. So Allah’s intention in posing this question is that we ourselves affirm it, instead of Him telling us directly. What we have said here is what any sane person would say and what no sane person could deny.

The slave who is owned by a single master is like someone who believes in Allah and devotes his worship to Him alone, while the slave who is shared by many partners, who are at variance with one another, is like the slave who associates others with Allah when he worships Him, so take heed.

When Allah says: ‘Praise be to Allah!’ (*az-Zumar: 29*) He means praise is due to Him for setting forth parables for us and making things clear for us by allowing us to grasp metaphysical matters through seeing material things. So the one who worships Allah alone without a partner lives with an untroubled mind, a peaceful soul and a tranquil heart, unlike the one who worships numerous gods. This is because he has a troubled mind and an unsettled soul, since if he were to obey one master, he would anger another. He does not have the necessary strength to help him satisfy everyone. He is most like the servant who says, ‘Woe, should I cut myself?’

Praise be to Allah who sends down the Quran in Arabic with no distortion in it! Praise be to Allah who clarifies parables that make matters, which normally baffle the mind, accessible by comparing them with matters that are easy to understand!

‘But most of them do not know,’ (*az-Zumar*: 29) i.e. they do not know this thing. They do not know that believing in the One True Lord and worshipping Him alone with sincerity is the path to true happiness and tranquillity, or that worshipping various gods is the path to misery and weariness. They do not know this reality because they did not put proper research into the matter of believing in Lordship, but instead took it without reflecting on it at all. The most important thing for them is for the god they worship to not have any commands or prohibitions, for the god they worship to not have a doctrine and to not have any demands. What kind of a god is it that satisfies your ego, whims and desires?!

Allah’s words: ‘But most of them do not know’ (*az-Zumar*: 29) set the hearts of the people of true belief and Oneness of Allah at rest. Despite the fact that they were few in number, they were still there, and the world will never be without good, no matter how little of it remains, as indicated by Allah: ‘A [large] company of the former peoples’, ‘And a few of the later peoples ...’ (*al-Waqi’a*: 13-14).

He says about the people of the right⁽¹⁾ in another verse: ‘A company of the former peoples’, ‘And a company of the later peoples’ (*al-Waqi’a*: 39-40), so there will always be good in this community.

إِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ وَإِنَّهُمْ مَيِّتُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ تَخَصِمُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

You [Prophet] will certainly die, and so will they [30] and, on the Day of Resurrection, you will dispute with one another in the presence of your Lord [31] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 30 - 31)

Whenever something bad happened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or he was afflicted by illness or hardship, like what happened to him at the Battle of Uhud, the non-believers of Mecca would rejoice. So how do you think it would have been if the Messenger of Allah had died? That is why the Quran affirms this reality for the Messenger of Allah: ‘Indeed, you are to die, and indeed, they are to die.’ (*az-Zumar*: 30) So what are they rejoicing

(1) People of the right: They are the believers who will receive their book of deeds with their right hands on the Day of Judgment.

about when that will be everyone's fate? As Allah indicates in another place in the Quran: 'And We did not grant to any man before you eternity [on earth]; so if you die - would they be eternal?' (*al-Anbiya*: 34)

But the affair does not end there, for after death there is another life, during which there is reckoning, recompense, and standing in front of Allah. During that time, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will enjoy the highest station. But as for you, you will occupy the station of those who are opposed to Allah, so what are you going to say when you are there? This is the meaning of Allah's words: 'Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord, will dispute.' (*az-Zumar*: 31)

In: 'Indeed, you are to die,' (*az-Zumar*: 30) the word *mayyit* (dead) appears here with the *shadda*⁽¹⁾ on the *ya*' and means, moving towards death and ending up dead. There is a difference between *mayyit* with a *shadda* on the *ya*' and *mayt* with a *sukun*⁽²⁾ on the *ya*'. *Mayyit* means (is going to die) or (is going to end up dead), and can be used to describe someone even when they are still alive. This is proven by the fact that Allah addresses His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word when he was still living. As for *mayt*, it describes one who is already dead.

An example of this is found in the words of the poet:

All of God's creatures will sooner or later die,

Whereas the dead is simply the one who is carried to the grave.

Allah's words: 'Indeed, you are to die, and indeed, they are to die' (*az-Zumar*: 30) reassure and comfort the Messenger of Allah Muhammad just like when He

(1) *Shadda*: The Arabic script has numerous diacritics, including *i'jam* (i'jam, consonant pointing), and *tashkil* (*tashkil*, supplementary diacritics). The latter include the *harakat* (vowel marks; singular: *harakah*). The Arabic script is an impure abjad, where short consonants and long vowels are represented by letters, but short vowels and consonant length are not generally indicated in writing. *Tashkil* is optional to represent missing vowels and consonant length. The *shadda* or *shaddah*, or (*tashdid*), is a diacritic shaped like a small written Latin "w."

It is used to indicate gemination (consonant doubling or extra length), which is phonemic in Arabic. It is written above the consonant which is to be doubled.

(2) The *sukun* is a circle-shaped diacritic placed above a letter. It indicates that the consonant to which it is attached is not followed by a vowel. It is a necessary symbol for writing consonant-vowel-consonant syllables, which are very common in Arabic.

addresses him with: ‘And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned.’ (*Ghafir*: 77)

As for here, He says: ‘Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord, will dispute,’ (*az-Zumar*: 31) which means either you will see Allah wreak His vengeance upon them in this world, or it will happen in the Hereafter. So, it is in your best interests to move to the highest level so we can compress the distances and you can see with your own eyes the places in which the obstinate disbelievers will meet their ends. You will not be weakened or humiliated because you are going to end up with Allah, from whom you will receive your recompense and they too will receive theirs.

When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about death in the chapter of *al-Mulk* (The Sovereignty), He says: ‘Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent - [He] who created death and life...’ (*al-Mulk*: 1-2) Reflect on the words: ‘...created death and life...’ (*al-Mulk*: 2) and how He places death first despite the fact that it comes after life. He does that because life will cause you to become self-deluded when you see your limbs and organs responding to your commands as well as the means of your subsistence. Also, because of the fact that this world gives you on demand, you inevitably fall prey to delusion. Allah *Glorified is He* however, wants us to not meet this world with delusion, but rather with an awareness of the reality that is the very opposite of life, namely death.

The rational person is the one who understands that he is heading towards death, and spends his life’s journey remembering that this will be his ultimate fate.

Then He says: ‘Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord, will dispute.’ (*az-Zumar*: 31) The first dispute that will arise between the Prophets and those who rejected them will be as to whether they conveyed their message. The Prophets will bear witness that they conveyed The Message of Allah to their people, whereupon they will make their excuses, saying, ‘We thought it was magic!’, ‘We thought it was lies!’, ‘We thought it was fantasy!’ But they did not realise that Allah had emphasised that with His words: ‘And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you.’ (*al-Baqara*: 143)

So, Allah *the Exalted* favoured the people of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by allowing them to also carry the Message of their messenger, something that had never happened with any of the messages of the previous messengers. And that is why He *the Exalted* says: ‘...you are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 110). The proof that this community carries this Message is that no messenger came after the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* trusted the nation of Muhammad to carry His Message. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness that He *the Exalted* conveyed it to his nation, and they must bear witness that they conveyed to the rest of the people.

This is one of the meanings of the middle way about which Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way,’ (*al-Baqara*: 143) even if they sometimes extend to other things, and that is because they take the middle way in everything. We have seen those among other peoples who denied Allah *the Exalted* completely and others who believed in numerous gods, both of which are extreme beliefs. So Islam came and called on people to worship a single God *the Exalted* and not to ascribe any partners to Him, thereby choosing the middle way and resolving that dispute.

That is why our Lord addresses us with the words: ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way...’ (*al-Baqara*: 143), i.e. you choose the path of balance and moderation. So, if you hear one person calling for communism and another calling for capitalism, or see someone else holding fanatically to his *madhhab* (doctrine), say to them, ‘We are a middlemost community, and have left capitalism to profit from its endeavour and aspiration, for not everyone has that endeavour. And when capitalism profits from its endeavour, it inevitably comes to serve society. See how many workers are working and how many homes are being built.

‘And just like communism, we assign the part of their wealth that they do not spend to those who are unable to work. So we have taken the best part of one and the best part of the other, as is proven by the fact that the wickedness of the two systems that have had control over the world during recent times has begun to lessen. For the capitalists have started to take the edge off of

capitalism, and have started to take the workers into consideration and give them rights, benefits, trade unions and so on. And similarly the communists say, "There must be a class of people in society who are able to balance things up in society by means of their endeavours, and give the works the opportunities to work in them." But in the end, communism came to an end. Praise be to Allah *the Exalted* that it did.' So, the Muslim community is a community in the middle that takes the best of both systems.

We say that in the Hereafter, the first dispute will be the Prophets and those who rejected them, but there will also be a dispute between the heads of the unbelievers and those who followed them, having been misguided and led astray by them, between those people who left their mark on the foolish and caused them to follow them in unbelief.

The Quran paints us a picture of the dispute they have in that place when it says: '[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers, and the latter shall see the suffering [that awaits them], with all their hopes cut to pieces! [166] And then those followers shall say: "Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could disown them as they have disowned us!"' Thus will Allah show them their works [in a manner that will cause them] bitter regrets; but they will not come out of the fire. [167]' (*al-Baqara*: 166-167) And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah-conscious.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 67)

So, it is inevitable that they will differ with one another on that day, curse each other and claim that they were simply following the others. That is why Allah *the Exalted* says: '...and halt them [there]! [And then,] behold, they shall be asked, "How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?"' Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah]; but [since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins]. Some [of them] will say: "Behold; you were wont to approach us [deceptively] from the right!" [To which] the others will reply: "Nay, you yourselves were bereft of all faith!"' (*as-Saffat*: 24-29)

In this way, the followers and those who are followed argue with one another and split apart, no longer aiding one another in the way they aided one another to unbelief in this world.

The Quran also paints another picture of the unbelievers describing how their leaders are taken to the fire first, and how their followers come and find that their leaders have preceded them: Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘All this [for the righteous]: but, verily, the most evil of all goals awaits those who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right: hell will they have to endure – and how vile a resting-place! This, [then, for them –] so let them taste it: burning despair and ice-cold darkness and, coupled with it, further [suffering] of a similar nature. [And they will say to one another: Do you see] this crowd of people who rushed headlong [into sin] with you? No welcome to them! Verily, they [too] shall have to endure the fire! [And] they [who had been seduced] will exclaim: “Nay, but it is you! No welcome to you! It is you who have prepared this for us: and how vile a state to abide in!”’ (*Sad*: 55-60)

The fact that the leaders precede their followers to the fire indicates that their wrong action is worse than that of their followers, since they were themselves misguided but also led others astray. But it also dashes the hopes of the followers that they will be saved or freed from the fire, for they see those that they thought would save them, their leaders and bosses, having preceded them to it.

On the other hand, Allah *the Exalted* lays out the conversation that takes place between the believers while they reside in paradise: ‘One of them speaks thus: “Behold, I had [on earth] a close companion.”’ (*as-Saffat*: 51) That is, I had a companion who was an unbeliever: ‘...who was wont to ask [me], “Why – are you really one of those who believe it to be true [that] after we have died and become mere dust and bones we shall, forsooth, be brought to judgment?”’ [And] he adds: “Would you like to look [and see him]?” and then he looks and sees that [companion of his] in the midst of the blazing fire,’ (*as-Saffat*: 52-55) i.e. he looks over the wall and lo, there is his companion in the midst of the blazing fire, i.e. in the middle of it, so he says: ‘... “By Allah! Verily, you have almost destroyed me [too, O my erstwhile companion],”’ (*as-Saffat*: 56) i.e. destroyed me with you: ‘...for had it not

been for my Lord's favour, I would surely be [now] among those who are given over [to suffering]⁽¹⁾! (as-Saffat: 57)

The conversation might also occur without any element of dispute, as in Allah's words: 'On the Day when their faces shall be tossed about in the fire, they will exclaim, "Oh, would that we had paid heed unto Allah, and paid heed unto the Apostle!" And they will say: "O our Lord! Behold, we paid heed unto our leaders and our great men, and it is they who have led us astray from the right path! O our Lord! Give them double suffering, and banish them utterly from your grace!"' (al-Ahzab: 66-68) Allah then says:

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَذَبَ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَكَذَّبَ بِالصِّدْقِ إِذْ جَاءَهُ ۗ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَالَّذِي جَاءَ بِالصِّدْقِ وَصَدَّقَ بِهِ ۖ
أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

So who could be more wrong than the person who invents a lie about God and rejects the truth when it comes to him? Is there not ample punishment for the disbelievers in Hell? [32] It is the one who brings the truth and the one who accepts it as true who are mindful of God [33] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 32-33)

The question that is asked in: 'And who could be more wicked...' (*az-Zumar*: 32) is a question whose purpose is to indicate astonishment and disapproval. Its meaning is, 'There is no one who is wicked more than this person who invents lies about Allah!' If he were to have invented lies about someone other than Allah *the Exalted* that would have been reprehensible, so how much worse must it be to invent lies about Allah *the Exalted*, who knows everything that happens in the heavens and on the earth and knows the true reality of things, both what they keep secret and what they reveal openly? So, lying against Allah *the Exalted* is doomed to failure. If you must lie, then lie against another human being like yourself, for he is also predisposed to lying.

(1) *Were it not for Allah's favour to me, I would have been like you in the midst of the fire, undergoing the punishment with you. But He, exalted is He, favoured me and granted me mercy, and so guided me to believing in Him and affirming His Oneness. (Tafsir of Ibn-Kathir: Surat as-Saffat)*

And that is why the phrase: ‘...more wicked...’ (*az-Zumar*: 32) appears in the superlative form (*af‘al*), for the worst and most serious type of wrong-doing is to tell lies against Allah *the Exalted*. But who has he wronged? Has he wronged the one he has lied against or has he wronged himself? The answer is that it is himself that he has wronged.

But that was not the end of the matter as far as that person is concerned, for him also: ‘...gives the lie to the truth as soon as it has been placed before him...’ (*az-Zumar*: 32) for declaring what is true to be a lie flips matters on their head. A true statement is one that cannot be met with the response, ‘You have lied’, for it is simply giving the news of actual events that are confirmed by what really happens. We said previously that if what is referenced in speech corresponds to reality, then that speech is truthful, but if it differs from reality, then it is a lie.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks a question that He *the Exalted* knows the answer to: ‘...Is hell not the [proper] abode for all who deny the truth?’ (*az-Zumar*: 32) meaning ‘What do those who tell lies against Allah *the Exalted* and declare what is true to be a lie think is going to happen? Do they not know this reality—that hell is the abode for all unbelievers who deny the truth?’ If they had taken this reality into account, they would not have dared to lie against Allah *the Exalted*. But instead they are liars who say what conflicts with reality and do not believe in Him.

After that He *the Exalted* moves on to a description of the quality of the truthful one, saying: ‘But he who brings the truth...’ (*az-Zumar*: 33). That truthful one is Muhammad who received the message from his Lord and conveyed it to his people. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has emphasised the truthfulness of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in many places, including the time when He *the Exalted* says: ‘Now if he [whom We have entrusted with it] had dared to attribute some [of his own] sayings unto Us, We would indeed have seized him by his right hand, and would indeed have cut his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him!’ (*al-Haqq*: 44-47)

So, the matter of lying against Allah *the Exalted* is one that Allah *the Exalted* does not approve of in anyone, not even His Messengers. And that is why what the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* transmitted from

Allah *the Exalted* was so precise. He did not convey the sense of what Allah *the Exalted* said but rather conveyed what He *the Exalted* said word for word. Read Allah's words: 'Say: "He is The One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlās*: 1): It was well within his capacity to say to his people, 'He is One Allah', and if he had done that he would have conveyed the sense of the verse, but instead he conveyed it exactly as it had come down to him from his Lord: 'Say: "He is The One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlās*: 1) mentioning the command: 'Say'.

It is astonishing that there has appeared amongst us those who say that this word, 'Say', should be omitted, taking as their proof the fact that [they say] it adds nothing new to the meaning. We say in response, 'This is not the speech of a human being, but rather is the speech of Allah *the Exalted* and His Quran. And Allah *the Exalted* has Himself preserved it. And His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed it to us in exactly the way he *peace and blessings be upon him* received it from his Lord.'

Suppose you were to send your son to convey a message from you to someone else, saying to him, 'Go to so-and-so and say such-and-such to him.' It is possible for your son to convey the sense of that message, but when he says, 'My father said to me, "Go to so-and-so and say such-and-such to him", that means that he is emphasising the message and taking care to pass on the message exactly as he received it. So, if the word 'Say' were to be omitted, a word of the Quran would have been omitted, not some word that was additional to it.

As for the words: '...and he who wholeheartedly accepts it as true...' (*az-Zumar*: 33), they mean, 'he affirms the truth that he brought'. In other words, he affirmed it first and did not wait for any of us to affirm it or bear witness to its being true. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took it from his Lord that He *the Exalted* was one God, without a partner, and bore witness to that and affirmed that first.

In the same way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not wait for His slaves to bear witness to His Oneness, but rather first bears witness to that Himself when He *the Exalted* says: 'Allah [Himself] proffers evidence – and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him...' (*Al-Imran*: 18). After Allah *the Exalted* bore witness Himself to His

Oneness, it also became necessary for the Messenger to bear witness that Muhammad is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. So he brought the true Word and himself affirmed it. And he said about himself, 'I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' Similarly, the angels bore witness to this Oneness. And those who are endowed with knowledge bore witness to it with their testimony based on the proofs and evidences in front of them.

Some say ⁽¹⁾ that: 'But he who brings the truth...' (*az-Zumar: 33*) is the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while: '...and he who wholeheartedly accepts it as true...' (*az-Zumar: 33*) refers to those who affirmed as true the first message the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed from his Lord, regardless of whether it was Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* or Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her*. For there is a difference of opinion as to whether the first person to believe was Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* or Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her*. But it is not necessary for there to be a dispute about this, for if someone were to ask you who the first man to become Muslim was, you would say Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* and if someone were to ask you who the first woman to become Muslim was, you would say Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her*.

The reality is that Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* believed in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and affirmed the truth of what he brought right in the beginning of the affair, and perhaps even before Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* had been told about it. You know the stance she took towards the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the revelation came to him, and that she took him to see her cousin,

(1) *The people of tafsir differ with one another with regard to who the one who brings the truth and who the one who wholeheartedly accepts it as true is. There are a number of different opinions: (1) The one who brings the truth is the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the one who accepts it as true is Abu-Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him. This is what 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, may Allah honour him, said; (2) The one who brings the truth is the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the one who accepts it as true is 'Ali. This is what Mujahid said; (3) The one who brings the truth is Gabriel peace be upon him and the one who accepts it as true is Muhammad peace be upon him. This is what As-Suddi said; and (4) The one who brings the truth is the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and the one who accepts it as true are the believers. This is what Ibn Zayd, Muqatil and Qatada said. You can see all of these opinions in the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi (8/5901).*

Waraqa ibn-Nawfal⁽¹⁾, who said, ‘He is the Prophet of this community.’ And, in order to emphasise this for her, he said, ‘And if your day comes when I am still alive, I will give you my most vigorous support. If only I might live to see the day your people cast you out!’ Muhammad *peace be upon him* asked, ‘Are they going to cast me out then?’ He replied, ‘No one has ever brought the like of what you have brought without being subjected to harm and abuse. You will be cast out!’⁽²⁾

As for Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* when they told him, ‘Your companion claims that he is a Messenger’, he replied, ‘If he has said that then he is telling the truth.’⁽³⁾ How could Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* affirm the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he had never seen any miracle from him proving his Message?

They reply, ‘Miracles are not something that people cannot believe without. Rather, they are only there for those who stubbornly refuse to affirm and believe. And that is why the miracle of the Quran came as a challenge to the unbelievers and obstinate rejecters. As for those who believed in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the beginning, they had no need of a miracle, for what miracle could have caused Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* to affirm the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so quickly?

(1) *He is Waraqa ibn-Nawfal ibn-Asad from the tribe of Quraysh, a pre-Islamic wise man. He kept away from idols before Islam, refusing to eat what was sacrificed to them, and became Christian. He used to write the Arabic language in Hebrew script. He was the cousin of the mother of the believers, Khadija may Allah be pleased with her. He died in the year 12 BH.*

(2) Al-Bayhaqi narrated it in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (2/139 & 140) in a (*Hadith*) from Muhammad ibn an-Nu'man ibn Al-Bashir, and Ibn-Hisham narrated it in *as-Sira an-Nabawiyya* (1/256), and in his version Waraqa says, ‘By the One who holds my soul in His hand, you are the Prophet of this community. The great Namus that came to Moses *peace be upon him* has come to you. You will most certainly be rejected, abused, cast out and fought against. If I am still living on that day, I will support Allah *the Exalted* with a support He knows.’

(3) Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his *Tafsir* (5/4012) and they go on to say, ‘Do you believe him before you even hear it from him?’ He replied, ‘Where are your brains? I believe what he tells me as coming from heaven, so how can I not believe what he tells about Jerusalem? Heaven is much further away.’

It was because, they said, he had never ever heard the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tell a lie. And if he was truthful when it came to matters relating to people, then why would he tell lies against Allah *the Exalted*? So, Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* took his miracle from his prior history with and experience of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. And the same was true of Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* as is proven by the fact that it was she who encouraged him and supported him and said, 'By Allah, Allah will never humiliate you, for you maintain your ties of kinship, receive your guests with hospitality, take on others' burdens and help those afflicted by calamity.'⁽¹⁾ So the miracle of Muhammad for those who believed in him from the beginning was their history with him and their experience of him.

You know the (Hadith)⁽²⁾ of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Khuzayma⁽³⁾ *may Allah be pleased with him* in which he said, 'That Khuzayma bears witness for someone is enough for him.'⁽⁴⁾ The number of witnesses required to give testimony is well-known, so how could the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* make Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* equal that number on his own? And what was it that made him merit such a station?

Because, they say, he obtained that level of worthiness by affirming the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* borrowed a sum of money from a Jew and then paid it back to him at the appointed time. But that

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- (1) *It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3) and in six other places in the Sahih. It is also transmitted by Muslim in his Sahih (160) in a (Hadith) from 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her.*
 - (2) *The story of the testimony of Khuzayma in favour of the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.*
 - (3) *He is Khuzayma Ibn Thabit Ibn Al-Fakih ibn Tha'laba Al-Ansari, Abu-'Amara, a Companion and one of the noblemen of Aws in the time of ignorance before Islam and in the time of Islam. He lived until the Caliphate of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, may Allah honour him, and was present at the battle of Siffin, where he was killed in the year 37 AH. (Al-A'lam of Az-Zirikli)*
 - (4) *It is narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (2/18); and At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir (4/101) in a (Hadith) from Khuzayma Ibn-Thabit. And Al-Haythami said in Al-Mujma' (9/320), 'All of its narrators are trustworthy.'*

Jew came forward claiming that he had not received the money he had lent to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said in front of the people, ‘O Muhammad’ - or he said, ‘O Abu Al-Qasim! Give me the money I lent you back.’ the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘I have already given it to you,’ so the Jew said, ‘Who will bear witness to that?’ So Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* got up and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, I will testify that you have given him the money back.’

And so, because of the fact that the Jew’s claim was a lie, he believed Khuzayma’s testimony to be true and said to himself, ‘Perhaps he was present at the transaction and I did not see him.’ And that was because the Jew took the money he had loaned the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* back from him when no one else was present. So the Jew withdrew and left, whereupon the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* summoned Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* and said to him, ‘Khuzayma, no one was with me when I gave him his due, so how could you bear witness that you saw me give it to him?’ Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* laughed and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, should I believe you when you transmit revelation from Heaven and not believe you concerning a few *dirhams*?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was pleased with Khuzayma’s reasoning, considered it to be a fine use of judgement and so said about him, {That Khuzayma bears witness for someone is enough for him.}

The matter had nothing to do with the dirhams of the Jew, but rather had another reality altogether. For when they wanted to gather together the Quran, they took the greatest levels of care possible. So, the compilers did not write a single word into the master copy until they saw it written down somewhere and had heard two witnesses testify to it. They did that so that they could be sure of its truth, both in the hearts of men and the lines they had written down. This continued until the scribe came upon a verse that was written down but had only been testified to by a single witness, so he held back. But as soon as he saw that that witness was Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* he remembered the statement of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘That Khuzayma bears witness for someone is enough for him,’ and so he wrote it down.

Another of the occasions marked by affirmation of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was what Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* said when they told him about the Night Journey and Ascent of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When they said to him, 'Your companion claims that he went to Jerusalem and was taken up to Heaven in a single night,' he did not research the matter or dispute what they said, but instead affirmed it as true from the very first. He said, 'If he said that then he has spoken the truth.' For him, the real measure of truth was simply whether it had been said by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or not.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says: '...it is they who are [truly] conscious of Him!' (*az-Zumar*: 33) That is, those who take the small things into consideration and place a barrier between themselves and Allah's Attributes of Majesty.

لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ ذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾ لِيُكَفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ
أَسْوَأَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا وَيَجْزِيَهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ الَّذِي كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

**They will have everything they wish for with their Lord.
Such is the reward of those who do good. [34] God will
absolve them even of their worst deeds and will reward them
according to their best [35] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 34 - 35)**

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'All that they have ever yearned for awaits them...' (*az-Zumar*: 34) i.e. 'Everything they want will be provided in ample amounts for them and awaits them.' But with whom? '...with their Lord...' (*az-Zumar*: 34) when there is no one left to be with except for Allah *the Exalted*. It is this 'withness' that is meant by Allah's words: '...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day?' (*Ghafir*: 16)

This 'withness', this being *at* someone's place can be used for people in this world. For example, we say, 'This is an employee *at* this person's company' or 'this is a servant *at* that person's house.' But as for the Hereafter, the only One *at* whose place people will be is with Allah *the Exalted*. And through this 'withness', believers obtain in the Hereafter what they desired but were never able to get in this world, for Allah *the Exalted* says: 'All that they have ever yearned for awaits them with their Lord...' (*az-Zumar*: 34), and does not say,

‘They will have all that they yearn for’, but rather, ‘They will have all that they yearn when they are with Me.’ In other words, they will get it directly and not through any outside mediums or secondary causes, for secondary causes only exist in this world. And those things that you want in this world through those secondary causes may or may not come about for you, even when you hold them in your hand. And that is because Allah *the Exalted* brings His sovereignty about through the medium of His viceregents upon the earth, making one the cause of provision for the other, with the one helping the other. But those causes might fail to materialise. As for the Hereafter, there are no secondary causes. Rather, everything is given by Allah *the Exalted* directly without cause.

In the life stories of many of the great Messengers, there are events that clarify for us this ‘being with Allah’. When our master Abraham *peace be upon him* first came to call people to Allah *the Exalted* he called on his uncle Azar and entered into a debate with him regarding the worship of idols. Then when he saw that he was going to persist in his obstinate rejection, he said to him: ‘...Peace be upon you!...’ (*Maryam*: 47)

The word (*salam*) here is not the (*salam*) of peace and security nor the (*salam*) of greeting, but rather is the (*salam*) of saying goodbye. And that is because they had totally different viewpoints, and there can be no arguing with someone who is so obstinate and stubborn. All arguing for longer would do is to create more enmity and make things even more complicated. In such situations, it is better for the person in the right to withdraw and not let the fire of disagreement flare up even more. It is like when you say to your companion in situations of this sort, ‘Uncle, peace be upon you!’, thus bringing the matter to a close. So, ‘Peace be upon you!’ here means, ‘If I were not to have left this situation with you, there would never have been peace.’ Indeed, the message of peace can be conveyed by people who are not able to ensure that that peace will be implemented.

And that is why true peace only comes from Allah *the Exalted* as in Allah’s words: ‘Peace and fulfilment through the word of a Lord who dispenses all grace.’ (*Ya Sin*: 58)

The evidence here points to the fact that Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to ask forgiveness for his paternal uncle, but Allah *the Exalted* did not

answer that request. He wanted something in this world but Allah *the Exalted* did not want it. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to ask forgiveness for his paternal uncle, Abu Taleb, after having called him to Islam and after him having not accepted. Instead, he remained upon the religion of his forefathers. So when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked for forgiveness for him, Allah *the Exalted* revealed the following verse to him: 'It does not behove the Prophet and those who have attained to faith to pray that they who ascribed divinity to aught beside Allah be forgiven [by Him] – even though they happened to be [their] near of kin...' (*at-Tawba*: 113).

Muhammad wanted forgiveness for his paternal uncle, but Allah *the Exalted* did not grant him that. And that was because what he wanted was something in this world, not with Allah *the Exalted* but what he desired with Allah *the Exalted* in the Hereafter will be answered and will come to pass. That is the meaning of: 'All that they have ever yearned for awaits them with their Lord...' (*az-Zumar*: 34).

And even if believers do have desires that are not fulfilled in this world, they will be stored for him in the Hereafter, when they are with their Lord. Those desires which do not come about here are covered by one thing, and that is that the noblest thing you can desire from Allah *the Exalted* is that Allah *the Exalted* grant victory to His religion, and that desire has been fulfilled.

So, the desires that are not fulfilled are those which relate solely to yourself. As for those desires that conform to belief in Allah's programme, they will most definitely come about, just as they came about, for example, at Badr.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us who believe in Him and affirm His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to not yearn for things outside of Islam, since it is possible for those things that one wishes for outside of Islam to be in the hands of other people, meaning that those wishes will not be fulfilled. It is possible also that a believer will die before seeing the fulfilment of his wish that Allah's religion be victorious. If that happens, then that wish will be stored up for him in the Hereafter.

So, the important thing is for his wish to be solely for the victory of Allah's religion over those who deny and oppose it, for such a wish will come

true, as is proven by Allah's words: '...and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat*: 173)

As for Allah's words: '...such will be the reward of the doers of good' (*az-Zumar*: 34), it is the case that there is action and there is bounteous grace. And the fact that we are recompensed and rewarded for our actions is part of that grace since whenever our Lord rewards me for something that itself already brought me benefit, that reward is considered a bonus, for it would have been perfectly within His rights for Him to say, 'You have already taken your reward in the form of the benefit you derived from the work you did.' For your Creator has given you all the means as well as the limbs and organs to make use of them. He *the Exalted* has given you land, money, air, water and food, so if He *the Exalted* rewards you for your work as well, that is part of His grace and bounty.

The (*muhsin*), 'the doer of good', is at a higher level above the believer, for the believer takes the things Allah *the Exalted* has made obligatory for him and puts them into practice without doing anything extra. But as for the (*muhsin*), he puts into practice all that Allah *the Exalted* has made obligatory for him as well as doing extra actions of the same type as those things that Allah *the Exalted* made obligatory on him.

So, for example, he prays the five prayers and, on top of them, does extra supererogatory such as the night prayer, as Allah *the Exalted* himself says about the (*muhsinin*): 'They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts; and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 17-19)

Allah *the Exalted* does not say here, 'a known due share' because the known due share is *zakat*. But in the case referred to here, the believer pays the *zakat* on his wealth and then, in addition to that, gives as much voluntary alms and charity as he wills. Those additional alms are not demanded of you by your Lord; rather, you only give them out of love for Him and in order to draw nearer to Him.

So, the word (*ihsan*) has the same meaning when it is related to Allah *the Exalted* as it does when it is related to people. You say, 'I act with (*ihsan*)

towards so-and-so' when you give with more than is his due. And so, when Allah *the Exalted* rewards a (*muhsin*), He *the Exalted* gives that reward for his (*ihsan*). If a servant acts with (*ihsan*), Allah *the Exalted* is more generous and more worthy of doing the same.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a physical example of how this (*ihsan*) works by means of the earth and the fruits that it gives forth. You might, for example, plant a seed of wheat in it, and that seed then gives you in exchange 70 seeds. If that is what is given by the earth that is created by Allah *the Exalted* then what do you think will be given by its Creator? So, the reason: 'All that they have ever yearned for awaits them with their Lord...' (*az-Zumar*: 34) is because they were (*muhsinin*), and that is the reward for (*ihsan*). As for the Words: 'And to this end, Allah will efface from their record the worst that they ever did...' (*az-Zumar*: 35), they also indicate part of the reward that is specific to the station of (*ihsan*).

The word 'worst' is in the superlative form, so the word 'bad' is lesser than it. You can have a bad action and one that is worse than it. There is no doubt that 'bad action' refers to minor wrong actions, while 'worse' refers to major wrong actions. So, it is as if those who have arrived at the station of (*ihsan*) have been given the guarantee that that station of (*ihsan*) defrays the costs of those wrong actions and causes them to be removed. And it does not just do that to the minor wrong actions, but also to the major wrong actions since if the worst of their wrong actions are effaced, then so too will their actions which are merely bad. And all of that because you have placed yourself in a station that was not required of you - it was only love of Him that caused you to enter it.

And there is even a gift awaiting you that is even greater than that, for the matter does not end with your sins and wrong actions being effaced. Rather, they are also transformed into good actions, just as Allah *the Exalted* Himself says: '...for it is they whose [erstwhile] bad deeds Allah will transform into good ones...' (*al-Furqan*: 70).

Reflect on the various degrees of gifts that Allah *the Exalted* bestows upon us! True profit can only be obtained by engaging in trade with Him! And by

the same generosity, bounty and favour, Allah *the Exalted* rewards the (*muhsinin*) for their good actions: ‘...and give them their reward in accordance with the best that they were doing [in life].’ (*az-Zumar*: 35) Just as He *the Exalted* forgives them for the worst they have done, He *the Exalted* also rewards them for the best they have done, that is to say, for the best actions they did. These gifts from Allah *the Exalted* this generosity and favour that He *the Exalted* showers on His servants, encourage those who have strayed from belief to return to the embrace of belief. For, as long as the door to repentance remains open, there is no barrier between him and his Lord and there are no stumbling blocks in the way, no matter how numerous his wrong actions.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* prescribed repentance for disobedient wrongdoers, He *the Exalted* legislated it to save them from the wickedness of disobedience. For if we were to tell the disobedient that there was no way to repent, what would they then do? They would lose all their scruples. When we say, ‘So-and-so is unscrupulous,’ we mean that he has despaired of ever reforming, and so he persists in wrongdoing and slips further and further astray. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want that for His slaves, and so He *the Exalted* opens up to them the door of repentance so that their passion for Allah’s religion can return and so that disobedience and deviancy do not increase and become more widespread in society.

After the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his people about this divine program for rewarding people, the obstinate rejecters said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘We are afraid for you, Muhammad. We are afraid that our gods are going to visit some harm upon you because you have angered them.’ It is quite astonishing that they would say this, given that they knew that their gods were stones that could neither bring benefit nor harm. And so whenever they were touched by harm, they could find no one to take any refuge in except for Allah *the Exalted*. That is why Allah *the Exalted* reveals the verses:

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ وَيُخَوِّفُونَكَ بِالَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ وَمَنْ يُضِلِّ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ (٣٦) وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُضِلٍّ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِعَزِيزٍ ذِي انْتِقَامٍ (٣٧)

Is God not enough for His servant? Yet they threaten you [Prophet] with those they worship other than Him. If God allows someone to stray he has no one to guide him [36] if God guides some- one no one can lead him astray. Is God not mighty and capable of retribution? [37] (The Quran? *az-Zumar*: 36 - 37)

This means, ‘O Muhammad, do not worry about this meaningless prattle, for Allah *the Exalted* is enough for you and will suffice you.’ And that is proven by the fact that some of the believers used to guard him for fear that the idolaters might do some harm to him. But they were surprised one day by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* coming out to them and releasing them from duties, forbidding them from guarding him and dismissing them from their posts.

If the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not been certain that the One Who commanded him to dismiss his guards was Himself going to guarantee his safety and protection, he would not have done that to himself. And that is why a Danish woman, when she read in the account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was the greatest of all those people who have left their mark on history and when she came upon this event and read: ‘Is Allah not enough for His servant?...’ (*az-Zumar*: 36) and: ‘...Allah will protect you from [unbelieving] men...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 67) she said, ‘By Allah, Muhammad would not have done that unless he had absolute certainty in the fact that his Lord would protect him. Even were he to have deceived everyone, he could not have deceived himself.’ And so, on account of that one thing, she became a believer.

It pleases some people to say that the meaning of: ‘Is Allah not enough for His servant?...’ (*az-Zumar*: 36) is simply, ‘Is Allah not enough for His servant?’ considering the (*ba*’) to be superfluous, but that is not correct for there are no superfluous letters in the Speech of Allah *the Exalted*. As for the (*hamza*) here, it is indicative of a denying question, and denial indicates negation. And after that, the word (*laysa*) also indicates negation, and a double negative indicates

a positive. So the meaning is, 'We deny that Allah *the Exalted* is not enough for His slave', and if we deny that Allah *the Exalted* is not enough for His servant, we are saying as a result that Allah *the Exalted* is enough for His servants.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has a name which is 'Allah' and has attributes which we know as 'The Beautiful Names'. One of those Beautiful Names is (*al-Kafi*), 'The One Who is Enough'. So the meaning is then, 'Does Allah *the Exalted* not have the attribute of being Enough for His servant?' So how can we then say that the (*ba* ') is superfluous? Saying that the (*ba* ') is superfluous here is contrary to the eloquent nature of the Quran. It is not correct for us to say that there is a superfluous letter in the Quran. Some display courtesy towards the Quran and said that it is a letter of connection, while others say that it is a letter whose purpose is to link to existence. But the truth is that we have no need of any of these interpretations.

And we made this matter perfectly clear earlier. If I were to say, for example, 'I do not have money,' the word (*ma*) negates the existence of a significant amount of money, but does not deny the existence of money altogether - it does not deny me from having a pound or two. But if I were to say, 'I do not have any money', and use the preposition (*min*) before the word for money, that would mean that I did not have anything that could be called money, not even a single penny. Thus, the preposition that is used here is not superfluous at all, but rather is essential to the meaning. As for those who say that the (*ba* ') is superfluous in: '...enough for...' (*az-Zumar*: 36), they consider (*laysa*) to be one of the sister verbs of (*kana*), a category of verb that makes the subject (*marfu* ') and makes the predicate (*mansub*). So the majestic name, its subject, is (*marfu* ') and (*kafin*) 'enough' is its predicate. So the implied wording is, 'Is Allah not (*kafiyān*) His slave.' However, this interpretation runs contrary to the majesty and eloquence of the Quran.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says: '...And yet, they would frighten you with those [imaginary divine powers which they worship] beside Him!...' (*az-Zumar*: 36) i.e. with their idols: '...But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide,' (*az-Zumar*: 36) meaning, 'Let them say what they say, for Allah has led them astray, so who is there that can guide them?' '...whereas he whom Allah guides aright can never be led astray...' (*az-Zumar*: 37). This is the

opposite case - if Allah *the Exalted* guides us to the path, then no one will be able to lead us astray. '...Is Allah Almighty, not an avenger of evil?' (*az-Zumar*: 37) means, 'Is Allah *the Exalted* not described with might?' The (*ba'*) here is like the one that came in the previous verse.

The Almighty is the One Who overcomes and is not overcome. And since Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who overcomes and is not overcome, you must beware of His vengeance, since He *the Exalted* is also: '...an avenger of evil' (*az-Zumar*: 37). So no matter how much evil forethought, planning and plotting you do, you will never overcome Him.

It is amazing that the unbelievers sought to frighten the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with idols when they themselves knew their true nature. And as for their statement: '...We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah...' (*az-Zumar*: 3), it is totally false linguistically since worship is the worshipper obeying the worshipped in all his commands and prohibitions, and what commands or prohibitions come from inanimate idols? So their statement is totally nonsensical and baseless. And that is why Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him* said⁽¹⁾, after Allah *the Exalted* had softened his heart to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent him to destroy al-'Uzza, and after he had gone up to the idol with his axe in his hand to break it:

O 'Uzza, may you be profaned and not glorified,
for certainly I see that Allah has abased you.

If it was truly a god then it would have frightened him and protected itself.

Some of the orientalist have raised an objection to Allah's words: '...And yet, they would frighten you with those [imaginary divine powers which they worship] beside Him,' (*az-Zumar*: 36) saying, 'This refers to the idols, and those idols— al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat—all have feminine names. So how is it that the Quran uses the masculine word (*al-ladhina*) to refer to them and not the feminine word (*al-lati*)?' We reply, 'There is a difference between the

(1) This is narrated by Al-Marzuqi in his book, *Al-Azmina wa Al-Amkina*, in chapter 60. It is also narrated by Al-Kalbi in the book, *Al-Asnam*, and by Al-Jahiz in the book, *Al-Hayawan*, in the section entitled, 'the Fire of Artifice'.

name that is used for an idol and the thing that it names. In other words, it is a (*sanam*), an ‘idol’, and that idol is then named either al-Lat or al-‘Uzza. So, if we take into account the fact that it is a (*sanam*), its plural is going to be masculine, whereas if we take into account the name it has been given, its plural is going to be feminine. So, (*al-ladhina*) takes into account what they are, i.e. the fact that they are idols, and (*al-lati*) takes into account the names they have been given.’

We shall stop here to look at this opposite pairing in Allah’s words: ‘...But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide, whereas he whom Allah guides aright can never be led astray. Is Allah Almighty, not an avenger of evil?’ (*az-Zumar*: 36-37): A (*dall*) is one who is not guided towards his goal, like someone who loses his way and does not know in which direction to go. He is one who is astray without intending to be astray, since he simply does not know the way.

The word (*dall*) can also be used to mean hesitant and bewildered, such as when Allah *the Exalted* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘And found you lost on your way, and guided you?’ (*ad-Duha*: 7) And that came about because the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw his people doing things that he did not like, but at the time he still did not know the correct things they should be doing. So, it means that he did not know the truth, not that he knew but still turned aside from it, for there is a great difference between the two states. So, the (*dalal*), the ‘misguidedness’, here is something that was not intended. The word (*dalal*) can also be used to convey the meaning of forgetting, as in Allah’s words: ‘...so that if one of them should make a mistake, the other could remind her...’ (*al-Baqara*: 282).

And another aspect of that (*dalal*) is our forgetting that ancient natural covenant that Allah *the Exalted* made with us and which is referred to in His Words: ‘And whenever your Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ – to which they answer: “Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!”...’ (*al-A‘raf*: 172)

The opposite of (*dalal*) is (*hidayah*), ‘guidance’, a word that also has a number of different meanings. But those who seek to raise objections to the

Word of Allah *the Exalted* and damage its credibility take it to only have one meaning, applying that meaning to the word wherever they find it in the Quran. But that is not correct.

The word (*hidayah*) refers to guidance of pointing out the way in an absolute sense. In other words, He *the Exalted* guides you and then you are free to either follow that guidance or ignore it. The example we gave of this was that of a traffic policeman who guides you and points out the way to you, after which you are free to either take the path he has pointed to you or not to take it. If you do take the path he pointed out to you and thank him for the good turn he has done you, saying to him, 'May Allah increase you in goodness! If it were not for you, I would have lost my way,' he looks at you again and sees that you are worthy of being given even more good. So he says to you, 'By Allah, you are a good man, so I will travel with you until you pass out of this area, for it is full of danger!' This is called assistance. So the one who believes in The One Who guides is worthy of being assisted and being granted the success of having a greater level of guidance.

This is the meaning of Allah's words: '...just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in God-consciousness,' (*Muhammad*: 17) meaning, 'He increases them by granting them aid and assistance, lightening for them the burden and hardship of obedience and turning aside from them the things that lead to evil. So, the first type of (*hidayah*) is guidance in the absolute sense of pointing out the way, while the second type of (*hidayah*) is guidance in the providing assistance and success.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies these two types of (*hidayah*) when He *the Exalted* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: He *the Exalted* says about the first: '...and, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straight way,' (*ash-Shura*: 52) and He *the Exalted* says about the second: 'Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love: but it is Allah Who guides him that wills [to be guided]...' (*al-Qasas*: 56). How can Allah *the Exalted* affirm the act of guidance to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in one verse and yet negate it from him in another, for the words used in both verses are the same and the

subject of the verb in both verses is the same? They say, in each of the places the word is being used in a different sense: the guidance that is negated is not the same as the guidance that is affirmed. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You are but a guide who conveys My Message, not one who lays the way and makes the Law.'

You do not have the power necessary to force people to believe. Your only task is to convey, for it is by means of that conveying that Allah *the Exalted* guides people. It is not your job to insert belief into people's hearts.

This is similar to what Allah *the Exalted* says in a single verse: '...but most people know [it] not: they know but the outer surface of this world's life...' (*ar-Rum*: 6-7). Thus, He *the Exalted* affirms knowledge to them and negates it in the same verse. Why? Because they refer to different things: the knowledge that is affirmed is not the same as the knowledge that is negated.

Allah *the Exalted* says: '...But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide.' (*az-Zumar*: 36) When Allah *the Exalted* says (*yudlil*), He *the Exalted* is ascribing misguidance to them, saying, 'This one is misguided,' meaning that he is not on the path that I laid out for him. And anyone whom Allah *the Exalted* has described as being astray, no right-thinking person can then describe him as being right-guided, since as soon as he compares that person's actions with what Allah *the Exalted* actually requires of him, his intellect will naturally cause him to conclude that he is astray and not guided.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* for example, tells us to tell the truth and not tell lies. What does the right-thinking person say when he compares truthfulness and lying? It is inevitable that he will say that truthfulness is guidance and lying is misguidance, for it is not possible for him to say anything else. And that is especially true if he were to apply the matter to himself and say, 'Would you like people to tell you the truth or to lie to you?'

So, if Allah *the Exalted* misguides someone and rules him as being astray after having first clearly shown him the right path, no one can then come along and describe that person as being guided. And that is because Allah's guidance is something upon which all healthy natural minds agree, especially when you yourself are affected by some negative consequence of that misguidance and burned by its flames. That is why you find that liars love

those who are truthful and evil men loves those who are noble and good. The story of the three adolescent young men that we have previously mentioned is a case in point. These three persons followed their own evil whims and desires. They remained as such for a long period of time until one of them showed repentance to Allah, which is why the other two bitterly mocked him and stigmatized him with the worst characteristics. But the question to be asked now is: 'If one of these two men had a sister, would he allow her to get married to his companion who repented or to the one who was still committing evil?!' It is thus clear that even though evil may entice people, the good eventually will prevail and win a point which is proved by the saying of Allah, *the Almighty*: '...Is Allah Almighty, not an avenger of evil?' (*az-Zumar*: 37)

وَلَيْن سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلْ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَنِيَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ هَلْ هُنَّ كَاشِفَتُ ضَرِّيَ أَوْ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ هَلْ هُنَّ مُمْسِكَتُ رَحْمَتِهِ قُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ يَتَوَكَّلُ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

If you [Prophet] ask them, 'Who created the heavens and earth?' they are sure to answer, 'God,' so say, 'Consider those you invoke beside Him: if God wished to harm me, could they undo that harm? If God wished to show me mercy, could they withhold that mercy?' Say, 'God is enough for me: all those who trust should put their trust in Him' [38] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 38)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to show them how foolish it is to worship idols, and He wants to give them the evidence and proof that such worship is totally futile. And He *the Exalted* wants them to admit that proof, not simply for him to inform them of it. And as we have said before, a ruling is established either by a statement from you or a confession from your opponent. And confession, as we said before, is 'the lord of all proofs'. And you do not leave it to your opponent to make the ruling unless you are absolutely sure that he is going to say what you want him to say. It is just like when you say to someone who shows no gratitude for a good turn you did him, 'Did I not do such-and-such for you on such-and-such a day?' And you only say it because you are sure that he will not be able to deny that fact.

And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks them here about the main support of existence in creation and the highest and widest envelope that contains all created beings, that is to say, the heavens and earth. The universe was created for man before man was ever created, so he came upon an earth already containing crops, plants, water, air and wholesome earth, and he came upon a sky already containing plants, stars, and a sun and a moon.

So Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘...and thus it is [with most people]: if you ask them, ‘Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?’ – They will surely answer, ‘Allah.’ (*az-Zumar*: 38) And they had no option but to say, ‘Allah’ and ‘Allah alone’, for when they turned their thoughts to the matter, they could not find anyone else who claimed that this was his creation. Indeed, it has never even occurred to any of the unbelievers, opponents or deniers of Allah’s existence to make such a claim.

If we were to track the creation of man from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* and his immediate descendants, we would find that they came upon this world with its heavens and earth already in place. So if we were to have asked him, ‘Did you create the heavens and earth’, he would not be able to say, ‘Yes, I did create them.’

So, Muhammad, ask them that question: ‘... “Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?”...’ (*az-Zumar*: 38) and they will have no option but to say, ‘Allah’, since no being has ever spent a single moment of existence without the heavens and earth being present so that he could say that he was creating them for those yet to come. Rather, everybody came to find the heavens and the earth already there.

This is exactly like Allah’s words: ‘Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, ‘Allah’...’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 87) since no one can say to the first being to be created and brought into existence, ‘I created you’, nor can he himself say, ‘I created myself.’

The fact that they said, ‘Allah’ in response directs our attention to another matter. And that is that the word, ‘Allah’ is one that everyone uses and one that everyone understands to whom it refers. If that were not the case, then they would not use it. And that is because the first thing that comes into

existence is a meaning or a concept and then a word is coined to denote it. A good example of that is the television, for before it was invented we did not know such a word. It was not until after it had been brought into existence that we assigned this name. So, how did the word 'Allah' come into the language of man?

So, the majestic name must have something or someone to which it refers. That someone is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who existed before this word came into existence. And that is why we say to those who deny the existence of Allah *the Exalted* 'That is a contradiction in terms. Saying, 'Allah is non-existent' does not make any sense, for the word 'Allah' is a subject which you are passing judgment on, while 'non-existent' is the predicate with which you are passing judgment. So, how can you say He *the Exalted* is non-existent when the concept exists before the word used to denote it?

The word 'Allah' could not exist in language unless He Himself existed. He *the Exalted* must have existed before the name did and we could not have known of the name without its owner having told us it. And that is because the job of the intellect, when it comes to belief, is to show us that this creation must have had a Creator to bring it into being. But what is that power? And what does that power want from creation? It is not the job of the intellect to answer questions such as these, for the intellect could never arrive at an answer. The only way we can know the answers to these questions is by being told them by that Creator Himself.

You will remember the example we gave to illustrate this: We said, 'Let us say we are sitting at home and the doorbell rings. In the moment that the doorbell rings, we all agree that there is someone at the door because for everything that happens there must be someone or something to make it happen, but who is it? And what does he or she want? We cannot know the answer to those questions unless he or she tells us directly, saying, 'I am so-and-so and I want such-and-such.'

So, the intellect cannot tell us what any of the features or traits of the Highest Existence are; all it can do is believe and know that He *the Exalted* exists and uncover the proofs of that. As for His Name, attributes, programme and instructions to us, it is Allah *the Exalted* Himself who transmits and

conveys them to us. But that transmission must come from a person of consequence for us to accept it as true.

One of the failures of the philosophers, when it comes to investigating matters, is that they want to use the intellect not to just know what is intellectually knowable, but also to imagine the form that that intellectually knowable thing takes. But such conjecture is not the job of the intellect, for you will never be able to imagine the form that that thing takes. You can only know intellectually that it exists. Then you must leave it to that thing to speak for itself. Therefore, we find it odd when these philosophers talk about physical sciences and the science of what lies behind those physical things, which they refer to as metaphysics. However, why is it said that something lies behind physical matters? Because something cannot exist unless there is something from which we know about that thing. If nothing else comes along to set it right, then it establishes it.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He is the One who created this creation, as this existence could not exist if the Creator did not bring it into existence. In addition, no one objected to what Allah has said, so it is established so long as no one brings forth a counter claim.

Therefore, we said previously that the word of *kufir* (disbelief) is a proof of belief, since the original meaning of ‘*kufir*’ is to cover up, and only things that exist can be covered up. This means that the innate state is that of belief, but *kufir* (disbelief) emerged thereafter in order to cover it up.

After they acknowledged the first proof that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth, He says to them: ‘... Say, “Then have you considered what you invoke besides Allah?”’ (*az-Zumar*: 38) This means that Allah tells them to describe those who they worshipped other than Allah (the idols): ‘...if Allah intended me harm, are they removers of His harm...’ (*az-Zumar*: 38)? The verse refers to the idols, and the answer to the question is certainly in the negative, as the idols cannot hear the beseeching of those who supplicate them and cannot realise what the disbelievers ask for, so how can they fulfil people’s requests to remove harm from them?

On the other hand: ‘...if He intended me mercy, are they withholders of His mercy?’ (*az-Zumar*: 38) Their answer is certainly in the negative. Therefore,

they acknowledge that Allah is the One Who brings benefit and that their gods are false and useless. If they stammer after that and do not reply because their answer will constitute a proof against them, then: ‘...Say, “Sufficient for me is Allah...”’ (*az-Zumar*: 38) as He brings into existence beneficial creatures in the heavens and earth, and He is sufficient to ward off any harm

This is the meaning of Allah’s saying in the previous verse: ‘Is Allah not sufficient for His Servant [Prophet Muhammad]?’ (*az-Zumar*: 36) This means that He bestowed bounties upon His Servant by granting him the bounty of existence, then the bounty of preserving one’s life and then the bounty of preserving one’s species. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* removes harm from His servant when it afflicts him. In fact, whenever a person suffers from an affliction, he never resorts to a false god, as he will not deceive himself or lie to himself. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him...’ (*al-Isra’*: 67).

Allah’s saying: ‘...all those who trust should put their trust in Him...’ (*az-Zumar*: 38) makes use of the linguistic style of restriction, as trust is restricted to Allah alone. This is true trust and reliance since the one who relies on something strengthens himself via this reliance when his own strength fails. The sensible person only relies on the one who can help him, on one whom when he needs him, he finds him there. As we said before, anyone who relies on someone just like himself will fail since you rely on him and hope that he fulfils your needs, but it occurs that you read his obituary in the newspapers a few days later. Thus, our Lord teaches us how and upon whom we should place our trust, saying: ‘Rely upon the Ever-Living who does not die...’ (*al-Furqan*: 58).

There is a difference between the Arabic words ‘*tawakkul*’ and ‘*tawakul*’, as Allah has provided the living beings with the means for their survival and the means for the preservation of their life, such as food and drink. In addition, He has provided them with the means for the preservation of species by mating.

As Allah has provided us with all these means, He has also assigned us a role. For example, the earth that lies beneath us, the sun that shines on the earth, the wind that blows over it and the rain that brings water to it. People should exploit and take advantage of these means by tilling it, planting the seeds, and taking care of them. You do not just stay at home and expect those

means to bring you your food while doing nothing. No, your Lord has created you and has given you limbs that you can control. You can use your hand to hit someone or to pat the head of an orphan; you can use your tongue to utter the testimony of faith or say things that contradict it.

However, you must remember that those limbs are only subservient to your will in this worldly life, but in the Hereafter, you will not have control over them since they will be under the control of the One Who created them. On this day, Allah *Glorified is He* will say: ‘...To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day?...’ (*Ghafir*: 16) In addition, your limbs will be freed from your control and will bear witness against you: ‘On a Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against’ (*an-Nur*: 24) them.

Allah created these limbs to make use of them, not to neglect using them. If you are able to work and still ask others to support you, that is called ‘*tawakul*’: neglecting the means that Allah has bestowed on you and paying no heed to the talents and abilities that He has placed at your disposal. Allah *Glorified is He* has given you this honour, so how do you demean yourself by relying on other people? Why do you refuse making use of the bounties which Allah has granted you?

If you take advantage of the means and limbs which Allah has given you, then this is called ‘*tawakkul*’, as it means making use of the limbs while putting one’s trust in Allah. You should also expect that some trials may afflict you, such as when you work hard and take advantage of the means, but you do not gain anything. For example, when you till the soil and plant your crops, then the crops are destroyed completely. Allah then says:

قُلْ يَنْفَعُكُمْ أَعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَمِلْتُ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾
 مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Say, ‘My people, do whatever is in your power – and so will I. You will find out [39] who will suffer humiliation, and on whom a lasting torment will descend’[40] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 39 - 40)

Reflect on the vocative case in this verse: ‘O my people...’ (*az-Zumar*: 39). Even after the people’s stubborn rejection of Islam, their insistence on falsehood

and their refusal to accept the proofs and evidence presented to them, still Allah *Glorified is He* treats them kindly and commands His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to address them in such a kind and lovely manner. This vocative form indicates that he was not alien to them, as they were his family and people among whom he lived.

When Messenger Muhammad called them to Islam, they did not respond to his call. In addition, none of the proofs and evidence he brought, showing them the futility of worshipping idols, were successful in convincing them. His Lord commanded him to say to them: 'O my people do whatever is in your power – and so will I...' (*az-Zumar*: 39). This means that Prophet Muhammad told them to do whatever they want with him because he had full trust in his Lord and his Lord was sufficient for him. He did not say these words out of recklessness or arrogance, but because Allah has said: 'Is Allah not sufficient for His Servant [Prophet Muhammad]?...' (*az-Zumar*: 36)

The Arabic word '*makanatikum*' refers to the space occupied by an object, while the word '*makin*' refers to the object that occupies a space. Therefore, a glass is the space occupied by an object while the water in it is the object which occupies a space. You have a place that you occupy: if someone persecutes and expels you from your place, he will let you go to another place.

If you become settled in a place to the extent that you have authority over it, this is what is called '*makanah*'. Those with high standing and sovereignty have '*makanah*'. The additional letter '*ta*' in the word '*makanatikum*' is for the sake of exaggeration. When we refer to knowledgeable people, we may say '*'alim*', '*'allam*' and '*'allamah*', the last of which refers to the one who has reached the pinnacle of knowledge and has learnt so much that there is nothing hidden from him.

As for the question: Why does Allah describe Himself '*'Allam*' and not as '*'Allamah*'? It is because Allah's knowledge is not divided up into different levels. There are not things He only has general knowledge about and others about which He has partial knowledge. Therefore, Allah cannot be described with this attribute.

The word '*makanah*' is used in Allah's saying regarding the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph): 'We established Joseph in the land that We might

teach him the interpretation of events...’ (*Yusuf*: 56) Allah did not give him just a ‘*makan*’ (place), but He gave him power and authority that enabled him to move wherever he wished. A person can have a place, and then he gains power and influence in that place, as what happened in the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph). On the other hand, a person may have a place and he is removed from it, just like when a person is arrested and placed in a cell.

We said previously that there is a ‘*hamzah*’ in the Arabic language which is called ‘*hamzat al-izalah*’. When it is prefixed to a verb, it reverses its meaning. For example, the phrase: ‘*a’jama al-kalam*’ (a person clarified the meaning of a speech), and the Prophet Muhammad’s saying when addressing his Lord, ‘I will try to please You until you become content.’⁽¹⁾ The word ‘*al-’utba*’ which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the Hadith means ‘removing the source of blame.’ The whole saying means, ‘If I have done something that stirs Your Anger, I will try to remove the source of blame and please you.’ Within the context of lovers, ‘*’atb*’ means blaming for something.

Another example of the word ‘*makanah*’ is found in the Arabic text of Allah’s saying: ‘But if they intend to betray you - then they have already betrayed Allah before, and He empowered [you] over them. And Allah is Knowing and Wise.’ (*al-Anfal*: 71) The words ‘*amkana minhum*’ means ‘took away their place from them’. The words ‘*amakana min*’ means removing authority from someone and having power over them.

The word ‘*makanah*’ includes the sovereignty and influence a person has that enables him to obtain what he wants. The word ‘*makanah*’ is an exaggerated form of the word ‘*makan*’ and the Arabic letter ‘*ta*’ is used for giving emphasis. Term is also used for the sort of high esteem that inspires such awe extending beyond your personal domain. That is why when Malik

(1) *It is narrated by Ibn Hisham in ‘As-Sirah An-Nabawiyah’ when he was tackling the trip Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him made to Tai’f to call its people to Islam. However, they acted ignorantly and caused his feet to bleed. When he had taken refuge in one of the orchards there, he raised his hands to heaven and said, ‘O Allah, to You I complain of my weakness, lack of artifice and my disgrace at the hands of these people. O Most Merciful of all merciful, you are the Lord of the weak and you are my Lord, to whom do You leave me? To someone distant who frowns at me? Or to an enemy to whom You have given authority over me? ...’*

was killed⁽¹⁾, some people said, 'Malik used to guard the places where the clouds pass causing rain to fall.' Malik guarded these places in such a way that no one could encroach upon it because of the status he held amongst his people. Therefore, he was able to guard the places where rain fell outside his own country.

Allah's saying: '...and so will I...' (*az-Zumar*: 39) is described by Prophet Muhammad when he says, 'Do whatever you can with regard to obstinate refusal, persecution and abuse, and I will do whatever I can to call you to Islam, offer you advice and guide you. This is my Message and I will never abandon it. I will make greater efforts to promulgate it and I will patiently bear the persecution from which my Companions and I suffer. Nothing will keep me from what I want.'

Then Allah says: '...You will find out who will suffer humiliation.' (*az-Zumar*: 40) They will suffer this humiliation in the worldly life. '...and on whom a lasting torment will descend.' (*az-Zumar*: 40) They will suffer this lasting torment in the Hereafter. The word '*sawfa*' indicates the future; Allah did not say that this is going to happen now because Islam started strange and only spread amongst the weak and slaves who were persecuted, abused, expelled from their wealth and homes, and died in the cause of Truth.

Allah willed to test the believers who supported this *Da'wah* (calling to Allah), sort out those who had weak faith, and remove from them the weak and hypocrites who are not suitable for supporting this Message. Therefore, the Revelation would come to Messenger Muhammad at intervals bringing with him a new difficult matter. Whenever one of those matters is revealed, some of them were removed from the ranks of the believers until the only people who remained around Messenger Muhammad were people with strong and sound faith.

In this verse, Messenger Muhammad warns the people who denied events which were going to happen. This warning indicates his certainty and trust that the One Who revealed to him this warning is able to make it happen in the way

(1) This Hadith is narrated in '*Al-Iqd Al-Farid*' by Ibn 'Abd Rabbuh, '*Khizanat Al-Adab*' by 'Abd Al-Qadir Al-Baghdadi, and '*Nihayat Al-'Irab*' by An-Nuwayri. All of them mentioned that it was Kulayb ibn Rabi'a.

He described. If that were not so, then Messenger Muhammad would not say it, since the reality of this warning would be revealed by the passage of time.

The same case applies with respect to the promises that Messenger Muhammad conveyed to the people before they took place. The following is one of them: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar*: 45) This promise was made by Allah to the believers during very tough circumstances, as they were persecuted and were not able to defend themselves. When this verse was revealed, 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'Which assembly we are going to defeat when we are not even able to defend ourselves?' When he saw what happened at the Battle of Badr, he said, 'My Lord spoke the truth and His Messenger spoke the truth!' This promise did not discredit the *Da'wah* (call to Allah), but it sought to confirm it. It is thus clear that this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Qamar* clearly indicates that the Divine Promises and Threats will undoubtedly be fulfilled.

We said before that the truthfulness of the Messenger Muhammad with respect to matters relevant to his *ummah* is different from his truthfulness with respect to matters relevant to himself, as his truthfulness with respect to matters relevant to himself is even more emphatic. We mentioned earlier the story of the woman who converted to Islam when she read the interpretation of Allah's saying to His Messenger: '...Allah will protect you from the people...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 67) when Allah revealed that He would protect him and people would not be able to assassinate him, so he sent away his guards because of this promise.⁽¹⁾ This woman reflected on the matter rationally and realised that if he were to deceive everyone, he would not deceive himself. Therefore, this verse reveals Messenger Muhammad's trust in Allah's promise.

In Allah's saying: '...You will find out...' (*az-Zumar*: 39), Allah uses the Arabic word '*ta'lamun*' instead of '*tarun*' (see) or '*tanzhurun*' (observe) because knowledge is more comprehensive than sight, and the events that were going

(1) *At-Tabari narrated in his interpretation of verse 67 of the chapter of Al-Ma'ida from the narration of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her that Prophet Muhammad used to be guarded until the following verse was revealed: '...Allah will protect you from the people...' (al-Ma'ida: 67) She said, 'So Messenger Muhammad poked his head out of the dome and said, "O people, you may go away as Allah has protected me." [Hadith no. 9661]*

to happen might happen outside the range of your eyesight. They may happen in places where some people will see them while others will not. As for knowledge, it conveys things that your own limbs as well as others' limbs come upon.

Therefore, by means of knowledge, you can gain access to what others know. When you see something and discern it, you are guided to its ruling by what is pictured in your mind. However, by knowledge, you are able to benefit from that which is discerned and comprehended by others. Therefore, knowledge encompasses more than what is grasped by your intellect, organs and limbs.

Then, Allah says: ‘...and upon whom long-lasting suffering shall alight [in the life to come]!’ (*az-Zumar*: 40) The word ‘*muqim*’ is mentioned in this verse to rebut what they said previously, as their wars used to continue for a very long time, even in some cases for as long as 40 years. Victory was shared by turns among them. Perhaps they thought the torment would only last for a limited period, so Allah emphasises to them the torment will not be temporary, but it will be constant and lasting.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ لِلنَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ فَمَنِ اهْتَدَىٰ فَلِنَفْسِهِ
وَمَنْ ضَلَّٰ فَاِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾

We have sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth for people. Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, whoever strays away from it does so at his own peril: you are not in charge of them [41] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 41)

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about Himself sometimes using the plural first person pronoun ‘*inna*’, and sometimes with the singular first person pronoun ‘*inni*’ or ‘*innani*’. When Allah talks about His Oneness, He uses the singular pronoun, such as His saying to Prophet Musa (Moses): ‘Indeed, I am Allah...’ (*Ta Ha*: 14) In this verse, Allah emphasises that He is One God with no partner. When He talks about a matter in which He has a role and His viceregents on earth also have roles, He uses the plural pronoun, as in the following verse: ‘We have sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth for people...’ (*az-Zumar*: 41).

Reflect on the prepositions in the Arabic words ‘*alayka*’ (to you) and ‘*linnas*’ (for people), as prepositions in Arabic have a wide range of meanings.

The word ‘*alayka*’ indicates that Allah assigns to His Prophet the responsibility, but the preposition ‘*lam*’ in ‘*linnas*’ indicates that people will gain benefits. It is like when we say in bookkeeping ‘*lahu*’ (credit) and ‘*alayhi*’ (debit); ‘*lahu*’ (credit) entails benefit while ‘*alayhi*’ (debit) entails responsibility.

Allah informs people to whom Muhammad’s call is directed that it is for their best interests and brings benefits for them. Allah sent down a heavy burden on him that would tire him and his family out and would subject them to ridicule conspiracy and abuse...etc.

The Book was sent down to Muhammad with its burdens and responsibilities, so Allah wanted him to bear them and be resolute like the resolute Messengers who came before him. They were sent for a limited portion of time and space, but Messenger Muhammad was sent for an unlimited portion of time and space. Therefore, the difficulties he endured in the course of calling people to Islam would be greater than those endured by the other Messengers because of the universality of his Message.

Thus, the goodness and benefits of the call of Islam is for people, while its hardships were born by Messenger Muhammad. Allah’s saying: ‘We have sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth for people...’ (*az-Zumar*: 41) means that this Message carries benefits for people.

We will reflect on the use of prepositions in the verses. For example, in Allah’s saying in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord.’ (*al-Baqara*: 5)

The believers are ‘*ala*’ (upon) guidance. The word ‘*ala*’ gives the sense of being above or at the top of something. Therefore, it is as if guidance were a riding beast that carries them, allows them to rest, does not tire them out and helps them to reach their destination. The purpose of guidance is to soothe people and to achieve the people’s noblest objectives. Therefore, they should cling to it, as it will not burden them with things they are not able to bear, but it will benefit them.

The word ‘*bilhaq*’ (with Truth) indicates that it is something firmly established and does not change. Truth also means putting something in its rightful place. If you moved it from its rightful place, you come upon it in that state; the Truth will inevitably return to its rightful place.

The trials test the soldiers of Allah so that they will become worthy of carrying the call of Islam until the coming of the Final Hour.

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us that if falsehood prevails, we should take a lesson from those physical things that happen under your gaze with respect to the source of life: water. Water falls from the sky upon the mountaintops, from which it takes straw, debris and stones that it carries down into the valleys forming a layer of scummy froth atop the water which is of value. When wind blows, it scatters that scum, leaving the surface of the water clear and pure. In the same way, the prevalence of falsehood is temporary, as the truth returns to its rightful place. Allah lets falsehood rise up only to show people the special nature of the Truth. When falsehood causes pain to people, they become fed up with it and long for the Truth. Thus, falsehood is one of the soldiers of Truth.

Allah says: ‘...Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit...’ (*az-Zumar*: 41). This means that following guidance is in one’s best interests because the Lawmaker Who made His Laws, sent Messengers and sent down the Book does not benefit from our obedience and suffers no harm from our disobedience. This is because He brought us into existence by His attributes of Absolute Perfection and brought everything that we need before creating us. It is like when you say, ‘So-and-so is a poet; this means that he was a poet before you heard him recite poetry, as he could not compose poetry unless he was already a poet.

Allah does not benefit in any way from people worshipping Him, as only people receive these benefits, as they have been created by Him. The one who makes something wants his product to be well and in the best possible state from its start to its end.

As the Divine Law has come for the benefit of mankind, whoever is guided does so for his own good, and whoever is misguided does so at his own peril: ‘...Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, whoever strays away from it does so at his own peril...’ (*az-Zumar*: 41). The prepositions used in this verse ‘*falinafsih*’ and ‘*‘alayha*’ indicate that people will gain the benefit of guidance and the harm of disobedience.

Allah says: ‘...and you are not in charge of them.’ (*az-Zumar*: 41) The word ‘*wakil*’, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means the person who is responsible for those over whom he has been appointed, so he can force them to do what he wants.

Allah did not want His Prophet to do this, as He says in another verse: ‘...and you are not to compel them...’ (*Qaf*: 45). Rather, He wanted him to call to His way with wisdom so that the people would respond to his call out of their own free will. If Allah willed, He would create them like angels and make them obedient by nature.

Therefore, parts of the universe are wise and attentive, as they have been content to follow Allah’s Commands without having any choice, as the one who takes a burden upon himself may be able to guarantee doing so when he takes it up, but cannot guarantee doing so at the time of implementation. People are caused to follow different paths in life as they had different levels of perception of their responsibility at the moment they took up the responsibility and the moment of implementation. All corruption that infects people’s transactions with one another ultimately stems from this point.

We previously gave an example of a trust a person leaves with you until he returns from his travels and takes it back. However, when he returns and does not find it with you, then some circumstances arose that led you to make use of it. In the following verse, the wisdom of the inanimate elements of creation in refusing to take up the burden of the trust becomes apparent: ‘Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72)

Allah’s saying: ‘...you are not in charge of them...’ (*az-Zumar*: 41) also reassures and consoles Messenger Muhammad, as He asks Messenger Muhammad not to burden himself in a manner that exceeded his ability. His only duty is to convey the Message. In addition, any harm he suffered would not lessen his standing amongst them, for they considered him to be truthful and trustworthy and knew that he was right. He had a great stature amongst them. Allah instructed him not to be sad because they said about him that he was a poet, a magician and a lunatic: ‘We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by

what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.' (*al-An'am*: 33)

Allah freed His Messenger of any responsibility and the wrongdoers rejected him only because they denied His signs.

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا
فِيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ
مُّسَمًّى إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

**God takes the souls of the dead and the souls of the living
while they sleep – He keeps hold of those whose death He has
ordained and sends the others back until their appointed
time – there truly are signs in this for those who reflect [42]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 42)**

We said previously that no one witnessed the process of creation since the Creator did not seek anyone's help to do it, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants.' (*al-Kahf*: 51)

Therefore, the way that creation was brought into being is not known by anyone, unless the Creator had informed us of it, it would have remained hidden and unknown. If you want to know how creation took place, you must look to the reports of the One Who created the creation. If anyone claims to have knowledge through some means other than that, then they are from among those beings who lead men astray and whom Allah informs us about.

Allah *Glorified is He* names them misguided even before they came into existence. No misguidance could be greater than saying that man originated from apes that evolved.

Allah gave His created beings the immunisation that protects them from misguided people, as He tells us about them beforehand and warns us about them. In other words, He warns the believers against the misguided people who were in the guise of scientists or philosophers telling lies about how

humans are created. Allah instructs the believers not to believe those misguided people because they did not witness the process of creation.

When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* presents to us a complicated matter of which our intellects are only capable of grasping certain aspects, He completes our understanding of that matter by means of hearing from elsewhere. However, who do you hear from? From the one in whom you believe with your intellect. Therefore, it is not necessary for your mind to be convinced of everything; certain matters are left that you are convinced by, not by yourself, but rather by hearing about it from one whom you trust.

Therefore, we said at the beginning of the chapter of *Ya Sin* that matters fall into one of three categories: creeds, spoken matters, or rulings. An element of each of these can be grasped by the intellect, while another element remains unseen. However, the indications for those unseen matters lie in what can be grasped by the intellect.

When Allah tells us how the universe took place, He says man was created from earth mixed with water which then became clay. When clay dried, it became like pottery. Then Allah blew His spirit in him, and life pervaded him and he started to move.

None of us has ever seen these stages of creation about which the Creator informs us, but He brought into existence other physical things which we can perceive and which indicate to us the truth of what He has informed us with respect to these stages. We should derive proofs of the truthfulness of unseen matters from things we perceive.

As the Creator created life, He also created death. When He told us about them, He mentioned death first, saying: '[He] who created death and life...' (*al-Mulk*: 2) He has mentioned death first so that we would not handle life with arrogance or delusion but would handle it while knowing that each of us will inevitably die. We should know that with respect to each individual human being, the span of this worldly life does not last from the time of Adam until the coming of the Final Hour, but it only lasts for the length of time he himself spends. One is not sure when his life will end, since there are people who are born and die an instant later, while others die after only a month and others die after the passage of many years.

One of the righteous people once said, 'I have known that my life will end with death, so I have prepared myself for it. I have known that I could not escape Allah's gaze for even the blinking of an eye, so I felt too embarrassed to disobey Him, and I have known that I will receive a certain provision that I will never miss and which Allah has guaranteed for me, so I feel content with it. This should be our attitude in life, for you will live for a limited time.' Therefore, knowledgeable people say, 'Thank the One Who bestows on you bounties permanently, obey the One Whom you cannot do without even for the blinking of an eye, submit to the One Whose kingdom and sovereignty you can never leave. These are basic rules we should live by and principles to which we should all hold firmly. As we said, death is the opposite of life; although we have never seen the stages of creation, we have seen the stages of death. Therefore, take from the later a proof of the former.

You know that the demolition of any building happens in an opposite way to the way it was built. For example, if we want to destroy a ten-storey building, we will start by destroying the tenth storey and finish by destroying the first storey, in the exact opposite manner to the order in which we built it. The same is the case with death; the process starts with the soul leaving the body which is the last stage in the process of creation. Then the body becomes hard and rigid so that it resembles sounding clay, then it rots and decays so that its smell changes, just like dark fetid mud, then it breaks and disintegrates, turning back into clay and dust.

Therefore, even if the process of creation is something unseen and hidden from us, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves...' (*al-Kahf*: 51). We have witnessed the process of death.

Allah says: 'Allah takes the souls of the dead...' (*az-Zumar*: 42) The Arabic word '*anfus*' is the plural of the word '*nafs*' which is formed when the body combines with the soul and causes different states for the limbs. The physical body only is not called a '*nafs*' and the soul on its own is not called a '*nafs*'.

The meaning of '*yatawaffal al-anfus*' is (take the souls) which occurs in two stages: sleep and death. During sleep, a person loses his consciousness and capacity to perceive, but his soul remains in his body to keep its vital

functions running and keep him alive. When a person wakes up, his consciousness, awareness, and perception come back. However, as for death, Allah stops a person's consciousness, perception, and the source of life: the combination of body and soul. During sleep, the body does not engage in any action: even the brain, which must constantly remain working, only works every seven seconds.

When the body functions stop, the body's temperature drops and it requires to be warmed. Therefore, people are advised to cover up while sleeping, since the movement that normally keeps the body warm is missing and it is necessary for us to maintain the body's temperature. Some people think that the blanket warms up the sleeper, but the opposite is true, as the heat of the body warms up the blanket. The role of the blanket is to maintain the body's heat and prevent it from dissipating. The proof is that when you first go to bed you find it cold, but when you wake up in the morning you find it warm.

We have said that a person passes through different states in the course of his existence: wakefulness, sleep, death and resurrection, and each of these stages has its own set of rules which should not be mixed up with one another. For example, when one of us is asleep, he loses his consciousness and ability to distinguish things. However, when he wakes up, he still remembers his dreams and the shapes, people, and colours contained in his dreams and can distinguish between them in the same way as if he were awake. How can he perceive these things and distinguish between them when his eyes are closed?

Scientists said that the sleeper has faculties and a form of consciousness different than what he has when he is awake, as he sees but not with his eyes. Therefore, during sleep, a person has another form of consciousness. Some people are astonished that a single grave could contain two bodies, one of which is honoured and the other is punished, although they do not find this astonishing during sleep. When you sleep with another in a single bed, he may dream that he is on an enjoyable journey that includes all bounties, while you dream that you are being beaten or undergoing a painful experience and neither of you knows what the other is seeing.

Allah's saying: '...He keeps hold of those whose death He has ordained...' (*az-Zumar*: 42) means that the soul does not return to the body. The phrase

‘...sends the others back...’ (*az-Zumar*: 42) means that during sleep, consciousness and perception come back to you. And ‘... until their appointed time...’ (*az-Zumar*: 42) means until the time that Allah has decreed for your death and recorded in the Preserved Slate. So, ‘...there truly are signs in this for those who reflect.’ (*az-Zumar*: 42)

When you find one who tells you something that awakens your faculties of perception, such as the intellect and the abilities to think, remember and reflect, enabling you to distinguish between different statements, be sure that he has good advice for you and is not seeking to deceive you. This is because those who seek to cheat you try to rush you, so that you do not have an opportunity to reflect on matters.

We previously gave the cloth trader as an example. When he is truthful and knows that his goods are of good quality, he tests it for you, taking a tuft of wool, and burning it in front of you so that you can see that it is genuine wool. However, as for the cheating trader, he tries to use every trick he has to deceive you so that you do not discover how poor his goods are. The first trader is certain of the quality of his goods and that whatever you do you will eventually arrive at his desired aim.

When Allah says, ‘Then will you not reason?’, ‘Will you not remember?’ or ‘Will you not think?’ you should know that Allah urges your faculties of research, reflection and selection from different alternatives. He would not do that if He were not confident that were you to use those faculties you could come to no conclusion except for that which He desires of you.

أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُفَعَاءَ قُلْ أُولَئِكَ كَانُوا لَا يَمْلِكُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَعَةُ جَمِيعًا لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Yet they take intercessors besides God! Say, ‘Even though these have no power or understanding?’[43] Say, ‘All intercession belongs to God alone; He holds control of the heavens and the earth; in the end you will all return to Him’[44] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 43 - 44)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Yet they take intercessors besides Allah...’ (*az-Zumar*: 43). The style used here expresses disapproval. In other words, it

is not right for them to take others as intercessors alongside Allah. Allah rebukes them after they were shown the proofs and pieces of evidence; they take others as intercessors alongside Allah. However, why do they take intercessors besides Allah? Because those who take them imagine that they do so because they are devoutly religious. Religious devotion is part of human nature since Allah made His covenant with them, saying: ‘...Am I not your Lord?’ (*al-A‘raf*: 172)

Messengers came as reminders that remind us of that first promise we made and which we have forgotten about. Read Allah’s saying: ‘And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This] - Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this unaware.” Or [lest] you say, “It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?”’ (*al-A‘raf*: 171-173) Allah *Glorified is He* rebukes them for taking others as intercessors alongside Allah and calls them to leave that sorry matter behind since taking others as intercessors alongside Allah is contradictory, for who will they be interceding with? They would be interceding with Allah, as they themselves said: ‘...We who sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the Truth...’ (*az-Zumar*: 3). Therefore, they take intercessors to intercede for them with Allah. However, why do they not worship Allah directly without any medium?

In addition, no intercession is accepted unless certain preconditions are met; not all people’s intercessions are accepted, as it does not follow one’s desires. However, Allah gives permission to the intercessor to intercede, and should be pleased with the one on whose behalf intercession is made, and this person should affirm the Oneness of Allah. Therefore, the intercession they hope for is futile and will not be accepted by Allah.

Why do they not worship Allah directly instead of having an intermediary? Some people said that worshipping Allah requires one to undertake certain responsibilities that are difficult and cumbersome and following Allah’s religion requires one to submit to the restrictions of religious commands and prohibitions.

They wanted religiosity without responsibility, and gods who do not enjoin commands. In fact, they worshipped idols according to their whims, but whenever anything bad happened to them or they found themselves in difficult circumstances, they took refuge in Allah, the True Lord. Therefore, return to Allah before the time when returning to Him no longer benefits.

The word '*shafa'a*' includes '*shaf*' and '*witr*'; the former includes two '*witr*s', i.e. a pair.

We have said that the orientalist raised objections to two verses in the Book of Allah with regard to intercession, in an attempt to cast doubt on the level of eloquence of the Quran. Those two verses: 'Fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all, or will intercession be accepted from it, nor will compensation be taken from it, nor will they be aided.' (*al-Baqara*: 48) Allah also says: 'And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all and no compensation will be accepted from it, nor will any intercession benefit it, nor will they be aided.' (*al-Baqara*: 123)

The orientalist said, 'Which verse is more eloquent than the other? If one of them is eloquent then the other one is not eloquent. What is the wisdom behind bringing some words forward and others backward when they have the same meaning?' All these questions resulted from their misunderstanding of the Arabic language and lack of the necessary faculties to understand Allah's saying properly.

They have disregarded the first parts of the two verses: 'And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all...' (*al-Baqara*: 48). There are two types of souls: one who seeks to avail the other and intercede, and another for who is availed and interceded. Which of them is the intercessor and which is the one on whose behalf intercession is made? If you want to describe the one on whose behalf intercession is made, he is the one who puts the ransom forward first; if it is not accepted, he asks someone to make intercession for him. Allah says: '...no compensation will be accepted from it...' (*al-Baqara*: 123).

If you want to describe the intercessor, he is the one who first comes forward with his intercession and if it is not accepted, he puts forward the ransom on behalf of someone. Thus, both verses are equally eloquent, each according to the meaning it seeks.

The following verse: ‘Yet they take intercessors besides Allah ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 43) begins with the word ‘*am*’ which connects the word that precedes it with the word that follows it. The meaning of the verse is: ‘Was that the case or did they take others as intercessors...?’ The words that precede ‘*am*’ (yet) are: ‘Allah takes the souls of the dead...’ (*az-Zumar*: 42). If you lost your life force and your ability to move around and make use of the means, you should know that Allah gives you an example for the death that awaits you in the shape of sleep which you experience daily.

Death is one thing and sleeping is something else; the One Who is able to take away life in the sense of taking away your consciousness and your ability to distinguish and interact with the outside world (i.e. interact with others) is able to take it away completely. This is because sleep takes away your consciousness and ability to distinguish the outside world, even if your body parts are able to move such as the beating of your heart and movement of the lungs and intestines...etc. If Allah is capable of letting you experience this partial death, then He is also capable of letting you experience real death.

This verse means: ‘Are you safe from that? If you are not safe from it, and you are going to die and meet Allah, then why do you take others as intercessors? What has urged you to do that? Did you take intercessors?’

We have said that the word ‘*shafi*’ is derived from ‘*shaf*’, which is joining one thing to another so that they form a pair after having been solitary. Allah wants to bring an end to this practice and clarifies that it is futile, so He informs them that those whom they call besides Allah do not have the capacity to intercede. Even if they have the capacity to intercede, like calling on the angels, Jesus or ‘Uzayr, they will refuse to intercede on your behalf.

If the intercessors are inanimate things, they are closer to Allah than you are, and have more knowledge of the bases of intercession, and so they will inevitably refuse and despise you if you own them and derive benefit from them. This is because these inanimate things are in perfect harmony with the universe and constantly glorify their Creator. Therefore, they refuse to accept anyone except the one who also glorifies Allah. These inanimate objects submit to your will because Allah has subjected them to you and given you a will by which you control them according to the Will and Command of Allah,

just as you control your own limbs. You have controlled your tongue and used it to declare your disbelief, and you have controlled your hands and used them to strike down and tyrannise others...etc.

No one of them will consent to intercede on your behalf because you followed a different way to them. They hate you due to this, so how could they intercede for you? Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the heavens and the earth wept not for them...' (*ad-Dukhan*: 29).

He ascribes to the heavens and earth the action of crying. If they will not cry for those who went against them, they will undoubtedly cry for those who shared the same belief and religious instructions. Therefore, the heavens, the earth, and other inanimate objects have the ability to differentiate. If not, they would not weep for obedient people and disobedient people.

There is a literary expression that says, 'The land does not agree with so-and-so' which means that it dislikes him staying on it. This is because he has rebelled against Allah and gone against His path while it glorifies Allah constantly and submits to Him. Therefore, it does not cry for him when he dies, but it is pleased that Allah has relieved it and His slaves from him.

Imam 'Ali explained this matter, saying, 'When a believer dies, two places weep for him: one place in the sky and one place on the earth. The place that weeps for him in the sky is the place where his good acts are raised up, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: "...and righteous work raises it..." (*Fatir*: 10). As for the place on the earth, it is the place on which he prays.'⁽¹⁾

What made them confident and not fear death was the fact that they had taken others as intercessors and thought that those intercessors would defend them. However, their hopes would be dashed because the acceptance of an intercession does not lie in the hands of the intercessor, but it lies in the hands of the one to

(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned in his Tafsir (4: 142) on the authority of Ibn Abu Hatim that 'Ubad ibn 'Andullah said that a man asked 'Ali Allah be pleased with him: 'Do the heavens and earth cry for anyone?' 'Ali replied, 'You have asked me something that no one else has ever asked. Every slave has a prayer place on the earth and a place through which his actions rise up in the sky. However, the people of Pharaoh did not have any good actions on the earth nor had they any actions that rose up through the sky.' Then 'Ali recited Allah's saying: 'And the heavens and the earth wept not for them, nor were they reprieved.'* (*ad-Dukhan*: 29)

whom the intercession is made. Allah is the One Who gives permission to the intercessor and becomes pleased with the one on whose behalf the intercession is made. Do those with whom Allah is pleased require intercession?

Some people say that a person may have few good points, but if they fulfil the precondition of sincerity, Allah may let them grow and become more fruitful, and fix one's shortcomings by letting one of those whom He loves to intercede on his behalf. Allah would not legislate such a form of intercession unless He willed to accept it and relieve a person.

Thus, it was said, 'Beware of belittling any good action, no matter how small it may appear, as this action may be the cause of your salvation.'

It was narrated that Messenger Muhammad said, 'Allah conceals three things in three things: He conceals His pleasure in obedience to Him, so do not belittle any act of obedience, as Allah forgave a man who quenched the thirst of a dog that was gasping from thirst when he exerted effort to quench his thirst by taking off his leather sock and filling it with water.'⁽¹⁾ If this man had given water to another human being, we would have said that he had given it to him for a certain motive in mind, or because he had done him a favour. This proves that the action was sincere, for he did not benefit in any way from the dog nor did he expect to benefit. He loved to do favour regardless of the one who was receiving the favour. It was part of the man's nature to do good and not to be concerned with the person for whom the favour was done.

The second: 'Allah conceals His Anger in disobedience to Him. A woman entered the fire for a cat which she confined. She had neither provided the cat with food nor drink, nor set her free so that she might eat the insects of the

(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'While a man was walking along the road, he became very thirsty and saw a well to which he went down and drank his fill. Then when he went, he came across a dog which was so thirsty that it was gasping and eating the soil. Thus, the man said to himself, "This dog is as thirsty as I was earlier." So he descended to the well, filled his leather sock with water, took hold of it with his mouth, and gave water to the dog. Thus, Allah was thankful for him and forgave him.' They said, 'O Messenger of Allah, do we get a reward for what we do with animals?' He replied, 'There is a reward for serving any animate.' It is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (10/438), (Hadith no. 6009); Muslim in his Book on Greetings, chapter on the virtues of giving food and water to animals unlawful to eat (411/ Hadith (153/2244)).*

earth.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, just as you must not belittle any act of obedience, since it might be the cause of your salvation, you should not belittle any act of disobedience, since it may be the cause of your destruction.

The third: 'He conceals His secrets in His creation, so do not belittle any creature.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Even though these have no power or understanding...' (*az-Zumar*: 43). The word 'these' refers to the intercessors, so how can they ask for their intercession when they are like this? This is because intercession cannot happen except by Allah's permission, as He allows the intercessor to intercede and gets pleased with the one for whom the intercession is made. Intercession belongs to Allah, since: '...He holds control of the heavens and the earth; in the end you will all return to Him.' (*az-Zumar*: 44) Those who are arrogant and refuse to follow Allah's Path will return to Him.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ اشْمَأَزَّتْ قُلُوبُ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ
وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Whenever God is mentioned on His own, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with aversion, but they rejoice when gods other than Him are mentioned [45]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 45)

The word *ishma'azzat* means to recoil and have aversion. When a person hears something he does not like, he *yashma'izzu*, meaning, that an expression of annoyance appears on his face, and he displays aversion and shudders gloomily, then, he moves away from that thing. This is similar to the state of those whose selves feel aversion when they hear Allah *Glorified is He* being mentioned alone, and shut themselves off from affirming The Oneness of

(1) It is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/261, 269 & 457); and Muslim in his Sahih (2619) in the Book on virtue and enjoining good manners from the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him and the wording of Muslim, 'A woman was punished in Hell because of a cat which she had confined until it died. She did not give it anything to eat or to drink when it was confined, nor did she free it so that it might eat the vermin of the earth, so it died from weakness.'

Allah *Glorified is He*. Why is this? Scholars said because you have reminded them of the one whom they are certain has the capacity to bring them harm, or benefit. If that was not the case and they did not have that certainty, then the mentioning of Allah *Glorified is He* would have had no effect on them whatsoever. So, their hearts recoiled and shuddered because they were afraid of something. In the moment that they heard the mention of Allah *Glorified is He* they were reminded of His majesty, power, and immensity, and they were reminded that they were heading towards Him and would stand before Him, yet, they had not done anything to prepare themselves for that standing.

The Word: ‘...alone...’ (*az-Zumar*: 45) indicates their inclination towards assigning Him partners. What this means is this: if those partner gods were to be mentioned, their hearts would not have recoiled in aversion. The recoiling of the heart in aversion is something that cannot be seen but which leaves its mark upon the face; for a pained expression appears upon the face as a result of it. The verse does not mention why their hearts recoiled, and that is one of the things that indicate that the heart is the motor that influences the rest of the limbs of the body and brings about a physical response in them. For example, when you meet one person, you find yourself happy, and when you meet another, you find yourself concerned and recoiling. What causes these responses? It is the heart.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but when those besides Him are mentioned...’ (*az-Zumar*: 45), i.e. the partner gods they associate with Him, ‘...they rejoice.’ (*az-Zumar*: 45), i.e. they are delighted. Why? Because they think that they will intercede on their behalf. In fact, they will be disappointed in both, this life and the Hereafter. Allah then says:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ عَلِيمَ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ أَنْتَ
تَحْكُمُ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ فِي مَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Say, ‘God! Creator of the heavens and earth! Knower of all that is hidden and all that is open, You will judge between Your servants regarding their differences’[46] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 46)

This is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after mentioning His promise to the people of

good and His threat to the people of evil—and indeed both groups received, in full, what had been promised them. Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, after you have conveyed My promise and threat, there is nothing more for you to do than to take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*. He alone is The One Who will judge between you and them, for you have exhausted all the avenues of calling them to Islam in the best way and conveying the message beautifully. As long as they remain insistent upon unbelief, let them be until the Day of Judgement when Allah *Glorified is He* will judge between you and them.

‘Do not be sad, Muhammad, for Allah *Glorified is He* judges only according to the truth. You can be certain that He is The One Who chose you for the Message and that He will aid you and give victory to your religion. You will witness that victory in this world before the Hereafter.’ Indeed, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did see that victory come to pass before his death.

Read Allah’s words: ‘Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders,’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 41) i.e. ‘We will decrease the size of the land of disbelief.’ A decrease in the land of disbelief means an increase in the size of the land of belief. This was a sign they witnessed with their own eyes for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do they not see...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 41)? So they should have paid heed, taken a lesson from it, stopped their stubborn opposition, and known that Allah *Glorified is He* indeed gives victory to His religion and fulfils His Commands. Every day that passed, the land of belief was expanding and the land of disbelief was shrinking, and the freedmen, slaves, and poor people were all going over to Muhammad. Then, after them came the leaders, notables and nobility.⁽¹⁾

The True Lord teaches His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and teaches us how to call on Him, saying: ‘Say...’ (*az-Zumar*: 46)

(1) *This is the position adopted by the majority of the commentators of the Quran. Ibn ‘Abbas may Allah be pleased with him said, ‘Have they not seen that We have opened up land after land to Muhammad.’ Ibn Kathir mentioned a number of opinions in his Tafsir 2/520 including a decrease in the land’s inhabitants and its blessing, meaning a decrease in its people and fruits by the land becoming barren, and death, meaning the death of its people of knowledge, jurists and people of good.’ Then he said, ‘The first opinion is the best one, and that is that it refers to Islam overcoming unbelief village by village.’*

O Muhammad: '*Allahumma*' '...Allah...' (*az-Zumar*: 46) Sa'id ibn Al-Musayyib⁽¹⁾ said: I have not found a verse in the Quran which gives the one who supplicates more hope than Allah's words: 'Say, "Allah! Creator of the heavens and earth"...' (*az-Zumar*: 46). Allah *Glorified is He* would not have taught Him to make that supplication unless He had predetermined that He was going to answer that supplication. So, the True Lord did not leave His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make supplications using his own words. Rather, He taught him the wording with which to supplicate for He must have ordained the acceptance for those supplications. Similarly, if a man were to give you the key to a place that means that he did not mind your getting into the place.

Here, we should take some time to look and reflect on the magnificence of the rhetorical composition and the immensity of the supplication found in the word *Allahumma* which basically is the Majestic Name *Allah* with a doubled *mim* attached to the end of it, in order to make it vocative. We know that a vocative or a call is in order to request the person addressed to appear in the presence of the speaker, and that there are well-known particles which are used in the vocative according to how near or how far away the person addressed is from the speaker. For example, when the person addressed is close by, we say: '*AMohammed*'; when he is far away, we say, '*ya Mohammed*'; and when he is very far away, we say, '*Aya Mohammed*'...etc.

So, the vocative particle itself defines the place where the one called on is. So, is it then permissible to use these particles when calling on the True Lord, saying, for example, '*ya Allah!*' It is good manners with Allah *Glorified is He* not to call on Him as we call on others since He is closer to us than our jugular veins. It would not be appropriate to say, '*ya Allah!*' or '*aya Allah!*', for these are degrees of being far away and Allah *Glorified is He* is close by.

Therefore, you will never find the Quran using these vocative particles in supplications, but instead only using *allahumma*, to teach us to use it in our

(1) *What is mentioned in the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 8/5910 is that the one who made this statement was Said ibn Jubayr and the wording of it was, 'Truly I know a verse which no one has ever recited and then asked Allah Glorified is He for something except that Allah Glorified is He has answered his request.'*

supplications. The doubled *mim* (mm) at the end of *allahumma* takes the place of the vocative particles that appear before the addressee, meaning that the *mim* is a substitute for the deleted vocative particle. The doubled *mim* indicates that it is a vocative and indicates your humbleness while requesting.

If we make a thorough investigation of the Noble Quran, we find that the word *Allah* appears 985 times in the *marfu'* case, and it is not used for supplication except in the form *allahumma* in five places. Those places are: this verse that we are currently commenting on; then, the verse in which Allah says: 'Say: 'Allahumma, holder of all control. You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will...' (*Al-Imran*: 26). Then, Allah's words: 'Jesus, son of Mary, said, "Allahumma, send down to us a feast from heaven so that we can have a festival—the first and last of us—and a sign from You. Provide for us: You are the best provider.'" (*al-Ma'ida*: 114) Also in another verse Allah says: 'They also said, "Allahumma, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.'" (*al-Anfal*: 32)

And finally, Allah's words: 'Their prayer in them will be, "Glory be to You, Allahumma!" their greeting, "Peace," and the last part of their prayer, "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.'" (*Yunus*: 10)

By contrast, when He is called upon by His attribute of Lordship, we do say, '*ya rabb*' (O Lord!). Thus, there is a difference between calling on Him by means of His majestic name, 'Allah,' and calling on Him by the word indicating Lordship, 'Lord', for Divinity implies responsibility, while Lordship implies giving and withholding. So long as the Lord is the Bestower of blessings, we say when we address Him, '*ya rabb*' (O Lord!), since Lordship implies bringing something that does not exist into existence and providing nurturing and aid. You, human, are the beneficiary when it comes to the gifts of Lordship. But as for Divinity, it is making you responsible for doing things by the commands through 'Do' and 'Do not do'.

As for the word *Fatir*, it means the Creator, Originator, and the Bringer into existence what did not exist in a manner that had never previously been done. In other words, a new and original creation was created. If someone

creates something following a previously existing pattern, i.e. creating a replica, then he is not called a *Fatir*.

As for the words: ‘...the heavens and the earth...’ (*az-Zumar*: 46), He chose the heavens and the earth since they are things in existence that are not hidden from any human being: the earth bears him and the sky shades him. Both are with him constantly at every moment of his life. There are other blessings that might be hidden from people at various different times, such as water, for example.

In ‘...Knower of all that is hidden and all that is open...’ (*az-Zumar*: 46), Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us of His knowledge of the unseen, but how can He remind us of His knowledge of the seen when that is something that is known to all people by sight?

Scholars said: because Allah is *ghayb* (unseen). We might understand from the word *al-ghayb* (the unseen) that it is just like what is *al-ghayb* (the unseen) with respect to us. We can see those who are with us in our homes, but do not see those who are outside. So, what is outside is *ghayb* to us. By contrast, the True Lord knows the *al-ghayb* (the unseen), knows those seen things that are unseen by you and knows those things that are seen by you as well as others.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...You will judge between Your servants regarding their differences.’ (*az-Zumar*: 46) This is a reference to the final court which will settle the dispute between truth and falsehood: the Day of Victory which these people are waiting for and telling you to bring quickly. Indeed, they speak mockingly about it, as is shown by the words the True Lord mentions them saying: ‘...bring us the punishment you threaten.’ (*al-A‘raf*: 70)

They also said: ‘And they say, “When will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?”’ (*as-Sajda*: 28) So the True Lord replies to them, saying: ‘Say, “On the Day of Decision it will be no use for the disbelievers to believe; they will be granted no respite,”’ (*as-Sajda*: 29) meaning: ‘When that day does come, you will never be able to come back here again to find belief or repent.’

We notice, here, that the Quran uses the word *ibad* (servants) to refer to both groups: the believers and unbelievers. This word, *ibad* (servants) is

normally only used for those who are obedient and hold firm to Allah's Program, as in Allah's words: 'The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, "Peace",' (*al-Furqan*: 63) so can the unbelievers and the disobedient also be called 'servants'?

Scholars said: Yes, because a human being has two sets of positions with respect to his Lord. In one of those he has freedom of choice, i.e. the capacity to choose which Allah *Glorified is He* created in the human being such that he can do what he wants, even to do what his Lord does not want him to do. In the other, he does not have freedom of choice, and that is in all those things which are compelling and about which the servant has no choice.

If a human being, for example, were to rebel against his Lord's Way, oppose it or deviate from it, we would say to him: 'If it is your custom to rebel, then rebel against everything. Rebel against illness, rebel against death... etc.' However, he will not be able to do so, since those are matters that are compelled upon him and about which he has no choice. In this condition of his, he is controlled by his servant-hood since he is compelled, and he cannot get away from being a servant of Allah *Glorified is He* even when he is an unbeliever. When we call the unbelievers 'servants,' it is because in one aspect of their conduct they cannot reject Allah's will, owing to their being compelled.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about them in the Hereafter: '...Was it you [false gods] who led these creatures of mine astray, or did they go astray from the path by themselves?' (*al-Furqan*: 17)

These words are addressed to those who lead others astray, and in it those who are astray are referred to as 'servants'. Why is that? Because this statement is made in the Hereafter when all are equal, for every single person there is obedient, right acting and a believer. In the Hereafter they are all '*ibad*' (those who are given the ability to choose and they choose to obey Allah) and '*abid*' (those who are compelled to accept Allah's will), whereas here, in this world, everyone is '*abid*', while only some are '*ibad*'.

وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُ مَعَهُ لَافْتَدَوْا بِهِ مِنْ سُوءِ الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَبَدَأْهُمْ مِنْ اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يَكُونُوا يَحْتَسِبُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

If the evildoers possessed the earth's assets twice over they would offer them to ransom themselves from the terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection: God will show them something they had not reckoned with [47] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 47)

You remember that we said—when we were talking about intercession—that wrongdoers who turn aside from their Lord try to pay a ransom so that they will be forgiven, but that ransom is not accepted from them? Then, they bring someone forth to intercede on their behalf, but their intercession is not accepted. Let us suppose that one of these guys possessed the world in its entirety and presented it to Allah *Glorified is He* as a ransom in exchange for his wrong actions. No, let us suppose that he had even more than that, that he possessed the world with everything in it: ‘...and the like of it with it...’ (*az-Zumar*: 47). We know that no person will ever have such a thing, but just supposing that a disobedient person did have such a thing and were to put it all forward in order to ransom himself from the punishment of the Day of Judgement, it would not be accepted from him.

Allah’s words: ‘...they would [attempt to] ransom themselves thereby from the terrible punishment on the Day of Resurrection...’ (*az-Zumar*: 47) indicate that before a person seeks to guarantee himself eternal bliss, he first tries to save himself from the punishment – that is the most important thing to him. That is why the conceited man who owned two gardens, mentioned in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, when he became dazzled by his work and thought it was righteous, said: ‘...even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there,’ (*al-Kahf*: 36) meaning, ‘He will give me, then, that which is even better than what I had.’ That is the very height of vanity, and we take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that.

Therefore, rich people say when they are afflicted by serious illness—and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that—‘Take everything I own and bring me my good health back!’ The first thing he wants to do is rid himself of illness, just like the people of disobedience in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... from terrible punishment ...' (*az-Zumar*: 47) meaning from the bad punishment: '... on the Day of Resurrection ...' (*az-Zumar*: 47). Then, He surprises them with something they had not reckoned on: '...And there will appear to them from Allah that which they had not taken into account' (*az-Zumar*: 47). The word *bada* means 'appeared to them', and that is because no matter how broad a person's imagination is in this world, it will never be broad enough to encompass what Allah *Glorified is He* will bring forth in the Hereafter.

Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir⁽¹⁾ (a prominent *tabi'i* and reciter of the Quran, transmitted a number of Hadith) said, 'This verse has filled me with fear because I am afraid that when I die, there will appear to me that which I have not reckoned on.'⁽²⁾ That is because people often commit wrong actions without being aware that they have done so, or without knowing that they are wrong actions. They might, also, do them and then forget about them, which is what Allah *Glorified is He* refers to when He says: '...Allah has taken account of it all, though they may have forgotten...' (*al-Mujadala*: 6).

Satan might embellish your wrong actions and make them seem good to you when there is nothing good about them. All of these are things with which you might be taken by surprise in the Hereafter.

The first thing that surprises the unbelievers on the Day of Rising is that they do not find, there, the gods whom they worshipped apart from Allah *Glorified is He* and nor will there be anyone to intercede on their behalf. Even their leaders and masters who led them astray will wash their hands of them: 'When those who have been followed disown their followers, when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them are severed.' (*al-Baqara*: 166)

(1) He is Abu Abdullah Al-Qurashi Al-Madani Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir ibn 'Abdullah, one of the well-springs of truthfulness around whom the right-acting people gathered. He was a hafizh and the lord of the reciters, and there was a consensus regarding him being trustworthy and one of the foremost scholars and men of action. He died in the year 130 AH Tadhkirat Al-Hufazh 1/127 & 128.

(2) Al-Qurtubi mentioned this statement in his Tafsir 8/5911 and said that Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir became very anxious as he was approaching death so that was why he was so anxious. He replied, 'I fear a verse from the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*: "...for something with which they had not reckoned before will (by then) have been made obvious to them by Allah *Glorified is He*." (*az-Zumar*: 47) I am afraid that there will appear to me that which I have not reckoned on.' This was also mentioned by Adh-Dhahabi in Tadhkirat Al-Hufadh 1/127.

More than that, those leaders who led them astray will precede them to the fire, as is mentioned in the Quran: '[It will be said], "Here is another crowd of people rushing headlong to join you." [The response will be], "They are not welcome! They will burn in the Fire."* They will say to them, "You are not welcome! It was you who brought this on us, an evil place to stay,"* adding, "Our Lord, give double punishment to those who brought this upon us."' (*Sad*: 59-61)

If the follower were to have gone into the fire before his master, his thoughts would immediately have fixed on to him and he would have thought that he was going to come and save him. Instead, he will enter the fire and find that he preceded him there, thereby dashing his hopes and making his sorrow and regret all the more complete.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

**The evil of their deeds will become plain to them,
and they will be overwhelmed by that at which
they used to laugh [48] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 48)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and there will become plain to them...' (*az-Zumar*: 48), i.e their *sayyi'at* (the evil of their deeds) will appear and become clear to them, but is what appears to them in the Hereafter their wrong deeds or the punishment for those deeds?

Scholars said: 'That which they will see in the Hereafter is the consequences and the punishment for their wrong deeds. The True Lord says: '...and there will become plain to them the evil of their deeds...' (*az-Zumar*: 48) because the punishment they will receive will be of the same kind as their wrong deeds. The punishment will also be in the form of wrong deeds, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it...' (*ash-Shura*: 40) since the meaning of *sayyi'ah* is any matter which grieves. So, just as he did evil things in this world, We will do what will grieve him in the Hereafter.

As for the words: '*ma iktasabu*' (literally: that which they earned), '...their deeds...' (*az-Zumar*: 48), we previously clarified this matter, saying that the Quran uses the form *kasaba* for good deeds and *iktasaba* for bad

deeds, since good deeds come naturally to the human being and do not require any artifice or affectation on his part. That' is why the morphological form *fa'ala* (did) is used. As for evil, it necessitates that the one who does it to engage in artifice, simulation, and covering things up and that is why they use a form for it that expresses fabrication, namely *iktasaba* upon the morphological form *ifta'ala* (fabricated).

The example we gave for that was that of a man who looks upon women of his household or unmarriageable kin, who might be really beautiful, yet, when he looks upon them, he looks at them naturally, not seeking to conceal his look and fearing nothing from them. By contrast, if he were to want to look at a beautiful woman outside of his family circle, he would do so surreptitiously, using all his wiles and artifice.

Why then does the Quran use the word *kasaba* here when it is wrong deeds that are being referred to, and as we clarified earlier, *iktasaba* is the word that is normally used for them? Another similar usage is found in Allah's words: '...those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins...' (*al-Baqara*: 81).

Scholars said, 'The Quran uses the word *kasaba* for wrong deeds when the one who does them has become so accustomed to doing them that they have become second nature to him: they have become a habit and everyday custom. Not just that, but he has become so skilled at them that he boasts about them—and we take refuge in Allah from that. Such people do wrong deeds without constraint and without feeling the need to cover them up. So, for them it is *kasb* (did) and not *iktisab* (did by the use of artifice). They are much like the criminals who become so accustomed to crime that it becomes their profession. For them, doing crime is a natural everyday process. When, a wrongdoer does a wrong deed, it is considered a gain by him.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and they will be overwhelmed...' (*az-Zumar*: 48). That is it will descend upon them: '...by that at which they used to laugh.' (*az-Zumar*: 48) The meaning of this is made clear by the True Lord elsewhere when He says: 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers—they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, "These people are misguided," though they were not sent to be their

keepers—so today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?” (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-36)

Yes, we often see and hear the mocking and ridicule that the people of falsehood direct at the people of truth and the jokes they make of them, until in the end they even accuse them of being astray—Glory be to Allah! However, the people of truth take comfort in the fact that this ridicule is something that happens to them in this transient world and that, if they bear it with patience, they will be rewarded, and will return that ridicule and mockery in the everlasting Hereafter. The people of truth will mock the people of falsehood and laugh at them. Even more, the True Lord will address the people of truth to reassure them, saying: ‘Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 36) This means: ‘Have We been able to fully recompense them in the manner that they deserve?’

Scholars said that evil people mock and ridicule good people in order to gain revenge for them being good—it is only because they are unable and are incapable of being like them that they ridicule and mock them, with the intention of causing them to leave their goodness behind and come over to evil. Those with intellects understand this matter and know that this ridicule is simply a manifestation of rancour, spite, and envy. So, they bear it with patience, knowing that for every time they are mocked or ridiculed they will attain to a new station with Allah *Glorified is He* and will be compensated.

فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلْنَاهُ نِعْمَةً مِنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ بَلْ هِيَ فِتْنَةٌ وَلَٰكِنَّا أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾ قَدْ فَالَهَا الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَمَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

When man suffers some affliction, he cries out to Us, but when We favour him with Our blessing, he says, ‘All this has been given to me because of my knowledge’—it is only a test, though most of them do not know it [49] Those who lived before them said the same. What they did was of no use to them [50] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 49 - 50)

We have seen the polytheists, who took others as gods alongside Allah *Glorified is He* and said: ‘We worship them for no other reason than that they

bring us closer to Allah...’, yet, when something difficult happens to them in their lives and they find themselves unable to cope with it, they do not take refuge in their idols nor in their gods that they worship instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. Instead, they take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* and beg Him to relieve them of their difficulties and take away their afflictions. Why is that? This is due to the fact that this is the wholesome, natural disposition Allah instilled in mankind, and that is the covenant that Allah *Glorified is He* made with us when we were in the world of atomic potential when Allah *Glorified is He* said to us: ‘... “Am I not your Lord?” and they replied, “Yes, we bear witness.”...’ (*al-A’raf*: 172). A human being does not deceive himself or give himself up. So when he is beset by evil and hardship that he does not have the means at his disposal to ward off, he says, ‘O my Lord!’, and for that moment forgets his arrogance, stubborn opposition and rejection of the Messengers. In that moment, he finds no one but his Lord and Creator, the sole Divinity that he worships.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truly when He says: ‘When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you, but when He brings you back safe to land you turn away: man is ever ungrateful.’ (*al-Isra*: 67)

We notice also that when a human being finds himself in a predicament from which he is not able to extricate himself on his own, he calls on those around him to help. Then, if no one responds to his cry for help, he says, ‘*ya hu*’, which means, ‘*ya huwa*’ ‘O He! O the One Who there is no deity but Him!’ Of course, by that he means Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but when We favor him...’ (*az-Zumar*: 49), i.e. We give him: ‘...with Our blessing, he says, “All this has been given to me because of my knowledge”...’ (*az-Zumar*: 49), meaning: if We grant him a blessing, after this pain and affliction has befallen him, he will all too quickly forget and return to being conceited and deluded by life. This is because he fears that the removal of the affliction will bring him close to his Lord whom he called upon and that this favour, which caused him to take refuge in his Lord, will bring him back to the Straight Path, and thus propel him to go straight.

Straightness brings with it obligations and responsibilities that he hates, and he does not want to restrict himself in this way, since obligations would

entail self-restraint and depriving the self from its vain desires, as well as propel one's self to bear the burdens of obedience. He is afraid that this will captivate him or limit his freedom of indulging his desires. It is for this reason that the True Lord says about prayer: '...this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble.' (*al-Baqara*: 45)

As for the statement: '...all this has been given to me because of my knowledge...' (*az-Zumar*: 49), there are two interpretations to it. Either, what he says means: 'It is because I know from Allah that I deserve this blessing for, if not, He would not have given it to me'—this if he believes that Allah is the One Who gives—or what he says means: 'It is because of the knowledge I possess, for I possess the necessary skill and acumen to deal with things, and I have experience and knowledge and I am the kind of person who studies the consequences and results.'

Then, his Lord corrects him saying: '...it is only a test...' (*az-Zumar*: 49) meaning: 'this blessing is a trial from Allah *Glorified is He* and is not because of Allah knowing that you deserve it nor because of your own knowledge and skill. It '...is only a test...' (*az-Zumar*: 49) meaning a test and a trial.' It is just as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...And We test you with evil and with good as trial...' (*al-Anbiya*: 35) meaning: 'We test with the bad in order to see who has patience, and We test with the good in order to see who will be thankful and who will transgress.'

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently? And your Lord is ever seeing.' (*al-Furqan*: 20) This means that each group of us is a trial for another: the rich is a test for the poor; the strong is a test for the weak, and the reverse is also true. The True Lord does this in order to test His creation and sees who will endure patiently and who will feel anxiety and despair; who will be grateful and who will be ungrateful; and who will be content and who will feel indignant.

So, every human being should move in his life in whatever condition Allah puts him in for everything that Allah chooses for him is good. So, if you see someone else with a blessing that you do not have, you should know that although Allah *Glorified is He* has favoured that person over you, still by

bearing patiently what Allah *Glorified is He* has inscribed for you and not holding rancour in your heart towards your brother, you can become even better than him.

The verse is concluded with Allah's words: '...though most of them do not know it,' (*az-Zumar*: 49) i.e. these realities that are mentioned here are something of which the vast majority are unaware. In other words, only very few people know them.

Then, the True Lord makes it clear that this is not something theoretical, but rather something factual—a thing that has a historical basis and has actually happened to previous peoples: 'Those who lived before them said the same. What they did was of no use to them.' (*az-Zumar*: 50) Yes, indeed, for Qarun said it: '... "this [wealth] was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess"...' (*al-Qasas*: 78).

We say: 'As long as you have been given it by virtue of knowledge, regardless of whether that was Allah's knowledge of your being worthy of that blessing, or your own personal knowledge and expertise when it comes to work and handling things, then the blessing lies at your disposal. All you have to do is look after it and preserve it. As we all know, looking after something you already have is easier than bringing it into existence from nothing. Can you preserve it? That is to say: 'We are not speaking theoretically, but rather I am telling you of something that is a fact backed up by history. Qarun, in his self-delusion, said it. Then We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling.'

This gives rise to another matter: if you had truly been given on the virtue of your knowledge, then use that knowledge to preserve and hold on to it. If the small matter of holding on to it proves impossible for you, as is the case, then you will have even less capacity to bring it into being.

Yes, indeed! "Those who lived before them said the same. What they did was of no use to them.' (*az-Zumar*: 50) Allah *Glorified is He* caused the earth to swallow Qarun and his dwelling, too. So, it was not just the blessing and wealth that left him, but the vengeance even extended to the place within which he lived, spent his nights, and rested.

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَالَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْ هَؤُلَاءِ
سَيُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَمَا هُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

**They suffered its evil effects. Today's wrongdoers
will also suffer the evil effects of their deeds: they
will not escape [51] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 51)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They suffered its evil effects...' (*az-Zumar*: 51), i.e. all those who preceded them in saying these words suffered the evil effects of their wrong deeds. In other words, they brought that upon themselves. We did not wrong them in any way, but rather, it was they who wronged themselves. '...Today's wrongdoers...' (*az-Zumar*: 51), i.e. contemporaries: '...will also suffer the evil effects of their deeds: they will not escape.' (*az-Zumar*: 51)

The *mu'jiz* is one who does something by which he challenges you, and you prove unable of doing something similar. That is why we call any sign—that proves that the Messengers are truly conveying what Allah revealed to them—a *mu'jiza*, (miracle). It is called *mu'jiza* because it confounds those who reject the Messengers since they are unable to do the same. As for those who believe simply upon hearing the Message and affirming it as being true there and then, they do not require any miracles. One of the conditions of a miracle is that it be accompanied by a challenge. Why is this? Scholars said: because when you challenge him, and tell him that you are going to do something that he is unable to do, you provoke his talents and faculties to prepare for the confrontation. Only then you can establish a proof against him. By contrast, if you take him by surprise with the challenge, he, then, has the right to say to you: 'By Allah, if I were to contemplate on the matter or give it much attention, I could have been able to do it.' Thus, *mu'jiz* means that it makes an opponent feel incapable of keeping up with the challenge.

We have said before about a *mu'jizah* (miracle) that it has to match the field of excellence of those to whom the message was sent, as well as the age in which the challenge is laid down. Surely, if you were to challenge a people to do something which they had no knowledge of or experience in, they could easily respond by saying: 'If we had had knowledge of this matter, we could have done it ourselves.' Otherwise, the challenge would not make any sense.

The Noble Quran gives us a perfect example of how a challenge should be when it challenges the Arabs—a people who excelled in the fine use of language and its rhetorical devices—to produce something like the Quran. When we reflect on this challenge, we find that it lowers the bar bit by bit. Each time it lowers the bar, the degree of miraculousness increases. First, it challenged them to produce something like the Quran. Then, it challenged them to produce ten chapters like it. Finally, it challenged them to produce only a single chapter like it.

It did not end there, for the challenge extended beyond men to the jinn. Despite the fact that the Arabs were a nation of eloquence and fine words, still they attributed an even greater command of language and degree of eloquence to the jinn. Proof of this is evident in their response whenever a poet became prominent or excelled in the profession, for they used to say, 'The jinn have inspired him and revealed those meanings to him.' They believed that those jinn lived in the valley of Abqar.⁽¹⁾

Therefore, the Quran extends the challenge outside the circle of man to include the circle of jinn, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other."' (*al-Isra'*: 88) *Zhahiran* means: helping and supporting each other.

That is why the miracle of Moses *peace be upon him* was in the form of magic, since it was in that field that his people excelled. Likewise, the miracle of Jesus *peace be upon him* was to heal the blind and the leper by the permission of Allah *Glorified is He* since it was in the field of medicine in which his people excelled.

Allah's words: '*wama hum bimun'jizin*' '...they will not escape,' (*az-Zumar*: 51) mean: 'they will not be able to run away or escape the punishment, since they

(1) *Ibn Al-Athir said, 'Abqar is, according to what they claimed, a village in which the jinn lived. So whenever they saw someone do something strange or which was very difficult or which required a lot of expertise and precision or something they saw as being incredible, they attributed it to that place and called that person 'Abqari. Then the word came into wider usage and every master or great person came to be called it.' Narrated by Ibn Manzur in Lisan Al-'Arab - subject matter Abqara.*

had done things that merited punishment, and when we take them to be punished, they will not be able to make Us incapable. In other words, they will not be able to escape from Us.’ As a human, when your opponent is in the same place with you and at your disposal, he can still escape from you and go somewhere else. By contrast, when it comes to the True Lord, He is in every place. If that is not so, then show me a place in which the True Lord is not there! Then how can there be any escape from Him? Where can you go? If you stay there with Him, He will not be unable to take you, and if you flee from Him, He will not be unable to bring you to Him.

أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ
 إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

**Do they not know that God provides abundantly
 for anyone He will and gives sparingly to anyone
 He will? There truly are signs in this for those
 who believe [52] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 52)**

Because Qarun was so deluded by his wealth and fame and by the great riches and wealth he had among his people that he said: ‘...this [wealth] was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess.’ (*al-Qasas*: 78) The True Lord wants to set the picture straight for him and those like him, so He says: ‘Do they not know that Allah extends provision for whom He wills and restricts [it]?’ (*az-Zumar*: 52) *Yabsut* means that He gives abundantly to whomsoever He wills, while *yaqdur* means that He restricts and straitens the provision of whomsoever He wills. It is just as we say, ‘He gives provision to those who are without resources so that those who have resources may be amazed.’ So provision does not come to you on the basis of your expertise or skill at acquiring things, but rather, it is something that has been decreed for you by the Provider Himself.

It has been narrated in a Qudsi Hadith that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O son of Adam..., O son of Adam! I created you to worship Me. So do not play. I have already set your share of sustenance, so do not make yourself tired (tire your heart with worry). If you are content with what I have allocated for you, I will bring comfort (peace) to your heart and body. And you will be praised

by Me. On the other hand, if you are not content with what I have allocated for you, I swear with My Glory and Might I will set the world loose on you, where you will run just like the animals run in the wild. And you will still not get more than what I originally allocated for you, and you will be censured by Me.⁽¹⁾

It is the Provider Who assigns provision—no degree of expertise, no superior intellect, nor is good planning required. That is why Abu Al- 'Atahiyya⁽²⁾ said:

The fool may be given abundant provision,

While you see a smart man impoverished and in difficulty⁽³⁾

The True Lord gives provision to man from where he least expects it. Therefore, the story is told of a shepherd who was walking along the road when he tripped over a stone. Under that stone, he found a well. He began to feel around in the well to discover what was in it. He found something that made a rattling noise like the noise of gold or silver moving around it. So, he looked into it and found a sack full of gold and silver, and he took from it as much as would fit into his pockets and as much as he could carry in his arms. He left the rest in a place that he knew well so that he could come back and take from it whenever he had the need.

After a period of time had passed, the sum that he had taken ran out, so he went back to the same place to take more of the money, but found that

(1) I found something similar to this in the Musnad of Ahmad 5/24, for he transmitted in a Hadith from Arfaja Ibn Asad that Allah *Glorified is He* tests His slave by means of what He gives to him. If someone is content with what Allah *Glorified is He* assigns him, then Allah *Glorified is He* will bless him in his provision and expand it, but if someone is not content, then he will not bless him.

(2) He is Isma'il ibn Al-Qasim Abu Ishaq, better known as Abu Al-'Atahiyya, a prolific, quick-witted poet who displayed great creativity in his poetry. He used to compose 150 lines in a day. He was born in the year 130 AH in 'Ayn At-Tamar near Kufa, and grew up in Kufa. Then he lived in Baghdad. He is considered one of the foremost producers of poetry and was from the same generation as Bishar and Abu Nuwas. He died in Baghdad in the year 211 AH at the age of 81. Al-'A'lam of Az-Zirikli (*may Allah honour him*) 1/321.

(3) This verse of Abu 'Al-Atahiyya's is from a poem made up of 12 verses composed in the *raml* metre. The beginning of the poem goes Al-Mawsua' Ash-shi'riyya:

I have not seen anyone whose life,

is entirely free of hardship, trouble and pain.

So take full advantage of what you have put forward early,

and never put off today's work till the morrow.

someone else had come before him and took everything that remained. Then, when he saw him carrying the money on his back, he looked at him. So the man said, 'Allah bestowed on me as provision that which you thought was yours, but in fact it is mine.'

We notice that when it comes to provision, many people make the mistake of limiting provision to wealth and money only. Such people think that provision means riches and great wealth, but that is not correct. Rather, we say that provision is everything that is useful and from which you can derive benefit. According to this definition, knowledge is provision, forbearance is provision, trustworthiness is provision, good health is provision...etc.

Therefore, rich people who have been granted huge sums of wealth should always ask themselves when they see someone who is poor, 'I wonder what the provision of this poor person is? In what ways has he been favoured over me?' His provision might lie in his intellect, his fine conduct, his forbearance, in the fine reputation he enjoys among people or in his good health.

We said previously that the total sum of talents that one person has is the same as the total sum of talents possessed by another - one person might have ten out of ten for wealth, but zero out of ten for children not having been blessed with a child, and so on. That is because all of mankind are Allah's dependents, and there is not one of them who is a son of Allah *Glorified is He* or has any family connection with Him.

So, what is there to make one person favoured over another? We say that provision needs many different directions in which to go. That is why the True Lord distributes the means among people. Life would not be right if all people were rich or all people were intelligent or all people were knowledgeable. That is because a single intellect requires more than one limb to serve its thoughts. When an architect, for example, draws up the plans for a residential building, he is but one architect, but he needs all the builders to do the work and bring those architectural plans to fruition. The simple worker who digs a hole in the ground to place the foundation has certain talents that the architect does not have. In this way, talents are divided up and provision is distributed.

Rizq (provision) can be by an increase in one's income, or, conversely, by a decrease in one's expenditure. We might, for example, find one man whose

monthly salary is only 100 pounds. People get amazed that he can live on such an amount, but they forget that the important thing with respect to provision is that it should come via lawful means, and when it comes by lawful means, Allah *Glorified is He* blesses the small amount so that it takes the place of the large amount. You might find, for example, that when this man's son falls ill, an aspirin tablet proves sufficient along with a cup of tea brewed by the mother, and with the permission of Allah *Glorified is He* the boy is healed.

On the other hand, another man may be earning many times that amount, but he does not take care to ensure that his earnings are all lawful. When his son falls ill, he goes to the doctor, runs a series of tests, and convinces himself that the illness is serious, and so spends a huge sum of money to save the boy from his illness.

It has been narrated in a Noble Hadith 'Whoever earns money through unlawful means, Allah will make it all go to waste and be spent in unlawful ways.'⁽¹⁾

Thus, positive provision is when your income increases, while negative provision is when your expenditure decreases. That is why we notice, for example, one employee on a high salary going with a friend who only has a middling salary to the market. When they get there, the former buys turkey or fish that costs 10 pounds for the kilo, while the latter buys a plain kind of fish that costs only 4 pounds for a kilo. Then, both go back to their homes and each of them eats a fish, but the former spent many times more than the latter spent. It might well be that both achieve the same result, for both may be content with what they bought and satisfied with what they ate. This is what we refer to as, 'negative provision'.

A believer should always be thinking about being economical when it comes to his expenditure and should know that 'negative provision' is ampler than 'positive provision', since negative provision protects you against pain, while positive provision might well bring you pain.

Allah's words: '...There truly are signs in this for those who believe,' (*az-Zumar: 52*) refer to those who believe in the Provider who named Himself

(1) *Al-'Ajaluni narrated it in Kashf Al-khafa' 2/313, and he attributed it to Al-Qadai from Abu Salama Al-Humsi from the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. But this Abu Salama is weak and was not a Companion. At-Taqi As-Subki said, 'It is not sahih.'*

the Expander (of provision) and who named Himself the Constrictor (of provision). If the True Lord names Himself with these two names, then there must be beings that are affected and impacted by these attributes. There must be among His creation those whose provision Allah expands and there must be others whose provision He constricts and straitens. Both cases are controlled by Allah's Wisdom and Decree.

Those people whose provision Allah *Glorified is He* expands and makes abundant must be grateful and thankful, while those whose provision He constricts and makes little must be patient and content. Moreover, he must make his way through life according to the level and type of provision he has been given, and must never resort to begging. Whoever is content with the amount of wealth that Allah inscribed for him, Allah will give him according to His Worth and Capacity. That is why if you were to look at many of the great people of this world—the influential and famous—if you were to look at them in the early parts of their lives, you would find them to be content with what Allah *Glorified is He* had decreed for them, and you would have found them living in a way that corresponded with their incomes at the time. Therefore, Allah's words come true, 'Whoever is content with My Decree, I will give him according to My Own worth.'

Then, the True Lord says⁽¹⁾:

(1) *The cause of the revelation of the verse: A number of narrations have been passed down regarding the reason for this verse being revealed, including the following:*

Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him said, 'This verse was sent on account of the people of Mecca who said, 'Muhammad claims that those who worship idols and kill those whose lives Allah Glorified is He has made inviolate will not be forgiven, so how can we emigrate and become Muslims when we have been worshipping others alongside Allah Glorified is He and have killed people whose lives Allah Glorified is He has made inviolate?' So Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.

Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him said, 'This verse was sent concerning 'Ayyash ibn Rab'ia, Al-Wali may Allah honour him and ibn Al-Wali (may Allah honour him) and a group of Muslims who had entered into Islam, but then were tortured and tested and were seduced away from Islam. We used to say Allah Glorified is He will never accept any payment or ransom from them for they are a people who became Muslim and then left their religion simply because of being tortured.' So Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.

And Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him and Ata' narrated that it was sent down concerning Wahshi, the killer of Hamza may Allah be pleased with him, since he thought that Allah Glorified is He would never accept Islam from him. Wahshi came to the=

قُلْ يٰعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ
 اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves
 by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God
 forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most
 Merciful [53] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 53)

Israf is exceeding the limits. We say that so-and-so is a *musrif* when he exceeds the limits by spending money in a manner that does not correspond to his income. The verse says that these people did *israf* against themselves, not for themselves. The fact that they did it against themselves indicates that *israf* brought them harm and negative consequences, for it was them exceeding the limits in disobedience and wrong action—and we seek refuge in Allah from that.

We said that *israf* is exceeding the limits. If those limits are established as the result of a command, then do not exceed them. If those limits are established as the result of a prohibition, then do not even go near them. It is for that reason that Allah *Glorified is He* says referring to His commands: '...These are the bounds set by Allah: do not overstep them....' (*al-Baqara*: 229) meaning: 'Stop at them and go no further.' As for the case when He refers to His prohibitions, He says: '...these are the bounds set by Allah, so do not go near them...' (*al-Baqara*: 187) since being near something entices you to go beyond it, as is made clear in a Noble Hadith: 'Whoever hovers around a private preserve, he is likely to enter into it.'⁽¹⁾

= Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'O Muhammad, I came to you asking for refuge so grant me refuge so that I can hear the Word of Allah Glorified is He.' So the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'I used to wish to see you from afar.'

(1) Al-Bukhari transmitted in his *Sahih* 2051 in a Hadith from An-Nu'man ibn Bashir may Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The halal is clear and the haram is clear. But between the two there are doubtful matters. Someone who does not do an action whose wrongness he is unsure about is more likely not to do those actions that are clearly wrong, whereas someone who risks doing an action whose wrongness he is unsure about is more likely to do an action that is clearly wrong. Acts of disobedience are the private preserve of Allah Glorified is He and anyone who pastures his animals around a private preserve is on the verge of entering it.' It is also narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* 1599.

For that very reason, when the True Lord forbade Adam *peace be upon him* from eating from the tree, He did not say, ‘Do not eat from it’, but rather said: ‘...but do not approach this tree...’ (*al-A‘raf*: 19).

That is the reason the word *ijtinab* (eschewal) is stronger than the word *tahrim*, (prohibition). It is quite amazing that we hear those who transgress against themselves saying, ‘There is no word, in the Book of Allah which indicates the prohibition of wine.’ We reply: ‘How can you say that Allah *Glorified is He* uses an even stronger word than *tahrim*, namely *ijtinab*, when He says: ‘O you who believe! Intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the Satan’s work; eschew it, that ye may prosper.’ Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 90-91)

The meaning of: ‘...eschew it...’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 90) is: avoid it completely—keep away from the places it is drunk, keep away from those who drink, keep away from those who sell it, keep away from those who transport it...etc.’ This is clearer and more eloquent than forbidding it by saying, ‘Do not drink alcohol’, as is proven by the fact that the Quran also uses the word *ijtinab* in matters relating to the very pinnacle of belief for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words.’ (*al-Hajj*: 30)

When we consider the *israf* (wastefulness and extravagance) in relation to spending, we find that the True Lord wants life to go on in the believing society in a balanced, consistent and moderate path, meaning that you know the limits of your income and the provision Allah has brought your way, and to live according to your means. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want you to keep hold of that provision and not spend it, nor does He want you to spend it all or be wasteful. Rather, He wants you to take the middle path, as He Himself makes clear when He says: ‘They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance.’ (*al-Furqan*: 67) Wastefulness and niggardliness are both censured and forbidden. Anyone who follows any path other than that of moderation harms both himself and society at large, since by holding on to his money, he reduces the buying power and selling power of the markets and that, in turn, leads to economic and productive stagnation, the ruination of wares and a slump in the markets.

If he spends his money wastefully and extravagantly, spending his entire income, he cannot then find any money to save in order to improve the quality of his life and move up to a higher standard of living. Then, he starts to blame himself when he sees others moving upwards to a higher, more luxurious standard of living and he cannot do the same.

This matter is made abundantly clear by the True Lord when He says: 'Do not be tight-fisted, or so open-handed that you end up blamed and overwhelmed with regret,' (*al-Isra'*: 29) i.e. you will be blamed when you hold back your money and act in a niggardly fashion, and you will be destitute and grieved when you spend everything you have wastefully. This is because he will find the people of moderation living the life of happiness, without blame or grief. The sensible person is the one who makes his expenditure subject to his income, not his income subject to his expenditure. When you make your income subject to your expenditure, you will inevitably be forced to ask other people for loans, and that will wear you out and make things very difficult for you. You will find yourself at wit's end and people will avoid your company and come to look upon you with disdain. Your life will become one long misery.

So, *israf* is exceeding the limits by doing things that will bring you pain and harm. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...have harmed yourselves by your own excess...' (*az-Zumar*: 53). As for *israf* that brings you good, it is *israf* for yourself not against yourself. An example of this is the one who pays *zakat* as 10% instead of the obligatory 2.5%, because he is certain that the additional amount he pays will be written for him and stored with Allah *Glorified is He*. So, there is a person who works only for this world, while the other works for both this world and the Hereafter.

Therefore, when Imam 'Ali *may Allah honour him* was asked ⁽¹⁾, 'O Imam, I want to know if I am one of the people of this world or one of the people of the Hereafter. (Can you tell me?)' He replied: 'I do not have an answer to this question, for it is within you that the answer lies.' 'How is that,' asked the man. Imam 'Ali *may Allah honour him* replied: 'If two people come to you, one bearing a gift and the other wanting help and asking for alms, see which of them you

(1) *The story of the question of a man to 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah honor him: 'Am I among the dwellers of heaven or hell?' and the response of Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah honor him.*

greet with a smile and welcome. If you extend your welcome to the man bearing the gift, then know that you are one of the people of this world, since that indicates that you love what brings you prosperity in this world, and if it is to the other that you extend your welcome, then you are one of the people of the Hereafter, since you love what brings you prosperity in the Hereafter.'

You know the story ⁽¹⁾ of the sheep that was given to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and which A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* gave away as *sadaqa* (charity) except for one of its shoulders. 'Then when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked her what happened to the sheep, she replied, 'It has all gone except for its shoulder,' and the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to love the shoulder more than any other part of the sheep. So the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Rather, all of it remains except for its shoulder.'⁽²⁾

So, the part that remains is the part that is given as a charity, while the part that is gone is the part we ate ourselves. This is further supported by Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* statement, 'O Son of Adam, you have no wealth except for what you have eaten so that it gets used up, worn so that it becomes worn out or given as charity so that it remains.'⁽³⁾

But then Allah *Glorified is He* opens the door of hope to those who have transgressed against themselves, saying to them: '...Do not Despair of Allah's mercy...' (*az-Zumar*: 53). But how is it they come to despair of the mercy of Allah? Scholars say that this is because they transgressed against themselves, went to excess in disobeying Allah *Glorified is He* and kept on doing that.

(1) *The story of the goat that was offered to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her gave it away to the poor.*

(2) *A sahih Hadith... It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 6/50; and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2470, who said that it was a sahih Hadith. It is also narrated by Abu Nu'aym in Al-Hilya 5/23, and the wording of the Hadith, as narrated by 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her is that they slaughtered a sheep. Then the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked, 'What remains of it?' She replied, 'Nothing remains of it except for its shoulder.' So he said, 'All of it remains except for its shoulder.'*

(3) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/24 & 26); Muslim in his Sahih (2958); and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2342) and he declared it to be Sahih (authentic).*

Then, when one of these people returns to the straight and narrow, he blames and rebukes himself and sees the wrong he committed as being great and unforgivable. He does not view himself as being worthy of forgiveness or mercy and so despair takes hold of him. We seek refuge in Allah from that happening to us.

When one reflects on this matter, one finds that this self-blaming and this despair of Allah's Mercy is, from another angle, a sign that a person's belief is good, for the fact that this transgressor sees his wrongs as being serious and does not think himself worthy of mercy indicates that his belief is sound and that he fears his Lord.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...behold Allah forgives all sins – for, verily, He alone is much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!' (*az-Zumar*: 53)

Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said about this verse that it is the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* since it gives hope to every wrongdoer, no matter how great his wrongs. If it were not for the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* followed this verse with His saying: 'Hence, turn towards your Sustainer [alone] and surrender yourselves unto Him...', (*az-Zumar*: 54) it would have caused people to think little of it and caused people to have such high hopes of Allah's mercy that they would have forgotten His vengeance and punishment. The believer alternates in the course of his life between fear and hope, and he is in need of both of them.

Indeed, your Lord is forgiving and merciful, but in order to be entitled to Allah's mercy and forgiveness, you must return in repentance to Allah *Glorified is He*. However, you should be honest and truly sincere in your repentance. This is because when one commits sins and then repents, then sins and then repents is like someone who is mocking his Lord. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from ever doing that.

When Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said about this verse that it is the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* one of those sitting with him said, 'I am of the opinion that the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* is Allah's saying: '...Now, behold, thy Sustainer is full of forgiveness unto men for all their evildoing...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 6).

I am critical of those scholars who interpret: ‘...for all their evildoing...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 6) as ‘despite all their evildoing’, for that cannot be its correct meaning when we are saying that the verse is the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*. We notice here that the Arabic word (*ma’a*) has two letters while (*‘ala*) has three letters, so the meaning conveyed by (*‘ala*) cannot be conveyed by (*ma’a*). To apply this to this specific verse, we find that this verse refers to forgiveness for wrong action and wrong action requires Allah’s attributes of being the Mighty Subduer and Avenger. However, Allah’s forgiveness erases the wrong action. In Arabic, that is a meaning that (*ma’a*) cannot convey.⁽¹⁾

As they are trying all the time to cast doubt about the Quran, some orientalist argue that there is a contradiction in the Quranic verses as Allah *Glorified is He* says here: ‘...God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful,’ (*az-Zumar*: 53) while He *Glorified is He* says in another Quranic verse: ‘Verily, Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him....’ (*an-Nisa*: 48)

We say to these people, ‘It is your ignorance of the Arabic language and its stylistic devices that has caused you to make this mistake, for *dhanb* means committing an action which Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden and for which set a punishment. Accordingly, associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* is not a (*dhanb*) since associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* takes one outside of the religion completely. And so, based on this interpretation, there is no contradiction between the two verses as you claim.’

Some scholars⁽²⁾ say, ‘This verse: ‘Say, “[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah’s mercy...”’

(1) Among those who said that (*‘ala*) had the meaning of (*ma’a*) was Ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir* (2/501). He said, ‘This means that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who effaces, pardons and covers up for people despite the fact that they sin and do wrong day and night.’ Ibn Hisham mentioned in ‘*Mughni Al-labib*’ (1/126) that (*‘ala*) here has the meaning of accompaniment, and he quoted this verse in support of his opinion.

(2) This was the position of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him and ‘Ata’. Al-Qurtubi said so in his *Tafsir* (8/5914), and Al-Wahidi an-Nisaburi said in *Asbab An-Nuzul* (p. 212), ‘It is narrated that the verse came down concerning Wahshi, the killer of Hamza Allah be pleased with him’, and he mentioned the narration with its isnad back to Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him (p. 193).

(*az-Zumar: 53*) came down concerning Wahshi, the one who killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* at the battle of Uhud and afterwards Hind took the liver of Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* and chewed on it.

We say, 'Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* was killed at Uhud and Wahshi did not become Muslim immediately afterwards, but rather after a long period of time had passed. Trying to reconcile the different statements in this regard, some scholars say, 'Perhaps when Wahshi killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* and then remembered his standing in Islam and that he was the Lion of Allah *Glorified is He* he despaired of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* and that despair could have led him to greater levels of evil and iniquity. Then a righteous person met him and told him, 'Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* for Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'Say, "[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.'" (*az-Zumar: 53*)

When Wahshi heard these words, he became Muslim, for the only thing that had stopped him from becoming Muslim before that was the fear he felt on account of what he had done. But if Allah's forgiveness was like this and his Lord had guaranteed to him that he would be forgiven, then why should he not become Muslim? The verse had been revealed prior to this story, so it was not sent down specifically about him, but rather was sent down beforehand. But it was quoted to him and recited to him, so it was the cause of his becoming Muslim.

Allah's saying: '...He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.' (*az-Zumar: 53*) confines the giving of mercy and forgiveness to Allah *Glorified is He* since every sin that is committed infringes one of Allah's rights and as long as they are Allah's rights that are being infringed, He *Glorified is He* alone possesses the right to forgive and have mercy on the guilty party, and He *Glorified is He* alone has the right to take him to task and punish him. That is because Allah's power is absolute and there is no other god alongside Him to oppose Him.

This meaning is clear in the story of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as related in the Quranic verses: 'And [beware the Day] when Allah will say,

“O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’ He will say, ‘Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen. “I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness. If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them - indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.”’” (*al-Ma‘ida*: 116-118)

We notice here that He *Glorified is He* does not say at the conclusion of this verse, ‘indeed it is You who is the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful,’ which would seem to correspond more closely with forgiveness, but instead He says: ‘...indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 118) The fact that Jesus *peace be upon him* said: ‘the Exalted in Might, the Wise,’ indicates that he personally thought that they ought to be recompensed and punished for the lie they had told, but Allah *Glorified is He* is The One Who has the Absolute Power to decide whether He *Glorified is He* wants to punish or forgive them. If Allah *Glorified is He* had a partner with whom He *Glorified is He* shared power, then Jesus *peace be upon him* would not have said that. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Almighty, All Wise, and no one can change anything that He *Glorified is He* has done. He *Glorified is He* forgives them in this case, not out of His capacity as the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful Allah, but out of His capacity as ‘the Exalted in Might, the Wise’, for they fully deserve to be punished.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ، مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

Turn to your Lord. Submit to Him before the punishment overtakes you and you can no longer be helped [54]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 54)

The Arabic word (*Inaba*) means repenting and going back to believing in Allah *Glorified is He* as the Only One God with no partner, while Islam is

putting into practice what Allah *Glorified is He* demands of you, obeying His commands and abstaining from His prohibitions.

Accordingly, does this (*inaba*) mean that they were with Allah *Glorified is He* in the first place and then left him and went over to unbelief, so that then it could be demanded of them to return to belief once again? We say, 'No, that is not the intended meaning here. Rather, (*inaba*) here refers to them going back to that first covenant that Allah *Glorified is He* made with all His slaves when they were still in the realm of atomic potential and were still in the loins of Adam *peace be upon him*. About this covenant, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware."' (*al-A'raf*: 172)

So the meaning of: 'Turn to your Lord,' (*az-Zumar*: 54) is: 'Go back to believing in Him with that natural belief that He *Glorified is He* made a covenant with you about.' This natural belief is a person's constant companion and it is what makes his conscience wake up after he has done an act of disobedience causing him to repent, or after disbelieving, causing him to believe. This natural belief that resides in the depths of the human soul is that which brings him back to his senses after he has been heedless and forgetful. It was this belief that roused Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* 'Amr ibn Al-'As *Allah be pleased with him* and others from their slumber of disbelief, and they all became believers after having gone back to the first covenant and rediscovered the natural belief that lay within them.

Allah says, '...before the punishment overtakes you and you can no longer be helped.' (*az-Zumar*: 54) Then, what does *Al-Nusra* (help) mean here in this context of talking about the Hereafter? It means that the people of falsehood will not be able to offer any help or succour to each other or defend themselves in any way, regardless of whether they be followers or those who are followed, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says in another Quranic verse: 'How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?' Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah]; but [since it will be too late,] they will turn

upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins]. Some [of them] will say: ‘Behold; you were wont to approach us [deceptively] from the right!’ [To which] the others will reply: ‘Nay, you yourselves were bereft of all faith! Moreover, we had no power at all over you: nay, you were people filled with overweening arrogance!’ (*as-Saffat*: 25-30)

Yes, they will not be able to provide one another succour because the situation they will be in will be one of blame and dispute, since each of them will seek to lay the responsibility for his predicament at the door of the other and each of them will declare himself innocent of the other. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah-conscious.’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 67)

Allah then says:

وَاتَّبِعُوا أَحْسَنَ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ
يَأْتِيَكُمْ الْعَذَابُ بَغْتَةً وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ

**Follow the best teaching sent down to you from your Lord,
before the punishment suddenly takes you, unawares [55]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 55)**

The Arabic word (*ahsan*) is in the superlative form (*af‘al*) that indicates exaggerated levels of good. From this, we understand that a lesser amount of goodness is *hasan* (good). We say, ‘This is good and that is better than it.’ The command that is given here is to follow what is best. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* sends down certain rulings that gratify the human self so that it does not feel anger or hatred towards other people, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you...’ (*an-Nahl*: 126) This is a warning to us: ‘If you want to retaliate, and then beware of doing so in a manner worse than what was done to you. If you are capable of responding in a like manner, then that is good. But it would be better for you to pardon and forgive, as Allah *Glorified is He* indicates: ‘...And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness, and restitution to his fellow man shall be made in a goodly

manner...' (*al-Baqara*: 178), and when He *Glorified is He* says: 'But if one is patient in adversity and forgives – this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!' (*ash-Shura*: 43) This is the best settlement of affairs in this regard.

Another example of this is found in Allah's words concerning adoption: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5). You know the story of Prophet Muhammad's adoption of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* and that when Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* was given a choice between his family and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he chose to remain with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'I would never choose anyone over the Messenger of Allah!' For that reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rewarded him by ascribing paternity to himself, calling him Zayd ibn Muhammad.⁽¹⁾

When Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to forbid adoption and sent down the verse: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5) He *Glorified is He* treated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* justly and declared what he had done to be good, but what Allah *Glorified is He* wanted was better; what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* did was just and equitable, but what Allah *Glorified is He* chose was more just: '...this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5). The wisdom behind: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5) is so that people do not come to view the immediate cause of their existence, i.e. their fathers, as being unimportant. And that is because viewing the immediate cause of your existence as being unimportant encourages you to deny The Highest Cause of Existence.

We can also say that the meaning of: 'Follow the best teaching sent down to you from your Lord' (*az-Zumar*: 55) is that at the time when the Quran was revealed, there were two religions practised by the people: Judaism with its

(1) It is narrated by At-Tirmidhi (3815) that Jabala ibn Haritha, the brother of Zayd said, 'I came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'Messenger of Allah, send my brother Zayd with me.' He replied, 'He is yours. If he wants to go with you, I will not prevent him.' Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Messenger of Allah, by Allah, I will never choose anyone over you.' [Jabala] said, 'I saw that my brother's opinion was better than my own.' At-Tirmidhi classified this as a (*hasan gharib* Hadith).

Book, the Torah; and Christianity with its Book, the Bible. When these Books and others were revealed, there were people who believed in them and others who rejected them and associated partners with Allah *Glorified are He*. Moreover, there were even atheist people.

The command 'Follow' is directed to everyone. It is as if Allah is saying, 'O you who believe in Moses *peace be upon him* and O you who believe in Jesus *peace be upon him* the religion you are following was good in its own time, but now Islam, the final religion that supersedes all others, has come, and it is the best religion that you shall follow.

Sometimes the comparative form (*af'al*) is used to describe the reality of the situation. But in this case, we do not consider its opposite, i.e. worse, but rather, we consider the same attribute of goodness, but to a lesser degree. This applies to all cases except for one case that we have noticed relating to one of the Sublime names (attributes) of Allah *Glorified is He*. One of His Names is *Al-Kabir* (the Great), not *Al-Akbar* (The Greatest), although the standard is that we should call Him *Al-Akbar* since that is the superlative form of *Al-Kabir*. So why is He *Glorified is He* not called *Al-Akbar*?

We say, 'The word *Akbar* does appear in a form that makes it seem as if it is an attribute of Allah *Glorified is He* for we hear it every day in every *adhan* (call to prayer) and every *Iqama* for every prayer. The prayer is a form of worship that has a special status in Islam, for it is that act of worship that is repeated five times every day, and it is the act of worship that never under any circumstances ceases to be obligatory for the believer as long as he remains alive. It is the only act of worship that was not made obligatory by revelation, unlike all the other acts of worship, but instead was made obligatory directly during *Al-Mi'raj* (the Night Journey to the Heavens). When we call people to come to do this act of worship, we say, 'Allah is *akbar*' and not, 'Allah is *kabir*.'

Here, in this particular place, the word *akbar* is more apt than *kabir* and expresses the intended meaning better. This is because we are not only required to perform prayer, fasting, making the pilgrimage and so on, but we are also required to do all actions that benefit and help us to perfect our performance of religious duties. This is why it is stated that one of the *shar'i* maxims is: 'Anything that an obligatory act cannot be completed without is itself obligatory.'

If we take prayer, as an example, we find that there are many requirements that shall be met so that one can perform this obligation. These requirements include, for example, covering up of one's private area. In order to cover your private area you need clothes to wear, but from where are you going to get those clothes? You need a tailor to tailor them, a retailer to sell the cloth from which they are tailored, a wholesaler, a factory for spinning, textile and dyeing, the farmers who grow the cotton and harvest it, and so on.

All of these processes require tools, machines, and workers. The same is the case with respect to the food that you must have in order to have the power that enables you to carry out the obligatory acts of worship. All these processes are there for your sake, to serve and help you. So, these everyday acts without which one cannot carry out his religious duties are themselves obligatory and should not be viewed with disdain. Rather, they should be venerated and closely adhered to, since they have the status of being obligatory.

So when your Lord calls you to prayer, while you are busy with any of these works, He *Glorified is He* does not take you from an act that is trivial, insignificant and valueless, but rather takes you from an act that is, in itself, an act of worship. So, for that reason, such works are *kabir* (great). Yet, The One Who calls you to the prayer is *akbar* (greater) than all of that. In the Quran, Allah does not call believers to a prayer except for the *Jumu'a* prayer as He *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 9).

Out of all worldly activities, He *Glorified is He* singles out selling because it is the fruit of all the remaining activities, such as trade, agriculture and manufacturing. This is because humans are more eager and greedy to sell than they are to buy since selling is the transaction that brings immediate profit. That is why we find people so eager to sell, unlike those who buy, for when a buyer does not find the particular commodity he wants, he says, 'Leave it!' since it is from his pocket that he has to pay. But as for sellers, they gain money and profit.

Then, when the prayer is finished, your Lord allows you to return back to the worldly work from which He *Glorified is He* summoned you. He says:

‘...and when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah’s bounty...’ (*al-Jumu’a*: 10).

Accordingly, you should not think little of worldly actions or think that they are not part of religion, for instead they are a part of it. Moreover, anything that an obligatory act cannot be completed without is itself obligatory, and those who disobey Allah with regard to worldly actions will inevitably also disobey in religious matters. So when we say in the call to prayer, ‘Allah is the Greatest’, it reminds us that things other than Him are also great and should not be belittled, but at the same time it tells us that The One Who grants us the energy is greater than those great things, so do not let your preoccupation with the great take you away from The One Who is greater.

As such, you come to know the wisdom that Allah *Glorified is He* calls Himself *Al-Kabir* (The Great), not *Al-Akbar*. When we say Allah is Great, this means that everything other than Him is small, but if we were to say Allah is *akbar* (Greater), that would mean everything other than Him was great.

So, when you hear His *Glorified is He* revelation and find that there is good and there is better, then follow the better of what He *Glorified is He* sent down: ‘...Follow the best teaching sent down to you from your Lord.’ (*az-Zumar*: 55)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...before the punishment suddenly takes you, unawares.’ (*az-Zumar*: 55) Punishment does not suddenly take anyone except for the oblivious and heedless person whom punishment never crosses his mind in this world. Had it crossed his mind, he would have avoided it and steered clear of the things that lead to it. And then, when it came, it would not have taken him by surprise.

But how can the punishment take someone by surprise? We say, ‘What is it that differentiates one person who is living his life in this world and one who is meeting his punishment? It is death, of course, for it is simply by dying and his soul leaving his body that a person is transported from the ease of this world to the punishment of the Hereafter if he is one of those destined to be punished. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that destination.

It is well known that no one knows the moment that his soul will depart his body, for it is possible for one to take a breath, but cannot exhale it. This is something that every believer must always be aware of and never forget.

أَنْ تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ بِحَسْرَتِي عَلَى مَا فَرَّطْتُ فِي جَنْبِ
 اللَّهِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُ لِمَنِ السَّخِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

**And your soul says, “Woe is me for having neglected what is
 due to God, and having been one of those who scoffed!” [56]
 (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 56)**

This is an example of the self when it becomes sorrowful and starts to blame itself. ‘Why have you allowed yourself to come to such a point when we have asked you to repent to Allah *Glorified is He* submit to His rulings and follow the best of what He *Glorified is He* sent down to you, thereby lifting all hardship and difficulty from it and keeping blame well away from it? We asked you not to adopt such a stance, but you did not comply.

The words (*ya hasrata*) are in the vocative form, but what is it that the slave is calling out to? He is calling out to sorrow, grief, and sadness, saying, ‘O my sorrow, come here to me for this is your time.’ He feels sorry for himself after the opportunity for feeling sorry has already passed him by. It is well known that it is only possible to use the vocative to call on something that is of benefit to you, but here he finds himself in a position of sorrow and regret. And the word for sorrow (*hasra*) has the first person attached pronoun, (*ya*) added to the end of it as well as the (*alif*) of absoluteness.

The meaning of: ‘...for having been remiss in what is due to Allah...’ (*az-Zumar*: 56) is ‘for having fallen short with respect to the obedience that is Allah’s by right.’⁽¹⁾ (*tafreet*) is neglecting to do what should have been done before, for when an opportunity has passed, it cannot be recovered. It is like the student who neglects his studies, but then takes an interest in them the night before his exam. We say to him, ‘My dear boy, before a shot can be fired the

(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned many opinions for what was meant by (janb Allah) in his Tafsir (8/5916), including that it means:*

- a) Obedience to Allah *Glorified is He*. This was what *Al-Hasan* said.
- b) Remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He*. This was what *Ad-Dahhak* said.
- c) Reward from Allah *Glorified is He*. This was what *Abu ‘Ubayda* said.
- d) Seeking closeness to Allah *Glorified is He* meaning *Paradise*. This was what *Al-Farra’* said.
- e) The Path of Allah *Glorified is He* to which He *Glorified is He* calls us. This is what *Az-Zajjaj* said.

barrels must be filled.’⁽¹⁾ This is a proverb that is struck for those who neglect to prepare for things before their time, for when a hunter goes out to hunt, he prepares his tools in advance so that when he comes across his prey, he can take it out before it runs away. For a gazelle, for example, does not sit there waiting for the hunter until he has filled up his gun barrels or prepared his arrows.

So, you feel sorry for yourself and blame yourself because of the fact that you did not take advantage of the opportunities you were given, and neglected to do so until they passed you by. Such opportunities can never be brought back, so you have no option left but to feel sorry for yourself and bite your fingers in regret. It is as if the two commands that preceded this verse, namely: ‘Hence, turn towards your Sustainer [alone] and surrender yourselves unto Him...’ (*az-Zumar*: 54) and ‘...follow the most goodly [teaching] that has been revealed unto you by your Sustainer,’ (*az-Zumar*: 55) it is as if they should have acted upon these commands in order to protect themselves from saying as soon as they see the punishment: ‘...Alas for me for having been remiss in what is due to Allah...’ (*az-Zumar*: 56). It is because of the mercy and compassion He *Glorified is He* has for His slaves that He *Glorified is He* does not like for them to say these words. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want His slaves to end up in a situation where they feel sorry for themselves and are not content with that for them. So when He *Glorified is He* says to us, ‘Do not despair of the mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* turn towards Him, surrender yourselves to Him, and seek the best of what has been revealed to you. He *Glorified is He* wants by that to wake up the heedless, warn those who are thinking of rejecting Him and remind them of the consequences of their actions and the sorrow they will feel when they see the punishment.

Hasra is the sadness and regret one feels for those good things that have passed you by and can never be brought back. An unbeliever does not just feel one sorrow, but rather constantly feels many sorrows, since each time he sees the punishment which is his lot he feels sorrow, and each time he sees the believers living in bliss he feels sorrow, and each time he is reminded of this world he feels sorrow.

(1) *This proverb was mentioned by Abu Hilal Al-‘Askari in Jumhurat Al-Amthal, and he said, ‘This is a proverb used for being prepared for misfortune and calamity before it happens. It is also mentioned by Az-Zamakhshari in Al-Mustaqsa fi Amthal Al-‘Arab.*

Allah words: ‘...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!’ (*az-Zumar*: 56) mean ‘Their crime is not just one of being remiss and falling short with respect to what is due to Allah *Glorified is He* but goes beyond that, for they also scoff at those who fulfil what is due to Allah *Glorified is He*.’ So their wrong action is multiplied. We previously mentioned the example of the people of falsehood mocking and ridiculing the people of truth that is mentioned in the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin*: ‘Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith; 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, ‘Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!’ And, withal, they have no call to watch over [the beliefs of] others.... But on the Day [of Judgment], they who had attained to faith will [be able to] laugh at the [erstwhile] deniers of the truth: [for, resting in paradise] on couches, they will look on [and say to themselves]: ‘Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for [aught but] what they were wont to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-36)

We often hear the people of falsehood mocking the people of truth, saying: ‘This guy is (*sulala*)’ ‘My uncle, take us over to your side’...etc. But it is enough for the people of belief that Allah *Glorified is He* is The One Who will give them their rights in the Abode of Permanence. So if they mock you in this impermanent world, you will mock them in the everlasting and permanent abode, if they laugh at you for a limited period of time here, you will laugh at them forever.

There is a point of interest in this verse: ‘...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!’ (*az-Zumar*: 56) When we look at the word (*nafs*) in the Quran, we find that it always appears in the feminine, such as in Allah’s, words: ‘...and yet, I am not trying to absolve myself: for, verily, man’s inner self does incite [him] to evil...’ (*Yusuf*: 53) and in His words: ‘Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of Allah!’ (*ash-Shams*: 7-8)

But as for here, its quality of masculinity wins out, for He *Glorified is He* says, quoting the words of the self: ‘...and for having been indeed one of those

who scoffed [at the truth]!’ (*az-Zumar*: 56) ‘...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!’ (*az-Zumar*: 56) saying (*sakhirin*) and not (*sakhirat*) Why is that? Because, they say, although the word (*nafs*) is feminine, when it is used to mean ‘human being’, it is masculine.

After having warned us of the position in the Hereafter where we will feel regrets and feel sorry for ourselves, Allah then warns us of another thing that will occur to the self when it sees the punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوْ تَقُولَ لَوْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هَدَانِي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾ أَوْ تَقُولَ حِينَ تَرَى الْعَذَابَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِي كَرَّةً فَأَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Or it says, “If God had guided me, I would have joined the righteous!” [57] Or, faced by punishment, it says, “If only I could have another chance, I would join those who do good!” [58] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 57 - 58)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...or lest he should say,’ (*az-Zumar*: 57) i.e. lest the self should say: ‘...If Allah had but guided me...’ (*az-Zumar*: 57), i.e. in this world: ‘...I would surely have been among those who are conscious of Him!’ (*az-Zumar*: 57) This is astonishing! It is astonishing that the self will even deny Allah *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter, for the fact that he said: ‘...If Allah had but guided me...’ (*az-Zumar*: 57) meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide him, and that is a lie.

Man says in defence of himself, ‘The fact that I was not among the ranks of the believers means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide me.’ That is a lie, for Allah *Glorified is He* guided you and pointed out to you the way to goodness. He *Glorified is He* clearly defined for you what was lawful and what was unlawful, but you did not travel His path nor did you follow His program: ‘...or lest he should say, when he becomes aware of the suffering [that awaits him], “Would that I had a second chance [in life]”...’ (*az-Zumar*: 58) meaning, ‘Would that I could go back to the world and live my life again.’

It is just like what Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘[As for those who will not believe in the life to come, they go on lying to themselves] until, when death approaches any of them, he prays: “O my Sustainer! Let me return,

let me return [to life].” (*al-Mu'minun*: 99) These are all empty and false hopes, so do not believe what they say. If they truly were to return, they would simply go back to doing what they were doing before and just as they lied in the first verse when they said: ‘...If Allah had but guided me...’ (*az-Zumar*: 57) they also lied in the second verse when they said: ‘...so that I could be among the doers of good!’ (*az-Zumar*: 58)

It is quite possible to conceive of people lying in this world, but astonishing that they could lie in the Hereafter, when they are standing in front of their Lord. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says after that: ‘And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied about Allah [with] their faces blackened. Is there not in Hell a residence for the arrogant?’ (*az-Zumar*: 60)

The most obvious explanation is that lying stuck to them and they became so accustomed to doing it that they even took it with them into the Hereafter.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* responds to these lies, saying:

بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَ نَكَآءَآئِنِّى فَكَذَّبْتَ بِهَا وَاسْتَكْبَرْتَ وَكُنْتَ مِنَ الْكٰفِرِيْنَ ﴿٥٩﴾

**No indeed! My messages came to you and you
rejected them: you were arrogant and rejected the
truth [59] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 59)**

The word (*bala*) is a particle of response that only ever comes as a response to a negative statement, and reaffirms the meaning that was negated in that previous statement.

Like when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... am I not your Sustainer?’ (*al-A'raf*: 172), and the response comes, using the particle (*bala*): ‘...to which they answer: “Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto”...’ (*al-A'raf*: 172) meaning, ‘No, you are our Lord’, since the rule is that the negative of a negative is a positive. Another verse like this is: ‘Is Allah not the most just of judges?’ (*at-Tin*: 8) and anyone who hears this verse should respond by saying, ‘(*bala*), O my Lord’, meaning, ‘No, you are the most just of judges.’

So, where then is the preceding negative to Allah’s words here: ‘...Yea, indeed! My messages did come unto thee...’? (*az-Zumar*: 59) They reply, ‘Because of the fact that he denied that guidance had come to him by saying:

‘...If Allah had but guided me...’ (*az-Zumar*: 57) the word (*bala*) appears in the response.’ In other words, ‘Rather He did guide: ‘...My messages did come unto thee...’ (*az-Zumar*: 59). (*Ayat*) is the plural of (verse) which is something amazing that captivates people’s gazes and impels their intellects and inner sights to reflect.

These verses (*ayat*) as we mentioned before, are of three types: existential signs that indicate the power of the Creator such as in Allah’s words: ‘Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon...’ (*Fussilat*: 37).

And Allah’s words: ‘...and among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in daytime, as well as your [ability to go about in] quest of some of His bounties...’ (*ar-Rum*: 23).

These existential signs which direct our attention to The Creator *the Most High* are the first means by which a person comes to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and that is why, every time the scientists discover something new or invent something new, we find the root of that thing in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*. Words spoken by Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* more than 14 centuries ago.

Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes even shows us these existential signs through the medium of the unbelievers, which is why He *Glorified is He* warns our jurists and religious scholars against meddling in the worldly sciences since those sciences have their scholars who have specialised in those areas, and those people will serve Islam and the matter of believing in Allah *Glorified is He* as well as showing us the proofs and evidences that oblige us to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* The Owner and Creator of this universe.

So, those scholars went to great pains in researching and reflecting upon the existential sciences in order to serve those who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and serve Islam. They are, even if they themselves disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* one of the armies of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth when He *Glorified is He* says: ‘In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth....’ (*Fussilat*: 53)

The most astonishing thing is that they deprive themselves of the rewards for all that effort they expend, for they did what they did and obtained whatever knowledge they obtained without ever thinking about Allah *Glorified is He*. All they thought about was serving humankind. So it is from humankind that they receive their payment, and indeed humankind has indeed afforded them great honour, building statues of them and celebrating their works. And that is why they will have no portion for what they have done in the Hereafter.

It is to them that Allah's words apply: '...for We shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought, and shall have transformed them into scattered dust.' (*al-Furqan*: 23) and Allah's *Glorified is He* words: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur*: 39) meaning, 'They will be taken by surprise by the fact that the universe has an Allah and Creator, as well as by the fact that there is a Reckoning and Recompense, for none of those occurred to them in this world.

The second type of verses (*ayat*) are the miracles that accompany the Messages from on high, and whose purpose is to prove that the Messengers are being truthful in terms of what they convey from their Lord. An example of this type of sign is found in Allah's words: 'And, indeed, We gave unto Moses nine clear messages.' (*al-Isra'*: 101)

As for the final type, they are the Quranic verses (*ayat*) that carry within them the judgements and rulings of Islam, and they are those verses (*ayat*) that Allah *Glorified is He* refers to here: '[But Allah will reply:] "Yea, indeed! My messages did come unto you; but you denied them, and you were filled with false pride, and you were among those who deny the truth!"' (*az-Zumar*: 59)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and you were filled with false pride...' (*az-Zumar*: 59): the verb (*istakbara*) means 'to seek to be big or great'. In other words, not only did he view himself as great, but strived for and sought after greatness. However, that was not granted him, for one who is arrogant

deems himself as great and must have no need of the one to whom he displays arrogance. And if you are in the kingdom of Allah *Glorified is He* and under His sovereignty, if you eat from what He *Glorified is He* provides you and live from the good He *Glorified is He* sends your way, then how can you display arrogance towards Him?

Then there is the fact that the only time a person should feel pride or arrogance is when he possesses some intrinsic quality that cannot be taken away. Therefore, all those who display arrogance in this world are doing is contending with Allah *Glorified is He* in terms of one of His attributes, since their arrogance is not backed up by anything, for who among creation possesses anything that is truly intrinsically his and cannot be taken away? And that is why we see those who are arrogant on account of their might being humiliated by Allah *Glorified is He* those who are arrogant on account of their wealth being impoverished by Allah *Glorified is He* and those who are arrogant on account of their good health and well-being being made ill by Allah *Glorified is He*.

So, the true and acceptable form of arrogance is for you to be arrogant on account of something you possess and which cannot be taken away from you. The very worst form of arrogance is to act arrogantly towards your Lord and Creator, The One Who is able to take absolutely everything away from you. As for those who act arrogantly towards creation, they are heedless of the greatness and immensity of their Lord, since if he had been aware of the greatness and immensity of their Lord, they would have been too ashamed and embarrassed to be arrogant, thereby disputing with Allah *Glorified is He* for an attribute that is His by right.

وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ تَرَى الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُمْ
مُسْوَدَّةٌ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ

**On the Day of Resurrection, you [Prophet] will see
those who told lies against God, their faces darkened.
Is there not ample punishment for the arrogant in
Hell? [60] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 60)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... all who invented lies about Allah ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 60), i.e. by saying, ‘If Allah had but guided me’ (*az-Zumar*: 57)

and other such statements, for Allah *Glorified is He* did in fact guide you and point out the way to you when He *Glorified is He* sent Messengers to you, backed up by miracles, and when He *Glorified is He* sent down Books and clarified the lawful from the unlawful. They also told lies about other things, like those who said: '...Behold, Allah is poor while we are rich...' (*Al-Imran*: 181) and like those who said: '...Allah's hand is shackled!...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 64) And just as these were those who claimed that there were other gods alongside Allah *Glorified is He*.

All of these told lies against Allah *Glorified is He* which is why they will come forth on the Day of Rising: '...[with] their faces darkened [by grief and ignominy]...' (*az-Zumar*: 60). Yes, they will be blackened because then they are face to face with Allah *Glorified is He* against whom they lied. And so their faces will inevitably be blackened, covered in dust, and overcast with gloom on account of what they did.

This is not to disparage blackness in and of itself, since blackness is one of Allah's creations, and there is nothing inherently blameworthy about it. You could well see a man who is white, but whose countenance carries an air of darkness and gloom so that his face appears dark, and from that we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*. That darkness is the mark that is left on the face by acts of disobedience and wrong actions in this world before the Hereafter.

Then you could see a slave, whose face is like a raisin, and yet there is an air of light and brightness about him, and in his face you find the markings of right action. It is as if his face is shining with light and you never tire of looking at it. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, laughing, rejoicing at glad tidings. And some faces will on that Day with dust be covered, with darkness overspread: these, these will be the ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity!' (*Abasa*: 38-42)

So, the quality is not in itself praised or disparaged, and the blackness and whiteness that are referred to here are not the blackness and whiteness that we know in this world. This whitening or blackening is a relative thing with some having it more than others. One of the right-acting people I saw had so much light that it was as if a bright torch were shining out from his face. And

whenever joy appeared on his face, it was as if the light of certainty and the delight of belief had spread beyond his interior and spilled out on to his face so that it glowed with radiance and light. That man had black skin like ebony.

We find something similar to this in Allah's words: '...the ugliest of all voices is the [loud] voice of asses,' (*Luqman*: 19) for is the sound of a donkey blameworthy when it is the donkey making that noise? No, because The Creator created it in that form, and there is a wisdom behind a donkey having such a high-pitched voice, since if it were to become lost or hidden behind a mountain or large hill, the only thing that helps its owner to find it is its loud voice. But when that loud sound emanates from a human being, it is blameworthy, for the most disapproved of noise that can emerge from the mouth of a human being is that which resembles a donkey's voice.

And the same is true of Allah's words: 'The parable of those who were graced with the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear this burden, is that of an ass that carries a load of books...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 5) for the purpose of this verse is not to disparage donkeys, since when donkeys carry loads on their backs they are fulfilling their role which is only to carry things. Donkeys carry their loads without objection or discontent. But it is blameworthy for human beings to imitate donkeys and be content to simply carry things without being aware of or understanding what it is they are carrying, and without putting into practice what they know.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Is not hell the [proper] abode for all who are given to false pride?' (*az-Zumar*: 60) This is a negative form of question to which we must respond by saying, '(bala), my Lord!' meaning, 'No, rather, they do have an abode in Hell.' The meaning here is, 'What do they think? Do they think that there is not a place set aside for them there? Their place there is already prepared. It has the names of all who will be there and is waiting for them. It longs for them to come - there is no housing crisis in hell.'

Allah *Glorified is He* created creation in the time before time, assigning to every person a place in paradise on the basis that all of creation was going to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and assigning to each person a place in the fire on the basis that all of creation was going to deny Allah *Glorified is He*. Then when the inhabitants of paradise enter paradise and the inhabitants of hellfire

enter hellfire, the places in paradise that were assigned to the inhabitants of hellfire were they to have believed in Allah *Glorified is He* are distributed among the inhabitants of paradise, as is mentioned in Allah's *Glorified is He* words: 'for such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 72)

The meaning of (*mathwa*) is a permanent dwelling place, and it will be: '...for all who are given to false pride' (*az-Zumar*: 60).

وَسَيَجِيءُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا بِمَفَازَتِهِمْ لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ الشُّوْءُ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

But God will deliver those who took heed of Him to their place of safety: no harm will touch them, nor will they grieve [61]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 61)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite, for although the permanent abode of the unbelievers will be in hell, the believers will be saved by their Lord: '...by virtue of their [inner] triumphs...' (*az-Zumar*: 61). That is, by them triumphing and obtaining what they wanted. The bliss of the Hereafter is obtained in one of two ways: either by a believer entering paradise straight away, or by him initially being one of the inhabitants of Hellfire, but then being encompassed by the mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* and removed from it and taken to paradise as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...whereupon he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph...' (*Al-Imran*: 185). Yes, his triumph is of the highest form. It is for that very reason that they call the desert (*mafaza*) despite the fact that it is destructive and causes travellers to become isolated: they call it (*mafaza*) in the optimistic hope that those who travel through it will stay safe. It is similar to the way they call the sting of a scorpion or a snake (*salim*), in the hope that they will be unharmed by its sting.

When Allah *Glorified is He* saves them and decrees triumph for them, they are safe from even being touched by the punishment: '...no evil shall ever touch them, and neither shall they grieve' (*az-Zumar*: 61) since every sight that they do see will fill them with delight, and nothing will ever make them sad, just as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says in another verse: 'The supreme awesomeness [of the Day of Resurrection] will cause them no grief since the

angels will receive them with the greeting, “This is your Day [of triumph – the Day] which you were promised!” (*al-Anbiya*: 103)

اللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

God is the Creator of all things; He has charge of everything [62] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 62)

After having mentioned His promise and His threat, and after having mentioned where the unbelievers and the believers are going to end up, Allah *Glorified is He* goes back to discussing another matter relating to belief, the fact that: ‘Allah is The Creator of all things...’ (*az-Zumar*: 62). It is as if He *Glorified is He* were saying, ‘What is it that has turned them away from believing in Allah *Glorified is He* The True Deity, when He *Glorified is He* is The One Who created everything?’

Some of them take this verse: ‘Allah is The Creator of all things ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 62) and assign every single act to Allah *Glorified is He*: in their view, Allah *Glorified is He* is The Creator of everything - The Creator of belief and The Creator of disbelief, The Creator of obedience and The Creator of disobedience. And, following on from that, they say, ‘So why does He *Glorified is He* punish those who do [wrong action]?’

We say, ‘There are some who firmly believe that everything occurs by Allah’s Omnipotence, saying that everything is by His Power; while there are others who cling fanatically to His attribute of Justice, saying that man is the one who acts and strives for himself, and that is why he is rewarded for obedience and punished for disobedience.’ This is the very opposite of what should be passing between the scholars since obedience and disobedience are both forms of action. But what is action?

Action is what happens when one of the limbs or organs of the body carries out its task. So the eye sees, but The Creator has set rules for what the eye should look at, and limits what it should see. So the eye sees what it is lawful for it to see, and lowers its gaze from what is unlawful for it to see.

And the same is true of the ear, the hand, the foot, the tongue...etc. When your action corresponds to what the Law commands, that is obedience, and when it goes against what the Law commands, that is disobedience.

Take, for example, a man who raises his hand to another and strikes him: by Allah, is it he who makes his limb do that action or does he simply direct that limb in a direction that is in its best interest? The answer is that he is simply the one who puts that limb in a particular direction, for he was certainly not the one who created the action that it does. And that is proven by the fact that he has no knowledge of the individual muscles that moved or nerves that were involved in that strike.

So, we say that the action is one thing while putting the limb in the direction of doing the action is something else. Every aspect of the action itself is created by Allah - He *Glorified is He* is The One Who gave the hands the capacity to strike, and He *Glorified is He* is The One Who gives them the capacity to do good to others. Allah *Glorified is He* is The One Who gives the tongue of the believer the capacity to say, 'There is no Allah but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', and gives the tongue of the unbeliever the capacity to voice the statement of unbelief, and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that. It is within your capacity to look with the eye towards what is lawful, and it is within your capacity to look with it at what is unlawful.

So, Allah *the Most High* gives every limb and organ the capacity to fulfil the function for which it was created. If that function corresponds to the Law, then that is obedience, but if it does not correspond to the Law, then that is disobedience. So, based on this, we say that Allah is The Creator of action in the real sense of the word. So, what does a slave do when he disobeys that merits him being punished?' And what does he do when he obeys that merits him being rewarded?

The action of the slave here and his role in the affair is that he directs the capacity that Allah *Glorified is He* created in him in a particular direction. That capacity that Allah *Glorified is He* created in him is suitable for being used for one thing and its opposite. So, the capacity and power to act does not come from you, it comes from Allah *Glorified is He*. But what is up to you is putting that active force in a particular direction.

So, if you look at it from the point of view of action, the entire process of acting belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Allah is The Creator of all things...' (*az-Zumar*: 62). And if you look at it from the point of view of channelling

and choosing, that is the role of the slave. And that is why we say that a disobedient person does not disobey Allah *Glorified is He* because he is compelled by Him, and that when an unbeliever rejects Allah *Glorified is He* he is far-removed from what Allah *Glorified is He* knows and wants. If Allah wanted, He could have made all of mankind into a single nation who all believed and were all obedient, but instead He *Glorified is He* left the choice to them and allowed them to channel their actions in the directions they wanted in order to see which of them would come to Him of their own free will - and Allah *Glorified is He* knows best what His slaves will do.

Reflect on Allah's words: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab*: 72) It would be a mistake for us to say that man alone is the one who has freedom of choice, for the reality is that the whole of existence has the freedom to choose. But the difference between the freedom of choice enjoyed by the heavens and the earth and the freedom of choice enjoyed by man is that when the heavens and earth were offered the choice, they chose to forego their own wants in favour of what their Creator wanted. They indeed made a choice, but their choice was not to have the freedom of choice and to be compelled to follow the Will of their Lord. But as for man, he accepted the trust and chose to have the freedom to choose between the myriad choices that would be presented to mankind.

We previously clarified the difference between taking on the burden of the trust and paying that trust back. We made it clear that although the slave can guarantee himself when he takes it on, he cannot guarantee himself when it comes to carrying it out and giving it back. Thus, the trust is a heavy matter, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes man as being wrongdoing and foolish for taking on the trust and exposing himself to it.

So, beware of entering into a maze and understanding Allah's words: 'Allah is The Creator of all things...' (*az-Zumar*: 62) in a way in which it is not meant to be understood, and saying, 'If Allah is The Creator of the unbelief of the unbeliever or of the disobedience of the disobedient person, then why does He *Glorified is He* punish them?'

Allah will punish these disbelievers because they chose to use the energy that Allah *Glorified is He* had placed within them in a direction that opposes Allah's rulings. Similarly, Allah will punish disobedient people for directing their capacities in a course that is contrary to Allah's Commandments.

Allah says: 'Allah is the Creator of all things.' (*az-Zumar*: 62) Some people claimed that the word 'all' in this verse does not refer to everything in creation. They said that this verse is similar to Allah's words when He narrated the story of Bilqees. Allah says in the story of Bilqees: '...and she has been given (abundance) from all (good) things.' (*an-Naml*: 23)

The word *kul* (all) in the story of Bilqees does not mean that she had been given everything in existence. This is because Allah used the preposition *min* (from), which indicates that she had been given bounties 'from' every form, but does not indicate that she had been given everything in existence.

Therefore, these scholars were mistaken to use the wording in the Quranic story of Bilqees to infer a limited meaning in Allah's words: 'Allah is the Creator of all things.' Saying that Allah did not create everything is not a correct inference because while Allah used a limiting preposition *min* (from) alongside the word *kul* (all) in the story of Bilqees, He did not use the same limiting preposition in our verse.

Yet, despite this limited interpretation being wrong, the verse: 'Allah is the Creator of all things,' (*az-Zumar*: 62) still has different possible interpretations. The polytheists who disbelieved in Allah's Oneness (at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) accepted that Allah was the Creator of everything. Allah says regarding these polytheists: 'Now if you ask those (who worship partners besides Allah) as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah."' (*az-Zukhruf*: 87) Allah also says: 'If you ask them, "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?" – they will surely answer, "Allah."' (*Luqman*: 25) So, Allah created the elements of containment, place, and time, and Allah *Glorified is He* conveyed this information to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who then conveyed this information to us.

Although these polytheists denied Allah's Oneness by worshipping their own false deities; none of them ever claimed that they or their idols had

created the universe. Man came into this universe and found it in the same form as it is today, with a sky and an earth. So, how can he claim that he was its creator when it is older than he is? Indeed its creation is greater than his own creation, as Allah says: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth: yet most men do not understand (what this implies).’ (*Ghafir*: 57)

Indeed, the Arabs knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a truthful person. He told us that this universe has a Creator and then described the Creator to us. Thus, we should listen attentively as he explains the solution to this riddle of creation.

We previously illustrated this concept in the example of a man who is stranded in a barren desert, waiting for death to approach him. If that man suddenly sees a table in front of him, laden with the best forms of food and drink, it is inevitable for him to ask: ‘How did this table of food come to exist in the middle of the desert?’

Similarly, we can find many proofs that Allah is the Creator of all things in the world around us. Indeed, as we said, even the polytheists of Quraysh accepted that Allah is the Creator of the world. However, they denied His Oneness because they wanted to deny His Laws and commandments, as His rulings placed restrictions upon their appetites. Belief in Allah is followed with responsibilities and obligations. It informs us that there will be a reward for the good deeds on the Day of Reckoning, and a punishment for the grave sins.

This responsibility is the reason behind the polytheists’ rejection of Allah’s Oneness. Indeed, they worshipped their false deities because idols did not require any actions from them. Therefore, this worship satisfied their natural urges to be religious, but without imposing any obligations on them. The polytheists said: ‘We only worship them (*na’buduhum*) because they bring us closer to Allah.’ (*az-Zumar*: 3) Their usage of the word ‘worship’ was wrong because a worshipper should obey the commands and prohibitions of the worshipped deity, and these idols gave the polytheists no orders.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and He alone has the power and (is the) authority (*wakeel*) to determine the fate of all things.’ (*az-Zumar*: 62) A

wakeel is the person who you authorize and entrust to carry out the actions that you are not able to do on your own. For instance, in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* his people said to him: 'Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken (and defeated by Pharaoh's army).' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 61) That was the moment when the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh and his army were behind them. All the indications backed up their expectations that they will be defeated on that day. However, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had another viewpoint and a different nature to theirs, for he was directly connected to his Lord, was reliant on Him and had total trust in Him. He knew with absolute certainty that Allah *Glorified is He* was his supporter. That is why Prophet Moses responded to them by saying: 'Nay, indeed.' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62) These words of trust were the result of his great reserves of belief in his Lord. He continued: 'My Lord is with me, (and) He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62) In this case, Prophet Moses considered Allah to be his *wakeel*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who rely upon Him: 'Nay – who is it that responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him, and who removes the evil (that caused the distress).' (*an-Naml*: 62) He also says: 'And whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those (powers) that you (had previously and mistakenly) invoked will forsake you.' (*al-Isra'*: 67) So, Allah *Glorified is He* is the guardian and supporter of all His servants, including those servants who do not believe in Him. Those who disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* call out, 'O my Lord!' when things become difficult for them. They may fool others by their disbelief, but they can never fool or deceive themselves.

Allah told us that: 'Allah is the Creator of all things,' (*az-Zumar*: 62) and that: 'He alone has the power to determine the fate of all things.' (*az-Zumar*: 62) Sometimes farmers plant crops to thrive and flourish, but these crops are struck down by a disaster or are consumed by an epidemic that wipes them out. This calamity may even happen just before the crops are harvested. Indeed, any calamity is decreed by Allah *Glorified is He* as a sign that you should invoke Him alone, and not depend on the worldly laws! Indeed, He is The Creator and the Guardian over everything. His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. This is why Allah says immediately afterwards:

لَهُ مَقَالِيدُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
بِعَايَةِ اللَّهِ أَوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

**The keys of the heavens and earth are His. Those who have
rejected the revelations of God will be the losers [63]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 63)**

The Quran was revealed in the language and the dialects that the Arabs used at the time of its revelation, but despite that, there are Persian, Ethiopian and Roman⁽¹⁾ words that still appear within it. These words do not negate the Arabic nature of the Quran because they had entered the Arabic glossary before the Quran was revealed and the Arabs used them knowingly. So, these words become part of their language.

One of those words is the word *maqaleed*, for to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs: ‘...the reigns (*maqaleed*) (to the mysteries) of the heavens and the earth.’ (*az-Zumar*: 63) The word *maqaleed* is either the plural of the word *miqlad*, a word which has the same morphological form as *miftah*, or is the plural of the word *miqleed*. Another Arabic dialect uses the word *aqaleed* which is the plural of *iqleed*.

The word refers to Allah’s right of possession over everything and the right of disposal of anything as He wills. It also refers to Allah’s power of protection and preservation. So, this verse means that Allah has Absolute Kingship over the heavens and earth, as well as the absolute freedom to do as He wills within them. He also preserves them while continuously governing and directing all their affairs.

This is the divine attribute by which Allah is the *Qayum* (Superb Sustainer) of everything in existence. Allah *Glorified is He* created everything in this world. Then, He provided and sustained these creatures so that they remain able to

(1) *As-Suyuti* included a section in his book, ‘*Al-Itqan fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran*,’ and mentioned the words that appear in the Quran in a language other than that of the Arabs (pp. 105 - 120). Examples of Persian words include (*ibriq*), (*jahannam*) and (*dinar*); examples of Ethiopian words include (*sinin*), (*shatr*) and (*taghut*); and examples of Roman words include (*qist*), (*qustas*) and (*tafaq*).

fulfil the functions for which they were created. To that objective, He set down laws that control them and revealed commandments that they are obliged to follow. Some people claim that Allah left these laws to control His creation without His presence, but this is a false claim. On the contrary, Allah supports and sustains His creatures at all times, without any moment of disregard.

Read Allah's words: 'Verily, it is Allah (alone) who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate (from their orbits) – for if they should ever deviate, there is none that could uphold them after He will have ceased to do so.' (*Fatir*: 41)

Some philosophers claim that Allah left rules and laws to govern the universe and that these laws are uniform. If this concept was true, things would settle into one particular course and would not change. For instance, the healthy systems would remain endlessly healthy, the mighty would remain mighty, and the rich would remain rich. However, this is not the way things are, because Allah *Glorified is He* acts freely within His creation and sustains His creatures according to His will.

It is narrated (in a weak Hadith) that 'Uthman ibn 'Affan *may Allah be pleased with him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the *maqaleed* (reigns) of the heavens and the earth. This Hadith has a weak chain of narration, but in it, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'O son of 'Affan. Nobody before you has ever asked me about them. The *maqaleed* of the heavens and earth are, 'La ilaha illa-Allah (There is no god but Allah)', 'Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest [than everything]),' 'Subhana'llahi wa bi-hamdihi (Glory and praise belong to Allah)', 'Astaghfiru'llaha'l-'azheem (I ask forgiveness from Allah, the Immensely Great)', 'La hawla wa la quwwata illa bi-llahi'l-'aliyyi'l-'azheem (There is no power and no strength except from Allah, the High, the Immense)', 'Huwa-l-awwalu wal-akhiru waz-zhahiru wal-batin, bi-yadihil-khayru yuhyi wa yumeet (He is the First and Last, and the Inward and the Outward. Good lies in His hands and He brings life and death)'. These are the *maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth.'⁽¹⁾

(1) This narration was transmitted by Al-'Uqayli in 'The Book of Weak Hadiths' (*Ad-Du'afa'u Al-kabir*) (4/231) in the biography of Mikhlaḍ Abu Al-Hudhayl (1825), =

Therefore, one of the interpretations of the phrase: ‘*maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth,’ is that they are the phrases which we should use in the pious remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He*. If this Hadith was authentic, it means that the entirety of existence was based upon particular concepts, which have been summarized in these phrases connected to belief in Allah *Glorified is He*.

The phrase: ‘*La ilaha illa-Allah* (There is no god but Allah)’ means that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only Deity and that He has no partners in Creation. Whenever He decides upon a matter, there is no force that can oppose Him or object to His decrees. If He gives bounties, there is no being that can hold back His gifts, and if He withholds His gifts, none can then give them away. That is why Allah said: ‘Behold, (you will find that) those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create (as much as) a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end.’ (*al-Hajj*: 73) Indeed, more than that, these false deities are unable to perform even simpler tasks than the task of creation. Allah says: ‘...And if a fly takes anything from them, they cannot retrieve it.’ (*al-Hajj*: 73) They cannot even retrieve the slightest amount of honey that a fly takes when it falls upon it. Allah says: ‘Weak indeed is the seeker, and (weak) is the (false deity being) sought.’ (*al-Hajj*: 73)

The phrase: ‘*La ilaha illa-Allah* (There is no god but Allah),’ is a primary principle that has been set by Allah *Glorified is He* Himself. Allah informed us of it as the ultimate testimony of His Essence. This testimony means that nothing in creation can ever refuse Allah’s orders. If He orders anything to come into existence, it will comply as He wishes. Thereafter, the angels testified to this principle because they witnessed it in action. Later on, the people of knowledge also paid witness to it, as they inferred it from the material forms of evidence and proofs they discovered in the Universe. Allah *Glorified is He*

= and he said, ‘There is great speculation regarding its chain of narrators, and it is only corroborated by a path of narrations that is almost identical to it.’ Al-Kinani also mentioned it in *Tanzih Ash-shari’a Al-Marfu’a* (1/192), mentioning the difference of opinion regarding this narration being a fabrication, even though there was agreement that it was munkar (denied from being authentic). Ibn Hajar said, ‘In my view, it is munkar (denied) with respect to all its chains of narration. But as for definitively declaring it to be fabricated, I will not go that far, for I have not seen anyone in its chain of narration who may be described as being a liar.’

says: 'Allah (Himself) proffers evidence – and (so do) the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity except Him, The Upholder of Equity: there is no deity except Him, The Almighty, The Truly Wise.' (*Al-Imran*: 18) Thus, the underlying concept of this is one of Allah's reigns in creation.

Similarly, the phrase: '*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)' is one of the *maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth. We previously explained that this is the phrase which we use to call people to prayer. It is important to note that the word *Akbar* is not one of Allah's Names. Rather, it is the word *Al-Kabeer* which is one of His Names. So, why did Allah not use His Name, *Al-Kabeer* (The Great), when summoning people to prayer, but instead used the attribute *Akbar* (The Greatest) for this call?

The answer is that we are comparing two concepts in this call to prayer. Indeed, we are comparing the concept of Allah's worship to the concept of worldly tasks we may be engaged in at the time of prayer. Thus, the word *Akbar* (The Greatest) is the appropriate linguistic form to be used, because we use it when making relative comparisons between two concepts. It means that when the time of prayer is due, Allah should be Greater in our eyes than the appreciably important tasks of livelihood and sustenance. Hence, since the tasks of livelihood are themselves important, Allah described Himself using the word 'The Greatest' (*Akbar*) instead of the word 'Great' (*Kabeer*). It is true that these tasks of livelihood are still great endeavours. Certainly, they place our worldly affairs in order, and give us the strength and capacity to uphold the affairs of our religion. However, despite the greatness of these worldly tasks, Allah is Greater. Therefore, in the call, 'Allah is The Greatest,' Allah implies that these actions were still great. However, you are obliged as a servant to leave these great elective tasks that you are doing when obligatory prayers are being called to. If Allah had used the Name *Al-Kabeer* (Great) instead of the word *Akbar* (The Greatest) in the call to prayer, this would have indicated that the tasks of sustenance are small and trivial, which was not the message intended.

The phrase: '*Subhanallahi wa bi-hamdihi* (Glory and praise belong to Allah),' is also one of the defining concepts of the heavens and the earth. This is because you will be exposed to wondrous concepts and matters in the

universe that are beyond comprehension and understanding. Whenever an extraordinary action is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He* a believer should say, ‘*Subhanallah* (Glory be to Allah).’ This is a matter we clarified when we narrated the story of the Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As we know, the Quranic account of this journey begins with the phrase: ‘Limitless in His Glory (*Subhan*) is He (Allah) who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship (at Mecca) to the Remote House of Worship (at Jerusalem).’ (*al-Isra*: 1)

There is nothing strange about this event since the action was ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad did not say, ‘I travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night,’ but rather, he said, ‘I was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem (by Allah) in one night.’⁽¹⁾ It is well-known that a verb corresponds to its subject in terms of its strength and time, but when the subject of the verb is Allah *Glorified is He* there is no time to speak of.

We previously gave an illustration of that concept. If you were planning a journey to Alexandria, you may probably use a horse. Alternatively, you may want to use a car, buy an airplane ticket, or even build a rocket to get there faster. Your journey will not take the same time with each of these modes of transportation because the length of time it takes depends on the speed and strength of the mode you use to travel. The more powerful the means of your travel is, the shorter the time of your journey. So, if the Power that transported Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Night Journey was the Omnipotent Power of Allah *Glorified is He* then there is no doubt that this journey would need no time to be accomplished.

We can find another proof of Allah’s extraordinary might in the blood that flows in our veins. This blood must have a specific degree of liquidity in

(1) From Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *may Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘When Quraysh called me a liar when I was transported by night to Jerusalem, I stood in the *Hijr* and Allah made the Sacred House at Jerusalem appear to me. So I started to describe its signs to them while I was looking upon it.’ It was transmitted by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/377), Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4710) and by Muslim (170). Prophet Muhammad described the Sacred House at Jerusalem to them, gate by gate, window by window, as well as its pillars and the road that leads to it. Such a detailed description could not conceivably result from a dream, no matter how true that dream was, for dreams do not contain such details.

order to flow. If its liquidity decreases inside the blood vessels, the blood starts to clot and may cause fatal emboli to shower the bloodstream. However, in contrast, when that same blood flows out of the body, it normally clots up to seal the wound through which it is flowing. Therefore, the same blood observes two different behaviours to suite its specific function.

Reflect upon the temperature of the human body. You will find that its natural temperature is 37 degrees. Regardless of whether you live in the land of the Eskimos or at the equator, your temperature remains fixed at 37 degrees. Despite that, there are organs within the human body that have slightly different temperatures, even though they are part of a single body. A well-known quality of heat or cold is that of temperature homeostasis. Adjacent objects tend towards a single level of temperature. So, why does the heat and coldness inside the body not equalise at one specific degree? These are all matters to which we must say, '*Subhanallah* (Glory be to Allah), the One Who created this capacity.'

The Quran teaches us to utter this phrase and remember its underlying concept whenever we are confronted by any act that only Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of doing. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Limitless in His Glory is He (Allah) who transported His servant by night,' (*al-Isra'*: 1) and He says: 'Limitless in His Glory is He who has created opposites in whatever the earth produces, and in men's own selves, and in that of which (as yet) they have no knowledge.' (*Ya Sin*: 36)

The phrase: '*Subhanallah* (Glory is to Allah...)' should always be followed by the phrase '*Wa Bi-hamdihi* (...and praise is to Him)'. This additional phrase means that you are praising Allah because He is exalted and transcendent above His creation. We should praise Allah *Glorified is He* because He does not resemble His creation in any way. There is no one like Him, and He has no peer or equal. This is also because the fruits of His transcendence will come back to the believers in the form of divine remarkable bounties.

The phrase: '*Astaghfiru'llaha'l-'azheem* (I ask forgiveness from Allah, the Immence),' is also one of the governing concepts of the heavens and the earth. If a servant forgets Allah's orders, it is one of Allah's bounties to forgive that servant and allow them to repent and return to Allah's path. In this world, this forgiveness will remove one's sins and wipe his slate clean, and is one of

the main manifestations of Allah's mercy towards us. However, if Allah *Glorified is He* did not allow the repentance of His servants, their disobedience will become worse and they would continue to transgress against others. So, the institution of repentance spares people from the evils of other people.

The phrase: '*La hawla wa la quwwata illa bi-llahi'l-'aliyyi'l-'azheem* (There is no power and no strength except from Allah, the High, the Immense),' is also one of the *maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth. When you are performing any action, do not consider these actions to be the result of your power or strength, since there is no power or strength except by Allah's will. Indeed, Allah is capable of taking away all your power. For instance, you can move your hands whichever way you want, smoothly and easily, and they obey your commands and comply with your intentions. However, you know nothing of the individual muscles and nerves that participate in their movements. This is the ability that Allah has placed inside your body, and if Allah wills to take that power from you, He can easily stop the nerve impulses that flow from your brain to your limbs. If that happens, these limbs will not respond to you, and you will be unable to even lift them at will. So, keep aware of this matter whenever you approach any action, and know that it does not happen by your power, but rather by the Power of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The phrase: '*Huwa-l-awwalu wal-akhiru wazh-zhahiru wal-batin* (He is the First and Last, and the outward and the inward),' is also one of the defining concepts of the heavens and the earth. Allah is the First being in existence as He is without a beginning. He is also the Last being, which means that He is without an end. It is like we say in the supplication during *Ramadan*, '(O' Allah), you are the First who is not before a Last, and (O' Allah), you are the Last who is not after a First, but that leads to that, so stop, O intellect, at the limit of what you can grasp!'

The word *Azh-zhahir* (the Outward) refers to the visible and outwardly signs in the kingdom of Allah *Glorified is He* that the eyes can perceive. On the other hand, the word *Al-batin* (the Inward) refers to the hidden aspects of Allah's kingdom that the eye cannot see. So Allah *Glorified is He* has a visible *mulk* (kingdom) and an invisible *malakut* (realm) that no one may see, except those of His servants whom He wills at the time that He wills.

The phrase: '*Biyadihil-khayru* (Good lies in His hands)' is also one of the *maqaleed*. Some of the scholars⁽¹⁾ have wrongly said, 'Both good and evil lie in Allah's hands.' They claimed that the proof for their opinion is found in Allah's words: 'Say: "O Allah, Lord of all dominion! You grant your dominion unto whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will; and You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Your hand is all-good. Verily, You have the power to will anything."' (Al-'Imran: 26) They said that the verse brought forth several forms of opposites, and thus, these scholars felt emboldened to claim that both good and evil lie in Allah's hands. However, their opinion is wrong and not permissible. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only said, 'The Good lies in His hands.' This was an exaltation of Allah, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not ascribe evil to Allah *Glorified is He*. Similarly, we must never ascribe evil to Allah, and that is why, since 1928, I have been objecting to the supplication many people repeat, 'Spare us the evil of what You have decreed.'⁽²⁾ I used to say that this supplication must be amended! Then, Allah guided me to another meaning from this supplication, which is that the real evil we are seeking refuge from is not being content with Allah's Decrees, and not that the divine decrees are evil in any way.

If we were to reflect on the wording of the phrase: '*Biyadihil-khayru* (Good lies in His hands),' as well as the verse: '...In Your hand is all good,' (Al-'Imran: 26) we would notice that the good here is absolute. Thus, all of the decrees of Allah are good, and the evil only ever comes from the creation. Read Allah's words: 'Whatever good happens to you is from Allah; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.' (an-Nisa': 79) Someone might ask, 'How can we understand the verse in which Allah says: '...all is from Allah'? (an-Nisa': 78) We previously explained that everything is from Allah *Glorified is He* in the sense that Allah is The Creator of all energy and power. Indeed, He is The Creator of the force and capacity to act. However,

(1) Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him said, according to what is narrated by Ibn Al-Jawzi in *Zad Al-Masir* in his *Tafsir* of verse 26 of the chapter of 'Al 'Imran, 'Both good and evil lie in Your hands, but ask for one of them, since it is the one that is to be desired.'

(2) This Hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud in his *Sunnan* (2/63 – (Hadith) no. 1425) in the chapter on the *qunut* in *Witr*, and was also narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (1/ 199 & 200) in a Hadith from Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah be pleased with him.

it is you who will channel that force and direct it either towards good or towards evil. So, based on that, we can say that good is from Allah *Glorified is He* and evil is from us.

The phrase: '*Yuhyee wa yumeet* (He brings life and death)' is also one of the *maqaleed*. Allah created life and created death, as the essential aspects of human existence. He says: 'It is He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test (and thus show) which of you is best in conduct, and (make you realize that) He alone is Almighty and truly forgiving.' (*al-Mulk*: 2)

Allah mentioned death first so that we not approach life in the deluded belief that we are going to live forever, but rather, we should approach it with the awareness that death is inevitable. This awareness will help us to act in preparation for that end. The words: '...He has the power over anything!' (*ar-Rum*: 50) mean that He does what you are unable to do because His power is absolute and there is no force that can resist His will. Therefore, when you ask your Lord for a particular provision, you should ask Him to give you blessings that you do not expect, for Allah *Glorified is He* can provide for you in ways that exceed your expectations. That is why the people of higher spiritual knowledge said, 'The material means are the outward cover of Allah's divine decrees.'

Thus, the verse in which Allah says: 'His are the reigns (*maqaleed*) of the heavens and the earth' (*az-Zumar*: 63) was a reference to His creative power and everlasting sustenance of His creation.

Then, Allah says: 'And those who disbelieved in Allah's messages...' (*az-Zumar*: 63). These messages could be the universal signs in existence or the miracles of the Messengers. They could also be the verses of the Quran that inform us of Allah's Commandments. Their disbelief is their refusal to put these divine commandments into practice. Allah says: '...it is they who are the losing folk.' (*az-Zumar*: 63). This means that they have made a losing bargain by denying Allah's messages. This is because they preferred their immediate appetites to the everlasting bliss of paradise. Then Allah says⁽¹⁾:

(1) *The reason for the revelation of the verse: Ibn Kathir mentioned in his tafsir (4/61) that Ibn Abu Hatim and others narrated from Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him that=*



**Say, ‘Do you order me to worship someone other
than God, you foolish people?’ [64]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 64)**

You may remember how the disbelievers acted when they stubbornly opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and refused to accept Allah’s religion. However, despite their efforts, Islam spread widely and its followers increased in number. So, the disbelievers tried to have an agreement with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, ‘O Muhammad, if you worship our gods for a year, we will worship your Allah for a year.’⁽¹⁾ So Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them: ‘Say (O Muhammad to these polytheists), “Are you ordering me (*ta’murunani*) to worship (*a’budu*) a deity other than Allah, O folk who are ignorant (of right and wrong)?”’ (*az-Zumar*: 64)

The question that is asked here is a question of disapproval and astonishment. Did they really want the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whom Allah entrusted to convey His Message and revelation, to worship someone other than Him? The Arabic word *ta’murunani* means, ‘Are you ordering me?’ It can be recited in a number of different ways⁽²⁾

= the idolaters, in their ignorance, called on Prophet Muhammad to worship their gods, and if he did that, they would then worship his God *Glorified is He*.

- (1) *Al-Wahidi* mentioned in *Asbab An-Nuzul* (p. 261) that the chapter of *al-Kafirun* (The Disbelievers) was revealed because a group of disbelievers from *Quraysh* said, ‘O Muhammad, follow our religion and we will follow your religion. Worship our gods for a year and we will worship your God for a year. Then if what you have is better than what we have, we have shared in it with you and taken our portion of it, and if what we have is better than what you have, you have shared in it with us and taken your portion of it.’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from associating any partners with Him!’ Then Allah revealed the verse: Say, ‘O you who deny the truth...’ (*al-Kafirun*: 1)
- (2) A number of different ways of reciting this have been narrated, including:
 - (a) (*ṭamuruniya*) with a single undoubled (nun) and with a (fatha) on the (ya’). This was the recitation of *Naḥf*’.
 - (b) (*ta’murunani*) with two undoubled (nuns) in the form that would be expected. This was the recitation of *Abu ‘Amir*.
 - (c) (*ta’murunni*) with a single doubled (nun) because of the two (nuns) merging into each other. This was the recitation of the remainder of the reciters and was chosen by *Abu*—

including: *ta'murunni* (with a doubled *nun*), *ta'murunani* (where the first *nun* is a preventative letter, which prevents a verb from taking the *kasra*) or it can also be pronounced as *ta'muruni* (with a single *nun*).

The word *a'budu* (to worship) indicates that worshipping their idols is a futile practice that has no intellectual basis, since the worshipper is obliged to obey the commandments of the worshipped deity, and these idols have issued no rules to be obeyed or disobeyed. That is why Allah described those who worship these idols as being ignorant, addressing them with the words: '...O folk who are ignorant (of right and wrong).' (*az-Zumar*: 64)

Here it becomes incumbent upon us to differentiate between people who are illiterate and people who are ignorant. The person who is illiterate is better than an ignorant because his mind is a blank slate that does not hold any particular theories or viewpoints. Therefore, it is easier for them to be convinced of the true facts. The ignorant's mind is not a blank slate, but holds a firm mistaken view of the world. That is why it takes more effort to convince an ignorant person of anything. Firstly, you must convince them of the error of their mistakes before convincing them of the correct facts. Thus, Allah says: 'Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body.' (*al-Ahzab*: 4)

We previously talked about the matter of confined space, and said that any point in space can only contain one body of matter. For instance, we notice that when we fill a jug with water, the bubbles of air have to come out first before the water can find its way in. The same is true of those unsound positions that reside in the heart of the ignorant. Their ignorant or corrupt concepts must leave their place so that the heart can be convinced of the truth. It is even harder to extract incorrect beliefs or positions that satisfy a person's own appetites and whims.

This concept of the capacity of a single space is one that is instinctually understood by most people, be they philosophers, young children, or illiterate individuals. Do you not see that if a young boy is sitting next to his father, and his older brother wants to sit in his place, the younger child would get up to

= 'Ubayd and Abu Hatim, because the word appeared in the original copy of 'Uthman may Allah be pleased with him with a single (*nun*) (*The Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi* 8/5922).

give his seat to the brother? This is because the young child understands the intrinsic concept that any one space can only naturally contain one solid body.

The disbelievers are described as being ignorant because they hold on firmly to a mistaken belief in their hearts. They mistakenly think that Allah *Glorified is He* has partners in divinity, and there is no greater ignorance than worshipping idols. Then, Allah says:

وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ
لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

**It has already been revealed to you [Prophet] and to those
before you: 'If you ascribe any partner to God, all your
work will come to nothing: you will be one if the losers [65]
(The Quran, az-Zumar: 65)**

This verse clarified the reason for the question of amazement in the last verse, when the disbelievers had asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to believe in their idols in order for them to believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. How can they tell him to do that when he was the Messenger whom Allah entrusted with His religion and revelation? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to those who came before him, that anyone who ascribes divinity to any deities besides Allah shall be among the losing people. That is why Allah has described them as an ignorant folk in the last verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are studying: '...it has already been revealed to you, as well as to those who lived before you.' (az-Zumar: 65) Those people who received revelation before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were the previous Messengers, for every one of them encountered this same problem.

Is it conceivable for Messengers to ascribe partners to Allah *Glorified is He*? The scholars said that this phrase was a mere supposition. The verse was declaring the punishment that will await anyone who chose to worship deities besides Allah. So, if the threat was directed to the noble Messengers themselves, then this threat surely included any less righteous member of the general populace.

Some of the scholars have said that this verse was speaking about the infallibility of the Messengers, but this infallibility is by Allah's decree and no one has any say over Allah's decree. Did one of the Messengers not say: 'We should be guilty of blaspheming against Allah were we to return to your ways after Allah has saved us from them! It is not conceivable that we should return to them – unless Allah, our Lord, so wills. All things does our Lord embrace within His knowledge' (*al-A'raf*: 89)? So, the meaning here is that Allah's power and commands have no limits, and that Allah can do what He wills, even if a particular divine choice was never made.

The underlying message of what has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who came before him was: '...if you ever ascribe divine powers to anyone but Allah, all your work shall most certainly be in vain.' (*az-Zumar*: 65) The verse narrated part of the revelation to the previous Messengers, and directed part of the revelation in the singular form to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and addresses him alone with the phrase: '...if you ever ascribe divine powers to anyone but Allah, all your work shall most certainly be in vain.' (*az-Zumar*: 65) However, the fact is that if this message was directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this means that the statement was also directed to all the previous Messengers. The meaning of the verse: '...all your work shall most certainly be in vain' (*az-Zumar*: 65) is that all the righteous actions that lack the correct faith in Allah's Oneness will be corrupt and worthless on the Day of Reckoning. Allah says: '...for (in the life to come) you shall most certainly be among the losing people.' (*az-Zumar*: 65) We know that in the language of commerce, a loss is when a person's actual capital decreases. So, when a trader does not obtain any profit on top of his capital, he is not considered to be a loser, so long as his capital remains intact. The same is true of the believer whose capital with Allah *Glorified is He* consists of his belief and righteous actions. Your Lord created you and provided for you out of nothing, then sent Messengers and revealed Books to guide you. Through such messages, Allah has set up a transaction for you with Him that is profitable. So it is up to you, O believer, to take advantage of this opportunity and earn its potential profits. Indeed, the amounts of actions you can do in this

world are limited by your life span. On the other hand, the potential reward for this limited life span will be the everlasting bliss of paradise. It is here that the special merit of the trade with Allah *Glorified is He* lies hidden. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said in another chapter: ‘...for, (if they did, they would know that) the life of this world is nothing but a passing delight and a playful enjoyment –whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only (true) life: if they but knew this.’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 64)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَلِ اللّٰهُ فَاعْبُدْ وَكُنْ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

No! Worship God alone and be one of those who are grateful to Him [66] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 66)

The Arabic word *bal* is a particle that turns the discussion around, by negating its preceding context and affirming its following sentence. So, the meaning of this verse is, ‘O Muhammad. Shun the invitation these polytheists offered you to worship their gods, and beware of being convinced by their invitations. Instead, Allah (alone) should you worship.’

In order to emphasise the Oneness of Allah, the verse used the linguistic style of placing the object in front of the verb. This particular linguistic style is called confinement. This style confined and restricted every form of worship to Allah *Glorified is He* alone and no one else, just as we say in prayer: ‘You alone do we worship.’ (*al-Fatiha*: 5) Placing the pronoun that refers to Allah *Glorified is He* before the verb, ‘...we worship,’ gives the meaning, ‘We only worship You and no one else.’ If the verse said, ‘We worship you,’ by placing the verb before the object, it would allow the possibility of adding more objects of worship which is not permissible.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and be among those who are grateful (to Him).’ (*az-Zumar*: 66) We should be among those who give thanks to Allah *Glorified is He* for guiding us and granting us success. We can do that by worshipping Him alone and thanking Him for the blessings that He has bestowed upon us. Those blessings are only a limited form of the eternal bliss that awaits the obedient believers in the Hereafter.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Allah's kindness towards us is that His rulings are in our own best interests in this world. Yet, Allah will still reward us in the Hereafter for obeying these commandments. Thus, His Commandments are a form of His kindness towards us. Certainly, He does not derive any benefit from our obedience, and indeed, our disobedience does not harm Him *Glorified is He*.

Read the Qudsi Hadith in which Allah says: 'My servants. Were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to all have hearts as pious as that of the most righteous servant among you, that would not increase the wealth of My kingdom in any way. And were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to have hearts as wicked as that of the most wicked servant among you, that would not decrease the wealth of My kingdom in any way, not even so much as a needle takes from the sea when it is put into it.'⁽¹⁾ We should know, as servants, that our Lord, Allah, loves us and wants us to obtain success and salvation. We are His creatures, and every creator wants his creation to be in the best possible state. Then, Allah says:

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ، وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ
وَالسَّمَوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ، سُبْحَنَهُ، وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

These people have no grasp of God's true measure. On the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be in His grip. The heavens will be rolled up in His right hand – Glory be to Him! He is far above the partners they ascribe to Him! [67]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 67)

Allah's words: '(And) they have not honoured Allah with the honour that is due to Him,' (*az-Zumar*: 67) mean that the disbelievers did not contemplate and extol Allah's Glory and Power in the way that He should be exalted. That is why they associated others with Him in worship. The reality of the matter is

(1) It is narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* (4/1994) in *Kitab A-Birr wa As-Sila* (Hadith 2577) in the chapter on prohibiting injustice, in a (Hadith) from Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him.

that: '...the whole earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His Right Hand.' (*az-Zumar*: 67) How did they forget about this reality of Allah's Omnipotent Power? Indeed, they will see the consequences of their disbelief in the Hereafter.

Allah says: '...and the whole earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His Right Hand.' (*az-Zumar*: 67) When a person says, 'The matter is in my hands,' it means that he has total control over it. Thus, this verse does not mean that Allah *Glorified is He* actually has a hand or a fist. Rather, it is a metaphor for His omnipotent strength and mastery.

We previously said that when the Quranic verses describe Allah *Glorified is He* in a way that has its counterpart in creation, we must understand that description in the light of Allah's words: '...there is nothing like Him.' (*ash-Shura*: 11) Examples of such attributes include Him being described as having hearing, sight, a hand, or knowledge.

Allah's words: '...and the whole earth,' (*az-Zumar*: 67) refer to this earth of ours upon which we live and breathe, as well as any other earths like it since Allah has said: '...He who has created seven heavens, and of the earth the same number.' (*at-Talaq*: 12) This includes the planets in our own solar system, let alone all the other solar systems and galaxies which may contain millions of planets just like our own. Allah says: '...He has (also) the power to gather them (unto Himself) whenever He wills.' (*ash-Shura*: 29)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and the heavens will be folded in His Right Hand.' (*az-Zumar*: 67) In the Arabic language, the right hand is used as a metaphor of a person's strength. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: 'Some (of them) will say, "Behold; you used to approach us (deceptively) from the right."' (*as-Saffat*: 28) This means that they were approached from their direction of strength.

Allah says in another place in the Quran: 'On that Day, We shall roll up the skies as written scrolls are rolled up; (and) as We brought into being the first creation, so We shall bring it forth anew.' (*al-Anbiya*: 104)

Which earth is meant by Allah's words: '...and the whole earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection'? (*az-Zumar*: 67) The scholars said that this earth will be different from the earth that we currently live upon. The

earth will be altered in the Hereafter, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: ‘(His promise will be fulfilled) on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens.’ (*Ibrahim*: 48) That is because the earth of this world is an earth of means and secondary causes. We live upon it, eat its fruits, and pursue the course of our lives. On the other hand, our lives in the Hereafter will be directly connected to the Primary Causer, Allah *Glorified is He*.

There will be no planting or cultivation in the earth of the Hereafter. Instead, we will simply wish for food or drink and it will come to us. You will be granted anything that comes to your mind without any need for secondary causes. This is because it will come to you directly by the power of Allah *Glorified is He* without secondary means.

Similarly, the sky of this world is a sky of means and secondary causes. For instance, the rain has to descend from its clouds. In the Hereafter, there will be no rain, no sun, or moon in the sky. That earth of the Hereafter will be illuminated solely by the light of its Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* concluded this verse with the words: ‘Limitless is He in His Glory, and sublimely exalted above anything to which they may ascribe a share in His divinity.’ (*az-Zumar*: 67) This is a command for us to say, ‘*Subhana'llah* (Glory be to Allah),’ and to disassociate Him from being like His creation with respect to having a hand or folding up the sky, for His folding of it here is nothing like the folding that we know. We must understand all these descriptions in the light of Allah’s words: ‘...there is nothing like Him.’ (*ash-Shura*: 11) So, disassociate Allah *Glorified is He* from what the idolaters say. Then, Allah says:

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ
شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

**The Trumpet will be sounded, and everyone in the heavens
and earth will fall down senseless except those God spares. It
will be sounded once again and they will be on their feet,
looking on [68] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 68)**

After speaking about the doctrines of belief and mentioning His promise to those who are obedient and His threat against those who are disobedient,

Allah started describing the Hereafter. This is the abode where we will all be recompensed for the actions we did in this world. This world contains creatures that are dead and creatures that are alive. The Final Hour will not come until every creature is dead before the phase of Resurrection. Allah spoke to us here about the sounding of the trumpet, for that sounding of the trumpet is what will kill everything that is living at that time.

The verb *nufikha* appears here in the passive case, which is the case where the subject of the verb is left unmentioned. The Prophetic Hadith has made it clear for us that the angel that will sound the trumpet (*soor*) will be Angel Israfeel *peace be upon him*.

The *soor* is a trumpet much like a bagpipe. Angel Israfeel *peace be upon him* will initiate a first blow that will kill off everything that is living. Everything will have to die first before they could be resurrected, just like all those who died before them right back to the time of Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah says: 'Every human being is bound to taste death.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 57)

Is it the first sound of the trumpet itself that kills everyone, or does the second sound of the trumpet itself bring the dead back to life? We say that it is not the sound of the trumpet itself that gives life or brings death, but the trumpet is the announcement from Allah, The One in whose hands the entire affair resides, that the act has begun: '...and all (creatures) that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will fall down senseless (*sa'iqā*).' (*az-Zumar*: 68)

The verb *sa'iqā* has two different meanings. The first definition has the meaning of perishing, such as in Allah's words: 'Hence, leave them alone until they face that promised day of their (death), when they will be struck down (*yus'aqoon*),' (*at-Tur*: 45) which means that they will perish.

The word *sa'iqā* also appears with the meaning of fainting and losing consciousness, like what happened to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when his Lord made Himself manifest to the mountain. When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* called on his Lord, he said: 'O my Lord! Show (Thyself) to me, so that I might behold Thee!' (Allah) said, 'Never canst thou see Me.' (*al-A'raf*: 143)

Allah *Glorified is He* is not saying here, 'I cannot be seen,' but rather, He is saying, 'Your current physical form will not allow you to see Me. Yet, circumstances

could change in such a way that would make it possible for you to see Me.’ Humankind has arrived at ways, means, and tools that enable them to see things that they would not normally be able to see. For example, we have all seen the power of devices such as spectacles, magnifying glasses, and telescopes. So, Allah *Glorified is He* is more capable of enabling you, one day, to see the things that you could not previously see.

Then, Allah says, completing the story of Prophet Musa (Moses): ‘However, behold this mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then – only then – wilt thou see Me.’ (*al-A’raf*: 143) Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to emphasise this matter to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not only with words, but also through an active event: ‘...And as soon as his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Musa (Moses) fell down in a swoon (*sa’iqa*).’ (*al-A’raf*: 143)

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, ‘If you lost consciousness simply by seeing the mountain to which the manifestation happened, then what would have happened to you if you saw The One Who manifests Himself.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are studying: ‘...unless they are from those whom Allah wills (to exempt).’ (*az-Zumar*: 68) Allah may prevent some of His creatures from falling down senseless at the sound of the trumpet. This may be for a limited period of time, since whoever is not killed by the first sounding of the trumpet will inevitably die later. The last creature to die will be the Angel of Death, when Allah *Glorified is He* will command him, ‘Die, O Angel of Death!’ Thereafter, life will become everlasting without end.

They say that Allah *Glorified is He* will exempt certain angels from falling down senseless, as these are the angels who are entrusted with the affairs of this world: Gabriel, Mika’il, ‘Azra’il and Israfeel *peace be upon them*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be one of those exempted from falling down senseless at the sound of the trumpet. It has been narrated in a Prophetic Hadith⁽¹⁾ that the sounding of the trumpet will take place and everyone will

(1) Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Do not say that I am better than Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for when everyone falls unconscious on the Day of=

perish, and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be the first to be resurrected. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will find Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* awake clinging to the Throne. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know whether Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had died along with everyone else but was resurrected beforehand, or whether Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had not fallen at all.

Therefore, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could be among those whom Allah *Glorified is He* exempted in the verse: ‘...unless they are from those whom Allah wills (to exempt).’ (*az-Zumar*: 68) Alternatively, he may have fallen but had been resurrected before everyone else.

Some of the scholars have explained that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* may be exempted because he had already fallen senseless in this world when Allah made Himself manifest to the mountain. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted that period of time he was senseless to be taken into account and made the time he was senseless on the Day of Rising shorter.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... And then it will sound again.’ (*az-Zumar*: 68) The trumpet will sound again for the resurrection. The first sound will kill off all living creatures, while the second sound will resurrect them and bring them out of their graves. Allah says: ‘...and (then) the trumpet (of resurrection) will be blown – and lo! Out of their graves towards their Lord will they all rush forth (*yansiloon*).’ (*Ya Sin*: 51) This is the image that Allah *Glorified is He* illustrated of the concept of resurrection. He said: ‘...And then it will sound again – and lo! Standing (before the Seat of Judgment), they will begin to see (the truth).’ (*az-Zumar*: 68)

The Arabic word *yansiloon* refers to the process of these bodies going apart after being together. This is like when we say to a tailor that the thread of a particular piece of fabric has unravelled, after having been closely knit together. This is a precise image and eloquent expression. It portrays the

= *Rising, I will be the first to be aware. And lo, there is Prophet Musa (Moses) standing beside the Throne. And I do not know whether Prophet Musa (Moses) was among those who fell unconscious but became aware before me, or whether he was among those whom Allah had exempted.* It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* (6517) in *Kitab Ar-Riqaq*.

circumstances in the grave when the dead are compacted under the earth together, after their quarrels and disputes when they were alive. An Arabic poet⁽¹⁾ expressed a similar concept when he said:

Perhaps a grave could become a grave many times over,
laughing at the crowding together of many opposites.⁽²⁾

When these people died, the earth closed upon them and cancelled the enmity and spite that existed between them. It purified their elements in a way that allowed them to merge together.

It is as if they were joyful at this reunion and this close association since it replaced the differences that had existed between them in this world. Then, when the trumpet is sounded for a second time, their meeting will break up and everyone will take a separate way once more. That is the meaning of the word *yansiloon* in the phrase: ‘...will they all rush forth (*yansiloon*).’ (*Ya Sin*: 51) Every single soul will be on its own, just as the tailor unravels a thread and removes it from its place in the fabric. This is because the Reckoning is a personal matter, with each person only taken to task for what they have done.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...they will begin to see (the truth).’ (*az-Zumar*: 68) They will have to wait and see what will happen to them, viewing all of the surrounding horrors with wide eyes. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, mentioning what they will say: ‘O our Lord! (Now) we have seen, and we have heard!’ (*as-Sajda*: 12)

The scholars said that this is the only verse in the Quran in which sight is mentioned before hearing. This is because when the people will be resurrected

(1) He is Abu Al-‘Ala’ Al-Ma‘arri, Ahmad ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Sulayman, a poet and philosopher who was born in 363 AH and died in 449 AH in Ma‘arrat An-Nu‘man at the age of 86. He started composing poetry when he was a lad of only 11 years. When he died, 84 poets stood by his graveside eulogizing him. He used to prohibit the hurting of animals and the eating of meat. He has a book titled *Luzum ma la yalzam* and *Siqt Az-Zanad*. (Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-shi‘riyya).

(2) The verse is from a poem by Abu Al-‘Ala’ Al-Ma‘arri, made up of 16 verses and composed in the *al-khafeef* metre. The poem starts with the verse:
They are not noble in my religion and my belief,
those who cry and wail at the grave, nor should any singer chant.

from their graves, they will be surrounded on every side by horrors and torments. In such circumstances, their sights will grasp the horrors before the hearing.

The horrors of the Day of Judgment will start with the sounding of the trumpet. The torments of the disbelievers will be more severe, and they will start to tremble and shake. Then, the first stages of Allah's Promise and Threat will be revealed to them, and they will know that everything they denied and rejected will be true as well. Those people had for so long denied the Resurrection and said: 'Shall we, indeed, be raised from the dead? And perhaps our forefathers of old (will be resurrected as well)?' (*as-Saffat*: 16-17)

Therefore, when they see that Allah *Glorified is He* spoke truthfully about the events of the Resurrection, they will realize that the Reckoning and its following punishment will also be true. 'So, woe to you, you disbelievers and deniers of the Reckoning. Then, Allah says:

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ وَجِئَ بِالشَّاهِدِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

The earth will shine with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; the prophets and wit-nesses will be brought in. Fair judgement will be given between them: they will not be wronged [69] and every soul will be repaid in full for what it has done. He knows best what they do [70]

(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 69 - 70)

These verses transport us to the world of the Hereafter, in which the earth shall be changed into another earth and the heavens into another heaven. In this world, we used to be illuminated by the light of the sun. However, when we will be transported to the Hereafter, the earth itself will shine with Allah's Light, as Allah says: 'And the earth will shine bright with its Lord's light.' (*az-Zumar*: 69) It is as if this light were an intrinsic part of it. There will be no sun to shine down upon it, but it will shine forth with its own luminance.

The Hereafter will be a world that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no mind has ever dreamt of. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and (they) will know therein neither (a burning) sun nor severe cold.' (*al-Insan*: 13) That is because this world works through means and secondary causes, as the sun

shines to light up the earth by day and the moon shines to light up the earth by night. However, in the Hereafter, we do not live through such means, but rather by a direct link to the Primary Causer, Allah *Glorified is He*. Everything will come to us directly without us having to work for it. We have no need there for a sun to give us light in the day or to cultivate the soil. We do not need a moon to give us light in the night.

Just as the earth is changed into another earth and the sky into another sky, we too will be changed into another form that is in harmony with the Hereafter. So you will eat without producing waste and will continue to live without growing old. When the earth shines brightly with the light of its Lord, you will see an ambient light with an undetected source. We have seen such lighting methods in modern times in this world, where lights are placed in a way that keeps the source of the light hidden, thus preventing the light from harming the eyes directly.

Allah has provided us with a metaphor for His illumination of the heavens and the earth in the chapter of *an-Nur*, when He says: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.’ (*an-Nur*: 35) This means that He illuminates them. In order to convey this meaning, Allah illustrated the example which we have all seen in our lives. He says: ‘...The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp.’ (*an-Nur*: 35) This verse does not describe how Allah’s actual light is. It is only a metaphor that is used to convey how Allah *Glorified is He* gives light to His creation, for none of us will be able to perceive the reality of His actual light.

A (*mishkat*) or niche is an opening in a wall that does not go all the way through; it is also called a (*kuwwa*). It still exists today in ancient traditional buildings. This niche is where a torch is placed. Some less educated people think that a (*mishkat*) is itself the lamp. The special thing about a niche is that it does not go all the way through the wall, and the amount of space inside of it is limited which means that the light of the lamp concentrates, masses inside of it and does not dissipate, thereby ensuring that all of the light goes to lighting up the room in which that niche is situated.

Then, that lamp is described as not simply being an ordinary lamp, but rather: ‘...the lamp is [enclosed] in glass...’ (*an-Nur*: 35). The glass purifies

the light of the lamp, and by preventing additional air from reaching it, it stops the creation of smoke which sullies the purity and clarity of the light.

Moreover, that glass is not of some ordinary type of glass, but rather: '...the glass [shining] like a radiant star...' (*an-Nur*: 35). A 'radiant star' is one which illuminates itself, which indicates that the light of this lamp is doubly bright.

Then, there is the fact that the oil with which the lamp is fuelled is not just any ordinary sort of oil, but rather, it is oil taken from a tree of moderate nature: '...[a lamp] lit from a blessed tree – an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west – the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light!...' (*an-Nur*: 35)

Some people object to this metaphor being used, saying, 'How can Allah use a niche containing a lamp to draw a metaphor for His light?' We say that the metaphor here is not a metaphor for Allah's light but rather a metaphor for the way He lights up the universe. The poet Abu Tamam⁽¹⁾ expressed this meaning when he said in praise of someone:

The bravery of 'Amr with the generosity of Hatim,

The forbearance of Ahnaf and the cleverness of Iyyas.⁽²⁾

Whereupon one of those who was sitting with the person praised objected, saying, 'How can you place the emir at the same level as these uncivilised Arabs? The emir is greater than you have described him.'

(1) Abu Tamam is Habib ibn Aws ibn Al-Harith, one of the princes of eloquence. He was born in Jasim, one of the villages of Hawaran in Syria in the year 188 AH, and then travelled to Egypt. He was tall and dark-skinned, eloquent and soft-spoken. He memorised 41 thousand (*rajaz*) poems, let alone all the other poems. His poetry was both strong and pure and he composed books including *Fuhul Ash-Shu'ara* and *Diwan Al-Hamasa*. (*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-shi'riyya*).

(2) As-Suli mentioned these verses in his book, 'Akhbar Abu Tamam' in the section on his relations with Ahmad Ibn Al-Mu'tasim. He was reciting this poem until when he reached this verse, Al-Kindi who was present at the time and wanted to criticize him, said, 'The emir is greater than you have described him. So he paused for a moment and then added the two verses that are coming up shortly.'

After pausing for a short while, Abu Tamam responded, saying:
Do not disapprove of me using those less than him,
to strike a stray metaphor for his courage and generosity.
for Allah uses for His light the least of things,
as a metaphor mentioning a niche and a lamp.⁽¹⁾

In this way, the True Lord provides mankind with the tangible light that protects their physical forms and preserves their abilities to work and move through life unhindered. If people move without light, they will bump into things around them. Bumping into things means that the strong one will crush the weak one underfoot (because they do not see or notice them). Therefore, we use dimmed lights over our walkways in the night to avoid clashing when we move around.

Since the True Lord has provided us with physical light to protect our physical forms from crushing other things or being crushed by them, then, He must also have provided us with spiritual light to protect our values, so that we do not crush others with injustice and so that we are not crushed through persecution. This light is the light of revelation and the Divine Law that brings the hearts to life and puts their spiritual movements in order as they make their way through life.

Just as the True Lord makes clear for us what physical light is, He also makes it clear for us what spiritual light is. He has advised us to get this light from the Houses of Allah. He says: 'In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of Allah, and from constancy in prayer, and from charity: [people] who are filled with fear [at the thought] of the Day on which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed.' (*an-Nur*: 36-37)

So, we should take the spiritual light from the houses of Allah where we meet our Lord *Glorified is He*. It is in those meetings that Allah grants you a

(1) These verses are from a poem of Abu Tamam made up of 24 verses composed in the (*Al-kamil*) metre and written in praise of the caliph, Al-Mu'tasim.

light from His light that fills up your heart, guides your limbs, and puts them right. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has explained to us that the light of values is higher than material light; this is proven by the fact that when a man is blind he can still walk and still do jobs in this world. But those who are lacking inner light or having blind hearts, as generally said, they cannot be guided to a correct path. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says at the conclusion of the verse: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth...’ (*an-Nur*: 35) ‘...light upon light! Allah guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided]...’ (*an-Nur*: 35).

Then, after the earth shines brightly with the light of its Lord, ‘...the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid bare...’ (*az-Zumar*: 69). Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* explains what this means and gives us more details, saying: ‘And the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid open; and thou wilt behold the guilty filled with dread at what [they see] therein; and they will exclaim: “Oh, woe unto us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account!” For they will find all that they ever wrought [now] facing them, and [will know that] thy Lord does not wrong anyone.’ (*al-Kahf*: 49)

This way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us the details of what He mentions in general terms when He says: ‘...the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid bare...’ (*az-Zumar*: 69). It is well known that the meaning of many verses of the Quran is explained in other verses of the Quran. The book or record that is described here is the book of actions that is specific to each individual human being and which a person does not share with anyone else; it is also mentioned in the verse: ‘And [for] every person We have imposed his fate upon his neck, and We will produce for him on the Day of Resurrection a record which he will encounter spread open [It will be said], “Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant.”’ (*al-Isra*: 13-14)

This book that enumerates all of your actions is a truthful record, since the one who writes it down is the angel that is assigned to you: ‘...noble, recording, aware of whatever you do!’ (*al-Infitar*: 11-12) Allah also says: ‘...not even a word can he utter but there is a watcher with him, ever present.’ (*Qaf*: 18)

This book is not just a verbal knowledge of Allah, since Allah's knowledge is His Speech, but rather, it is also a book that it is written down and read out. It is read out to its owner and shown to him so that one can see all of his good actions and bad actions laid out before him. It is for that reason that when the evildoers see their books, they start to tremble out of fear since all their wrong actions are counted out for them, with no major or minor wrong actions being left out. In that moment, they have no option but to wail and burst into loud laments.

Then, after everyone has taken hold of their books, Allah will bring forth the Messengers: '... and all the Prophets will be brought forward, and all [other] witnesses...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 69). He brings them forth so that each Messenger can bear witness that he has conveyed the Message to his people, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the day when Allah shall assemble all the apostles and shall ask, "What response did you receive?"' (*al-Ma'ida*: 109)

Then, after the Messengers have borne witness, the witnesses bear witness. These witnesses are those who held on to the divine knowledge after the Messengers had gone. This is mentioned in the prophetic Hadith: 'This knowledge will be borne in every generation by its most just and trustworthy people: they will keep away from it the distortions of the people of excess, the presumptions of those who speak idly and the interpretations of the ignorant.'⁽¹⁾

These scholars also bear witness that they conveyed it to others. It is for that reason that the ummah of Muhammad is characterised by its scholars, for it is they who carry forward Muhammad's Message. That is why we have the advantage over other people when it comes to this matter.

The martyrs who were killed in wars in the way of Allah also bear witness⁽²⁾ thanks to the position that Allah has granted them. They obtained such a rank

(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bazzar in his Musnad. See Kashf Al-Astar 'Az-Zawa'id Al-Bazzar of Al-Haythami (1/86) Hadith (143). Al-Bazzar said: 'The Hadiths of Khalid ibn 'Amr are munkar, for he used to narrate Hadiths that were not corroborated and this is one such Hadith.'* Al-Haythami mentioned it in *Mujma' Az-Zawa'id (1/140)* and said: 'It contains Khalid ibn 'Amr Al-Qurashi who was classed as a liar by Yahya ibn Mu'in and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. This Hadith is ascribed to Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him and Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him, although Al-'Uqayli narrated it in *Ad-Du'afa' Al-Kabir (1/9)* in his introduction to it as being a Hadith of Abu Umama Allah be pleased with him.'

(2) *The fact that the Sheikh said 'also' here indicates his perspicacity and great knowledge, for there are scholars of Tafsir who when it comes to interpreting the word 'witnesses', =*

based on martyrdom. It is enough for a martyr that he enters the battle knowing that he will be killed if he is defeated. He fights for either victory or martyrdom. He knows his life is the price, so if he had not had full confidence that the reward promised to him by Allah will come about, he would not have gone out to war.

That is why Allah says about martyrs: 'But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah's cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Lord have they their sustenance.' (*Al-Imran*: 169) It is astonishing that some people say in disbelief, 'Does that mean that if we were to take a martyr out of his grave, we would find him alive?!' We say, 'Read the verse and reflect on its meaning: Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...they are alive! With their Lord...' (*Al-Imran*: 169) not 'alive with you;' this is proven by the fact that, Allah mentions the substance with which life is preserved, saying: '...have they their sustenance...' (*Al-Imran*: 169). That is because when the martyr sacrifices his life, his Lord guarantees him another life which is better, greater and more lasting than the one he had in this world. Thus, a poet⁽¹⁾ said concerning Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* the lord of all the martyrs:

O Hamza, uncle of the chosen one, you are master

of all the martyrs of the earth, every last one of them.

= *confine themselves to saying that they are the angels who record each person's actions, like Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (4/64); and there are scholars of tafsir who mention a number of different opinions, like Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (8/5928) who mentioned three different contradictory opinions:*

(a) That they are those who bore witness to other nations from the nation of Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*). Allah says: 'And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind...' (*al-Baqara*: 143).

(b) That they are those who were martyred in the way of Allah, and then on the Day of Judgment, they will bear witness on behalf of those who defended Allah's religion. This is what As-Suddi said.

(c) They are the recording angels who bear witness to the actions people have done. As for Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi, he took the position that all of these groups bear witness, thereby seeing the different opinions as supporting each other and not contradictory ('Adil Abu Al-Ma'ati).

(1) This verse is composed by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi himself.

That martyrdom is itself enough for you as a defence

Against death, since it links one life immediately to another.

The meaning is that you gave your life and sacrificed it, and by means of that protected yourself from death, since immediately after dying you became alive, thereby linking your life in this world directly to your life in the Hereafter. By giving your life, your life became continuous.

This is not the end point of the testimony against a human being on the Day of Judgement. After the angels have born witness against you by means of the book they have written down, and after the Prophets and other witnesses have given their testimony, the testimony moves over to you and your own body. There is a gradual progression at testimony here: from the angels, which are of a separate species, to the prophets and martyrs, who are of your own species, to your own limbs and organs, which are parts of yourself: ‘On that Day We shall set a seal on their mouths – but their hands will speak unto Us, and their feet will bear witness to whatever they have earned [in life].’ (*Ya Sin*: 65) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘...on the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!’ (*an-Nur*: 24) As well, Allah says: ‘...till, when they come close to it, their hearing and their sight and their [very] skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing [on earth]. And they will ask their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?” – [and] these will reply: “Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]: for He [it is who] has created you in the first instance – and unto Him you are [now] brought back.”’ (*Fussilat*: 20-21)

But, how can one’s limbs and organs bear witness against their owner, while they were the instruments by which the actions were done in this world? The tongue was speaking, the hand was hitting, the foot was walking...etc. Scholars say that is because Allah *Glorified is He* created those organs and limbs for a human being and made them subject to his will, commanding them to obey him and do everything he requires. So, the tongue is compelled to serve its owner; if he wants to say, ‘There is no deity but Allah’, it says it, and if it wants to utter the words of unbelief it utters them. The same is true of all the other limbs and organs.

So, during the lifetime of a person in this world, the limbs are under the authority of the human being who has been granted the freedom of choice, and they follow his will completely. Then, when we are resurrected and presented before The Creator, this will is dissolved and taken away, for there will be no one who has will except for Allah: ‘...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir*: 16) On that day, the organs and limbs will be released and take on their role of being truthful witnesses.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and judgment will be passed on them all in justice. And they will not be wronged,’ (*az-Zumar*: 69) i.e. Allah judges between the people, all those present and all created beings. The One Who judges is Allah. Then, it is a judgement based on truth and justice, with no one being treated unjustly. For no one on that day has any will, nor does anyone have any judgement or caprice. The entire affair is in Allah’s hand and Allah alone. It is up to Him to allow the wronged to retaliate against those who wronged them, or to satisfy the wronged and have them pardon those who wronged them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever [good or evil] he has done: and He is fully aware of all that they do.’ (*az-Zumar*: 70) That is, He will recompense them fairly for their actions: whoever does good will be abundantly rewarded, and whoever does evil will be severely punished.

When they came upon this verse, the orientalist raised objections to it, accusing it of having inconsistent context. They claimed that, in their view, the verse should use the word (*ya ‘malun*) and not (*yaf‘alun*) for ‘all that they do’ since ‘he has done’ used the verb (‘*amilat*). But they only say that because they do not understand the difference between (*fi‘l*) and (‘*amal*). A (*fi‘l*), ‘a deed’, is the opposite of speech, and it is only the tongue that has the function of saying words, all of the other limbs and organs act: the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand strikes, the foot walks...etc.

Every limb or organ has its function and each of those functions is called a (*fi‘l*). But as for the word (‘*amal*), it encompasses both saying and doing,

each of them may be termed as an ('amal). And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have attained to faith! Why do you say one thing and do another?' (*as-Saff*: 2)

But why is the verb pertaining to tongue action (*ya'malun*) mentioned in half of the verse while the other half of the verb used the verb (*yaf'alun*) pertaining to deeds of limbs and organs? Because, scholars say, speech is the means for conveying the message and preaching; thus, the tongue is considered the master of all the other limbs.

Then, what is the result of this repayment in full for actions? The result of this repayment in full for actions is that every self will get exactly what is merited by its actions in this world. That is why, after this repayment will have been made in full and the reckoning will have been completed, the people of belief will be driven to paradise and the people of disbelief will be driven to the fire.

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَتَحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ
لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ
لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

Those who rejected the Truth will be led to Hell in their throngs. When they arrive, its gates will open and its keepers will say to them, 'Were you not sent your own messengers to recite the revelations of your Lord to you and warn you that you would meet this Day?' and they will say, 'Yes indeed we were.' But the sentence of punishment will have been passed against those who rejected the truth [71] (The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 71)

We notice here that the verb (*seeqa*) '...will be urged on...' is in the passive voice, while in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And every soul cometh, along with it a driver and a witness.' (*Qaf*: 21) Who is the (*sa'iq*), the 'driver', in this verse? Scholars reply that it is the angels, driving the people of the fire to hell; we seek refuge in Allah. The (*sa'iq*) is the one who urges on those who are driven in order to make them go faster, like a horse rider who scolds and urges on his horse to go more quickly. The angels

do exactly the same thing to the evildoers, driving them hard and urging them on in order to get them to get to hell faster.

This indicates that the angels are furious with them, hate them, and are seriously annoyed with how they acted and what they did when they were in this world. Therefore, these angels are pushing them towards their just repayment in hell, without leniency or mercy. Have you seen what police officers do when they get their hands on a criminal? They beat him, punish him, and treat him with contempt because he is a bad egg in society and everyone wants to be rid of him. It is well known that the angels are honoured slaves who do not disobey Allah in any of His commands and do what they are commanded to do.

The Quran also depicts these events in another verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...on the Day when they shall be thrust into the fire with [an irresistible] thrust, [and will be told:]’ (*at-Tur*: 13) that is, they drive them towards fire and push them into it against their will.

As for the word (*zumar*) (throngs), it means ‘groups’; those who go against the orders of Allah will be sorted into groups based on their type of disobedience: one group will be those who abandon the prayer, another will be those who refuse to pay *zakat* (alms due), another will be those who partake in usury. Similarly, tyrants, (those who deal in) bribes, thieves, fornicators and embezzlers will be set in groups. Each wrongdoer will be grouped together with those guilty of the same crimes as him, with their leaders and instigators going into the fire first. Allah indicates that when He says: ‘One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams:...”’ (*al-Isra*’: 71) ‘...and thereupon We shall, indeed, draw forth from every group [of sinners] the ones that had been most determined in their disdainful rebellion against The Most Gracious.’ (*Maryam*: 69) As well, Allah *Glorified is He* says with regard to Pharaoh: ‘[And so] he shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, having led them [in this world] towards the fire [of the life to come]; and vile was the destination towards which they were led.’ (*Hud*: 98)

The fact that the leaders of misguidance and the worst of the unbelievers precede their followers in entering into the fire is to remove any last vestiges of hope the followers might have of being rescued. If followers enter into the

hellfire and do not find their leaders there, they may find hope that those leaders would come and save them. But what actually happens is that they go in and find those they followed and took as their example in misguidance having already preceded them into the hellfire.

Then, when they come to the gates of hellfire, the gates are opened up for them: ‘...till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71). That is because the gate of anger is not kept open (like the doors of a hotel), but rather is kept locked and is only opened for emergencies, unlike the gate of mercy which is always left open. This is part of Allah’s mercy since His mercy always precedes His anger.⁽¹⁾

This ending for the inhabitants of the fire has been written for them; Allah *Glorified is He* has known about it from the very beginning of life. Read, if you will, Allah’s words: ‘When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave; and of those [that are gathered together], some will be wretched and some, happy. Now as for those who [by their deeds] will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, [they shall live] in the fire, where they will have [nothing but] moans and sobs [to relieve their pain], therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise: for, verily, thy Lord is a sovereign doer of whatever He wills. But as for those who [by virtue of their past deeds] will have been blest with happiness, [they shall live] in paradise, therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise – as a gift unceasing.’ (*Hud*: 105-108)

Firstly, in order to understand this verse, you must first understand what is meant by (*khulud*) (eternal staying). (*Khulud*) is a long stay, and this stay is called (*khulud*) because it has a beginning but does not have an end. The verses here are speaking about those who are happy, namely the inhabitants of paradise, and those who are wretched, namely the inhabitants of the fire. But

(1) From Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘When Allah decreed creation, He wrote in His Book that is with Him above the Throne, “My mercy overcomes My anger.”’ It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3194, 7404 & 7422); and by Muslim in his Sahih (2751) in Kitab At-Tawba.

the True Lord *Glorified is He* excludes some people from each group; those excluded will have the period of their stays reduced. How is that?

After an unbeliever has been judged and driven to the fire, its gates are thrown open to admit him, and he remains there for a full eternity, from the beginning of that life endlessly. Similarly, a believer who is a recipient of Allah's mercy, after he has been judged, is driven to paradise and remains therein for a full eternity, from the beginning of that life endlessly.

But as for those who are excluded, they are disobedient believers who never repent for their wrong actions or who repent, but their repentance is not accepted. Such people must inevitably be repaid for those wrong actions and be subjected to the scorching flames of the fire; we seek refuge in Allah. That is what happens in the beginning; they enter the fire for as long as Allah wills them to be there, then they will be taken out of the fire and entered into paradise. Thereby, the period of eternity they spend in paradise is shorter than that of their fellow believers. Here, the reduction is in the beginning. Likewise, their period of eternity in the fire is also shorter than that of the inhabitants of the fire who are due to be there forever.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and its keepers will ask them ...' (*az-Zumar: 71*), i.e. the keepers of the fire will say to them in order to chastise and rebuke them: '...Have there not come to you apostles from among yourselves, who conveyed to you your Lord's messages and warned you of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]?...' (*az-Zumar: 71*) This question establishes the proof against them and silences all their arguments. Their Lord did not take them unawares, but rather sent messengers to warn them. The messengers were '...from among yourselves...' (*az-Zumar: 71*). They were from your own species, from among the best of you and the closest to you so that it would be easy for you to follow them.

Moreover, these messengers were supported with proof and evidence, and brought forward promises and threats. Therefore, the disbelievers will be unable to deny that: '...They will answer: "Yea, indeed!"...' (*az-Zumar: 71*) It means: 'That indeed happened.' They will themselves admit to their lack of evidence and that Allah did send them messengers who warned them about the coming of this Day.

So, the warnings which come to people in their lifetimes, about the affairs of this worldly life and affairs that will take place in the hereafter are signs of the perfect and complete mercy of Allah to His creation. Do you not see that when you help show your son what the consequences of negligence will be and make him afraid of failing at the end of the school year, you are in fact helping him to revise and work hard to avoid such a bad outcome which might afflict him all of a sudden?

In this regard, orientalists have raised objections to Allah's words in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*. They say, 'The blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions in the verses: 'He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? [He is] the Lord of the two farthest points of sunrise, and the Lord of the two farthest points of sunset. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they might meet: [yet] between them is a barrier which they may not transgress. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? Out of these two [bodies of water] come forth pearls, both great and small. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman*: 14-25) Are all blessings that merit Allah saying about them: 'Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman*: 25) But what blessing is there to be found in Allah's Words: 'A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman*: 35-36)

Indeed, warning about some evil before it comes about and telling people about it before taking place is a blessing. Quietly, it is one of the greatest blessings man can hope for in order to keep his affairs in order. The only reason for threats, warnings, raising awareness, and making afraid is so that we can take care to avoid the frightening thing and not become involved in it.

Then, Allah says: '...But the sentence of suffering will [already] have fallen due upon the deniers of the truth,' (*az-Zumar*: 71) i.e. it is due for them despite all the warnings and threats they received. The sentence that will

come true is Allah's words: '...most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!' (*as-Sajda*: 13) Then, what are you expecting to happen after that? It is quite astonishing that by our own failed choices, we do nothing more than help destiny and pave the way for it to come to pass.

A *kalima* (literally word, term, sentence, or speech) is a single utterance that conveys only the intrinsic meaning of the word used and not a meaning linked to any other word. So, for example, if you say, 'the sky', that does not convey a complete meaning that it would be appropriate to stop at. But when you say, 'The sky is clear', you express a complete meaning that is appropriate to stop at. However, scholars also say that a single word can sometimes convey a meaning. For example, if someone asks you who is with you and you replied, 'Zayd,' this single word conveys the meaning, 'Zayd is with me.' But if the words 'is with me' were not intrinsically understood, the single word 'Zayd' would not convey the complete meaning. So, a word does not convey a complete meaning where it would be appropriate to stop at unless it is linked to other words.

Arab grammarians made this point clear when they divided words up into three types: nouns, verbs and particles, and called each of them a 'word'. The difference between them is that a noun indicates an independent meaning that can be understood on its own; a verb also can indicate a meaning of its own, but it is connected to a time or time is part of it. For instance, the verb *akala* (ate) means that an action of eating took place in the past; the same is true for 'eats' in the present, and the imperative 'Eat!' in the future. As for particles, they do not convey an independent meaning that can be understood on its own, but they must always be linked to another word for their meaning to be understood.

Moreover, the word *kalima* also means a speech or a talk. For example, you can say, 'I gave a '*kalima*' at the party' meaning that you gave a talk. The Quran uses the word *kalima* (word) with that meaning when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 100) for the meaning of 'word' here is: '...O my Lord! Let me return, let me return [to life], so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed [a foretime]!...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 99-100)

Similarly, in the verse in question: ‘...But the sentence of suffering will [already] have fallen due upon the deniers of the truth,’ (*az-Zumar*: 71) with the ‘sentence’ (translated here for the word *Kalima* (word)) being: ‘...Most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!’ (*as-Sajda*: 13)

قِيلَ ادْخُلُوا ابْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا فَبِئْسَ مَوْىِ الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

**It will be said, ‘Enter the gates of Hell: there you will remain. How evil is the abode of the arrogant!’ [72]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 72)**

The word (*bi’sa*) (how vile) is used for expressing censure against something, which, here, is: ‘...an abode for those who were given to false pride!’ (*az-Zumar*: 72) That is, their place of residence and final destination. They are described, in particular, as being arrogant here, since they would not have come to such a despised end if it had not been for their arrogance. But who did they act arrogantly towards? They acted arrogantly towards their Lord and Creator. It is quite astonishing that the first arrogance displayed by the human being is against his Creator, the One Who created him from nothing and provided sustenance for him from nothing.

We notice in this verse one of the manifestations of Allah’s mercy even towards the unbelievers. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is opening a door of hope for them, giving them the hope of salvation, and indicating that they still had the possibility of repenting. No matter what they do, this door remains open. We understand that from Allah’s words: ‘...therein to abide!...’ (*az-Zumar*: 72) Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, ‘forever’ here, as He did, for example, in the verse: ‘...Now as for him who rebels against Allah and His Apostle – verily, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide beyond the count of time.’ (*al-Jinn*: 23)

When the scholars counted the number of times the word indicating eternal abide (*abadan*) is used in connection to the unbelievers, they found it only in two verses: one is the verse (65) in the chapter of *al-Ahzab* and the second is the verse 23 in the chapter of *al-Jinn*. So, the word (*abadan*) is

mentioned in some verses and left out in others. This entices those who have not yet reached the truth that will save them so that they will change, save themselves and return to the Straight Path. But when the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about paradise, we find the words 'therein to abide' are usually linked with the word (*abadan*), 'forever'.

We also notice that Allah says: '...enter the gates of hell...' (*az-Zumar: 72*) and did not say, 'Enter hell!' What is the difference between the two expressions? '...enter the gates of hell...' (*az-Zumar: 72*) indicates that the punishment rushes to meet them as soon as they enter; it is waiting to receive them at the gates.

After that, the context moves to the other party, the inhabitants of paradise. But why did Allah start with the inhabitants of the fire, saying: 'And those who were bent on denying the truth will be urged on in throngs towards hell...' (*az-Zumar: 71*).

Scholars say that unbelievers are mentioned first because they reject and deny the Resurrection and Reckoning. Therefore, they are pushed first to suffer punishment and distress in a state of surprise. On the contrary, the Allah-fearing believers have been certain about that Day, and believe in the Reckoning and Judgement that will take place there. Moreover, the conclusion with the promise and good news gives feeling of rejoicing and it is a happy conclusion.

Then Allah says:

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ
 أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

Those who were mindful of their Lord will be led in throngs to the Garden. When they arrive, they will find its gates wide open, and its keepers will say to them, 'Peace be upon you. You have been good. Come in: you are here to stay' [73]
 (The Quran, *az-Zumar: 73*)

Here also, the angels drive the believers forward. But there is a difference between the way the unbelievers are driven and the way the Allah-fearing are

driven, for the unbelievers are driven harshly and forcibly by the angels in order to hurry them to the punishment. But as for the Allah-fearing, they are driven in the manner that a lover drives his beloved on in order to help them get to the blessings of paradise all the more quickly.

The word *zumar* (throngs) means ‘groups’. The believers are also sorted into independent groups: a group of the ascetics, another of the scholars, a third of the Mujahedeen and fourth of the honest. ‘...till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open...’ (*az-Zumar*: 73). In the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened’ (*futihat*), whereas here He says: ‘...till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open...’ (*wa futihat*). Scholars say that, with respect to the inhabitants of the fire, (*futihat*) is the main clause (result) of the conditional (when they reach it) (here ‘when’ is used in place of ‘if’), whereas (*wa futihat*) is not the main clause (result) of a conditional clause; the result clause comes later when the blessings are mentioned. That is because the goal is not the opening of the gates, but rather, it is the blessings that follow.

The letter *waw* (equals the particle ‘and’) here is a particle of conjunction, and the phrase: ‘...its gates wide-open...’ (*az-Zumar*: 73) is conjoined to the sentence: ‘... till, when they reach it...’ (*az-Zumar*: 73). That is because the believers did not doubt that this Day was to come. But as for the unbelievers, they did have doubts about it. Therefore, ‘...its gates will be opened...’ (*az-Zumar*: 71) is made the result clause for the conditional clause that came before it.

But as for the Allah-fearing, the result clause of their conditional clause is something more exalted than the gates simply being opened for them; for them, opening the paradise gates is just the beginning of the mercy entries that are to be mentioned later and their elements that make them up, as well as how they gradually increase, starting with the angels greeting them: ‘...and its keepers will say unto them, “Peace be upon you! You have done well,”’ (*az-Zumar*: 73) since you purified yourselves from the dirt of wrong action and associating other idols with Allah: ‘...enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide!’ (*az-Zumar*: 73) This continues to the end of the chapter, whereby they see the angels circling the Throne. That is the result clause of the conditional that befits them.

Another group of scholars⁽¹⁾ said that (*wa futihat*) is the result clause of the conditional clause and that the letter *waw* here is one that is called a 'waw of eight'. But what is meant by a 'waw of eight'? The Arabs considered the number (seven) to be the upper limit for numbers; whenever a number came that was above seven, they consider it to be the start of a new sentence and place the conjunction letter *waw* (and) before it. An example of that is found in the verses in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: '[And in times to come] some will say, "[They were] three, the fourth of them being their dog," while others will say, "Five, with their dog as the sixth of them" – idly guessing at something of which they can have no knowledge – and [so on, until] some will say, "[They were] seven, the eighth of them being their dog."...' (*al-Kahf*: 22) Thus, the letter *waw* is added before the number eight.

Another example of that is found in Allah's words: '[It is a triumph of] those who turn [unto Allah] in repentance [whenever they have sinned], and who worship and praise [Him], and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance], and bow down [before Him] and prostrate themselves in adoration, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and keep to the bounds set by Allah. And give thou [O Prophet] the glad tiding [of Allah's promise] to all believers.' (*at-Tawba*: 112) The word (*an-nahun*), 'forbid the doing of what is wrong', is the eighth word in order of these types of the righteous men, and so is preceded by the letter (*waw*).

Some scholars also say that another example of that is found in Allah's words in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*: '[O wives of the Prophet!] Were he to divorce

(1) This was said by Abu Bakr ibn 'Iyyash according to what has been narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* (8/5931). Then Al-Qurtubi said, 'Those who said that there are eight gates to paradise used this as proof, mentioning the Hadith of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him who said that the Messenger Muhammad said: whoever performs ablution, doing it thoroughly, and then says, 'I bear witness that there is no Allah but Allah and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger', shall have the eight gates to paradise opened up for him, with him being able to enter from whichever gate he wishes.' It is narrated by Muslim and others. At-Tirmidhi also narrated this Hadith of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him with the wording, 'of the gates of paradise, eight will be opened up for him on the Day of Rising', with the addition of the particle (*min*), which indicates that the gates of paradise number more than eight. We have mentioned that in the book, 'At-Tadhkira' with the total number of gates reaching thirteen.

[any of] you, his Lord might well give him in your stead spouses better than you – women who surrender themselves unto Allah, who truly believe, devoutly obey His will, turn [unto Him] in repentance [whenever they have sinned], worship [Him alone], and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance] – be they women previously married or virgins.’ (*at-Tahrim*: 5)

Yes, the word (*abkaran*), ‘virgins’, here is the eighth word, but the letter *waw* here is used to separate between these two types of women, for previously married women can never be virgins. So, this verse may not be used as a proof for this matter. It is only the verses in the chapter of *al-Kahf* and the chapter of *at-Tawba* that may be used as proof that seven is the upper limit for numbers among the Arabs. The same is true with respect to the number ‘a thousand’.

Therefore, when the daughter of Khosrau⁽¹⁾ was taken prisoner and went to ransom herself, the people asked the one in whose portion of the booty she fell, ‘How much do you want for her?’ He replied, ‘A thousand dinars.’ They said to him, ‘But she is the daughter of Khosrau!’ meaning that it was possible for him to ask for more than that amount of money. So, he said, ‘By Allah, if I had known of a number greater than one thousand, I would have said it!’

But, we ourselves do not suggest this view, for the phrase (*wa futihat*) is not the result clause of the conditional clause here; the result clause with respect to the believers who are Allah-fearing is something far more exalted than the gates being opened for them, far more exalted than the angels saying to them: ‘...Peace be upon you...’ (*az-Zumar*: 73) and far more exalted than saying to them: ‘...Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide’ (*az-Zumar*: 73) for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that: ‘And thou wilt see the angels surrounding the throne of [Allah’s] Almightyness, extolling their Lord’s Glory and Praise...’ (*az-Zumar*: 75). His mentioning the Throne and the angels circling around it glorifying their Lord and singing His praises indicate the ultimate blessings that the Allah-fearing believers will receive. They will see the True Lord who is on the Throne and that is the supreme goal that merits being a result clause to the conditional clause mentioned earlier.

(1) *The story of paying the ransom for the daughter of Khosrau*

But why does Allah conceal the result clause for the conditional this way? Because, scholars say, if He said here: ‘(their blessing is) what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what has never crossed anyone’s mind’⁽¹⁾, it would have been something that our ears had heard. But Allah *Glorified is He* wants it to come as a surprise for us by being something that none of us had ever conceived. In other words, it is something that had never once crossed our minds. For example, when it comes to the fruits of paradise, the fruits I knew in this world, such as the apple or mango, are brought about to me; if I were to be given some new fruit that I did not know about in this world, I could have said, ‘Were these fruits to have been in the world, it would have looked and tasted just like this.’ That is why the fruits in paradise will be in the superficial form of the fruits that I know about in this world, but with different characteristics, which conform to the description: no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived.

So, its superiority comes from their being in paradise. Then, when the fruits which no eye had seen, no ear had heard, and no mind had thought of, come to me once, how about when it comes to me the second time? For, on the second occasion, I would have inevitably seen it before and thought of it before. When I see a mango, for example, I might say, ‘I ate that before!’

But that is not the case, scholars say, for when it comes to you the second time, it will come to you in a different form with another colour and another taste different to the one you ate the first time. Thus, it will come true that all the blessings that come to you in paradise will be blessings that no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has thought of.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as their appointed sustenance, they will say, “It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!” – for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]...’ (*al-Baqara*: 25).

(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2824); Ahmad in his Musnad (2/466); and Abu Nu‘aym in Al-Hilya (2/262) in a Hadith by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَبَوْا
 مِنَ الْجَنَّۃِ حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَمَلِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

And they will say, ‘Praise be to God who has kept His promise to us and given us this land as our own. Now we may live wherever we please in the Garden.’ How excellent is the reward of those who labour! [74]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 74)

Their saying: ‘...All praise is due to Allah...’ (*az-Zumar*: 74) is it praise to Allah because He made His promise come true, or is it because Allah gave you the success to affirm as true the promise He made to you? The meaning is, ‘Praise be to Allah who made us worthy of having His promise made true so that we could then affirm it as true.’ Otherwise, Allah’s promise is always true and truthful.

In ‘...and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion...’ (*az-Zumar*: 74), the word *irth* (literally means inheritance, translated as ‘portion’) here has a different meaning to the one we all know for it of inheriting from someone after their death. For the thing that is inherited here is paradise, as clarified by Allah in another verse: ‘...And [a voice] will call out unto them: “This is the paradise which you have inherited by virtue of your past deeds!”’ (*al-A‘raf*: 43)

That is clearly shown, as we said before, by the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed in the time before time that He was going to create creation, leaving them to make their own choices in certain things while compelling them in other matters so that they would always remain, despite themselves, in one aspect of their lives slaves to Him, and in another aspect of their lives slaves to the choices they make.

If they take Allah’s side and give preference to what He wants over the free choices He assigned them, they are victorious and obtain the position of servitude to Allah (*‘ubudiyya*); when they do that, they become better than the angels, since the angels are obedient by nature, while mankind is given free choice and then chooses to either obey or disobey. If man obeys Allah, he has the right to rise up even above the angels.

That is why Satan (Iblis) rose up above the angels before he disobeyed Allah. He used to be called the peacock of the angels (i.e. the best of them) since he was a being created with freedom of choice, in addition that he obeyed Allah just as the angels obeyed. Therefore, he had a quality that made him superior to them, until of course he finally slipped up and was expelled and cast out from the mercy of Allah.

We say that since Allah created the human beings and granted them with the free will either to obey or to disobey, He *Glorified is He* prepared a place of reward for each of them in paradise on the basis that they may all be believers and obey His orders. Likewise, He prepared a place in the fire for each of them in case they all may disobey. So, when the inhabitants of the fire enter into the fire, their places in paradise are left empty. Then, what about those places? They are taken by the inhabitants of paradise, or, in other words, they will inherit these places, just as the Quran says.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!...’ (*az-Zumar*: 74) We say that the meaning of *tabawwa’a* (translated in this verse as ‘dwell’) in a place is to settle in it. An example of the word being used in that way is found in the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*: ‘And thus We established Joseph securely in the land [of Egypt]: he had full mastery over it, [doing] whatever he willed...’ (*Yusuf*: 56). The meaning is to settle in and live in, but it is not something that is done with force with everyone going wherever they want to go, nor is there any transgression against anyone else’s rights. No, the meaning is that each of us will dwell and live in his own garden, not in someone else’s garden. There is a proof here that in fact each person’s personal paradise is a wide expanse. ‘...And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured [in Allah’s way]!’ (*az-Zumar*: 74): the word *ni‘ma* (how excellent) is used for things that are praiseworthy, referring to the huge compensation they get in exchange for all their right actions.

وَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةُ حَافِيَةً مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ
وَفُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

**You [Prophet] will see the angels surrounding the Throne,
glorifying their Lord with praise. True judgement will
have been passed between them, and it will be said,
‘Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds’ [75]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar*: 75)**

His saying: ‘... surrounding the throne of [Allah’s] almightiness ...’ (*az-Zumar*: 75) means that they circle around it: ‘...extolling their Lord’s glory and praise...’ (*az-Zumar*: 75). They have no job but to glorify their Lord and sing His praises. ‘...And judgment will have been passed in justice on all [who had lived and died]...’ (*az-Zumar*: 75) i.e. Allah will judge between them. But who are those that Allah will judge between? They are the angels, for there are different categories of them: there are the high class angels who are besotted with the mightiness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* and they know nothing about our world nor about Adam and his descendants. There are also angels who are charged with serving mankind; they are called the guardian angels about whom Allah says: ‘...he has hosts of helpers – both such as can be perceived by him and such as are hidden from him – that could preserve him from whatever Allah may have willed...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 11). It is these angels whom Allah commanded to prostrate to Adam, not all of the angels. It is as if this prostration was an indication of their subjugation and obedience to this created being whom they were going to serve.

Then, there are the noble recording angels: ‘and yet, verily, there are ever-watchful forces over you, noble, recording, aware of whatever you do!’ (*al-Infitar*: 10-12)

The meaning of: ‘...And judgment will have been passed in justice on all [who had lived and died]...’ (*az-Zumar*: 75) is that each of them will get the place and the reward he deserves.

And ‘...the word will be spoken: “All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of All the worlds!”’ (*az-Zumar*: 75) Who is it who says this? Some scholars say⁽¹⁾ that it is the believers from among the human race who say this; others say⁽²⁾ that it is all of creation who says this; and others say that it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who says this, being an example of Allah praising Himself, just as He bears witness to Himself when He says: ‘...that there is no deity save Him...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 18).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* praises Himself being the Lord of all the worlds. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said in a Hadith: ‘...We pay you the countless praise that is duly dedicated to you: The due praise You are worthy of is known and is estimated by none but yourself.’⁽³⁾ This is praise paid to Allah by Himself. O Allah, make us always be among those who say, ‘Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.’

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- (1) *Al-Qurtubi* said this in his *Tafsir* (8/5933), saying, ‘That is to say, the believers say, “Praise be to Allah for all the blessings He has rewarded us with, the kindness He has shown us and the victory He has given us over those who maltreated us.” It is also said that the statement is made by the angels, and we take that view, then this is them praising Him for His justice and true judgement.’
 - (2) *Ibn Kathir* said this in his *Tafsir* (4/69), saying, ‘That is to say, the whole of existence utter these words, those who have been granted the gift of speech and dumb animals alike, all saying that praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds for His perfect judgement and His justice. And that is the reason the statement is not ascribed to any particular speaker but rather is left general and unspecified. That indicates that all of creation bore witness to the fact that praise is due to Him.’
 - (3) It is narrated by *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* (6/58 & 120); as well as by *Muslim* in his *Sahih* (486): in a Hadith from ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her in which she said, ‘I noticed the Messenger of Allah was absent from the bed one night so I looked around for him and my hand fell on the bottom of his feet which were both upright as he was in prostration, saying, ‘O Allah, I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your displeasure, and in Your pardon from Your punishment. I seek refuge in You from You. I pay you the countless praise that is duly dedicated to you: The due praise You are worthy of is known and is estimated by none but yourself.’

the chapter of

Ghafir

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

The chapter of *Ghafir*⁽¹⁾ (The Believer):



Ha Mim [1] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 1)

This is the first of the chapters named collectively (*al-Hawamim*) meaning ‘those chapters which begin with Allah’s saying: ‘*Ha Mim*’. (*Hawamim*) is the plural of *Ha Mim*. It is, however, not formed in accordance to the rules for plurals, and it would be more correct to say ‘*al HaMim*’. The letters *Ha Mim* are from the isolated letters (*al-huruf al-muqatta’a*) that are found at the

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- (1) The chapter of *Ghafir* is also known as the chapter of *al-Mu’min* in honour of the believer of the people of Pharaoh mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘At that, a believing man of Pharaoh’s family, who [until then] had concealed his faith, exclaimed...’ (*Ghafir*: 28). It is also called the chapter of *at-Tawl* from Allah’s saying: ‘...forgiving sins and accepting repentance, severe in retribution, limitless in His bounty (*dhi at-Tawl*)...’ (*Ghafir*: 3) i.e. the possessor of riches, plenty and blessings. It is a Meccan chapter according to Al-Hasan, ‘Ata’, ‘Ikrima, and Jabir. It is related that Al-Hasan said it was Meccan up to Allah’s saying: ‘...and extol thy Sustainer’s glory and praise by night and by day’ (*Ghafir*: 55) because the prayers were only prescribed in Medina, Ibn ‘Abbas and Qatada said that it was all Meccan apart from two verses that were revealed in Medina: ‘Behold, as for those who call Allah’s messages in question without having any evidence therefor – in their hearts is nothing but overweening self-conceit, which they will never be able to satisfy: seek thou, then, refuge with Allah – for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing! Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth: yet most men do not understand [what this implies].’ (*Ghafir*: 56-57) It has 85 verses and is the 40th chapter in the final compilation of the Quran, but it was the 59th chapter to be revealed. It was revealed after the chapter of *az-Zumar*, and is placed as such in the final compilation, and after the chapter of *as-Sajda*. [See Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 8/5935 and Al-Itqan fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran by As-Suyuti 1/27].

beginning of several chapters. We have spoken of them already more than once. In fact, we are just trying to peruse some of their meanings that we are capable of deriving and understanding; after all, everyone must say of them, 'Allah knows best what they mean' because their meanings cannot be certainly encompassed

We said previously that each letter has a name and a sound of its own. The letter (ا) (A) is named (*alif*), and the letter (ب) (B) is named (*ba'*). To clarify the letter sounds, we give an example of the word (كتب) (wrote); you do not pronounce it (*kaf ta' ba'*) in accordance with the names of the letters, rather you pronounce it (*kataba*) because these are the sounds indicated by its letters. The sound of the letter (*kaf*) is "ka", the sound of the letter (*ta'*) is "ta" and the sound of the letter (*ba'*) is "ba". So, when we speak we use the sounds indicated by the letters, not the letters themselves.

Nevertheless, when we pronounce the verse '*Ha Mim*', we say the names of the letters, (*ha*) and (*mim*). Were we to pronounce their sounds as if they were a word we would say (*hamm*). From this, we can see the importance of oral transmission when learning to recite the Quran. It is through listening that we know that the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* is recited: '*Alif Lam Mim*', while the same letters at the beginning of the chapter of *ash-Sharh* are recited (*alam*): 'Have We not (*alam*) opened up thy heart.' (*ash-Sharh*: 1) Had it not been for oral narration by listening, we would not have known this pronunciation.

Some scholars who took to examining the meanings of the letters at the beginnings of the chapters said that the Quran came as an inimitable miracle to the Arab peoples. As the Arabs surpassed in rhetoric and eloquence, this miracle came in the field within which they excelled so that its inimitable nature may be manifested. There are no other people on earth who made markets and exhibitions for the spoken word as the Arabs did in the markets of 'Ukaz, Marbad, Dhu Al-majaz⁽¹⁾ and other places. The challenge of the

(1) 'Ukazh was a marketplace where the Arabs would contend in boasting about their forefathers, lineage, and greatness. It is near Mecca. The Arabs would go there once a year, staying for a month. Dhu Al-majaz is a place at Minawhere there was a marketplace in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance. [See *Lisan Al-'Arab* under (*akaza*) and (*jawaza*).]

Quran to them was the very testimony to their superiority in this field, and that they were authorities therein.

But what are the bases of the incapacitating nature of the Quran? How does it excel the speech of the Arabs, while the letters and words are the very same?

The scholars say that some of the letters from which language is composed are known as ‘letters of building’ (*huruf mabni*), i.e., they are the building blocks of words and have no meaning by themselves. Other letters are known as ‘letters of meaning’ (*huruf ma’na*), and these have meaning by themselves. For example, if we look at the letter (*kaf*) (*k*) in the word (*kataba*) (he wrote), we see it is used as a building block in the word. If we took the (*kaf*) out of (*katab*) it would not have any meaning on its own. But, the letter (*kaf*) in a sentence like (*al-jundi kal-asad*) (the soldier is like a lion), it is a letter of meaning. It has meaning on its own, that of similarity, i.e., ‘like’, and it has no place in the construction of the word (*al-asad*) (lion). Similarly, the letter (*ba*’) in the word (*kataba*) is a building block, but in the phrase (*billah*) (By Allah!), it is a letter of meaning and denotes the swearing of an oath.

From the letters, in general, words are made, and from words sentences and phrases are made. Good style and distinguished rhetoric are composed of sentences which attract listeners and impact the soul. By abiding by the correct rules of Arabic composition, eloquence is achieved. So, if the Arabic letters and words are the same in the Quran, how can it be distinguished from the normal speech of the Arabs? The scholars say that it is distinguished by means of its special composition and style, and that the Quran is the words spoken by Allah.

We previously said that if we want to test the skills of a group of weavers, it is not proper if we give one of them woollen thread, another cotton and yet another silk; if the raw materials are different, how can we judge who is best? Rather, they must all use the same raw material so that results can be distinguished properly.

So, the meaning of: ‘*Ha. Mim.* The bestowal from on high of this divine writ issues from Allah, *The Almighty*, *The All Knowing*,’ (*Ghafir*: 1-2) or: ‘*Ha. Mim.* Consider this Divine Writ, clear in itself and clearly showing the

truth!' (*ad-Dukhan*: 1-2) or: 'Alif. Lam. Mim. This Divine Writ – let there be no doubt about it...' (*al-Baqara*: 1-2) is that, from these letters, the Quran is composed and given the secrets of its inimitable style and the challenge it poses because it is Allah who spoke it and conveyed it to his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* who knew neither how to read nor write.

Thus, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* recited the Quran just as it was revealed to him, not changing even a single letter. Illiteracy is a defect in everyone except the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* for him, it was a distinction and an honour. It is as though he were saying: I did not learn anything from any man; rather, my education is all from my Lord.

Similarly, the whole Arab nation was a Bedouin and unlettered people. They knew little of civilization, and they had no widespread legal system to rule them. Had the Arab peoples at the time of the revelation been a civilized nation, the unbelievers would have said that Islam was a civilization on the rise. On the contrary, Islam appeared in the Arabian Peninsula, while the Arab was a Bedouin people, with no constitution and no law to govern them except the tribal law and its fanaticism. The ruler was the sheikh of the tribe. Their houses were portable with them on the backs of their camels. Wherever they found pasture, they stopped and pitched their tents, and wherever they found water they stayed in its neighbourhood. They were not bound to any homeland or place.

Moreover, there were conflicts and wars that erupted among the Arab tribes for the smallest of reasons. You know, for instance, about the war called Dahis and the Ghubara' which continued between two of the Arab tribes for 40 years. Thus, when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* wanted to form an army for the emerging Islamic State, he did not open a school to teach people the arts of fighting and war because they were a people who had already practised these arts perfectly. The Arab person is by nature always prepared for war; whenever he hears a battle cry⁽¹⁾ he flies toward it.

(1) (*al-Hay`a*) refers to a sound which shakes you and you fear to hear from the enemy. It can also refer to any harsh sound [Lisan Al-`Arab under (*haya`a*)]. The word can be found in the Hadith of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: =

Then, how can such a nation with these conditions become the leader of the entire world and conquest its countries?

It seems that Allah has willed to prepare them for travelling throughout the world bearing and presenting Allah's guidance to mankind. They were not inclined to anything. Then, Allah sent to them His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* who turned the slaves into masters and made the shepherd leaders and pioneers for all nations. Thus, the Arab nation was qualified by its language, illiteracy and Bedouin life to lead the civilized world so that all should know that the Mission of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is not a human one, but quietly a divine one. So how could such a nation lead the world, when this was its description?

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to prepare them to travel through the world, spreading His guidance to His creation unshackled by anything. Then, He brought forth the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from their midst and hence, the slaves became the masters and the shepherds became the leaders, as well as the beacons for the entire world. In this way was the Arab nation prepared, in terms of spoken language, illiteracy and Bedouin nature to lead the civilised world so that all might know that what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought was not from humans, but from Allah *Glorified is He*.

We return now to the disjointed letters. These letters may come in ones, as in *Qaf* and *Sad*; in twos, as in *Ta Sin* and *Ha Mim*; in threes, as in *Ta Sin Mim* and *Alif Lam Mim*; and they may come in fives as in *Kaf Ha Ya 'Ayn Sad*. So, they do not come in just one format.

When we consider the total number of these letters, we find that they are 14—half the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. That they are exactly half indicates that this is something intentional and not a mere coincidence. It is a proof that these 14 letters occur in such a way as to reveal that they have purpose and wisdom and were not just chosen randomly. From the first nine

= 'The best of people is a man who grips the reins of his horse in the path of Allah, every time he hears a battle cry (*al-Hay'a*), he flies towards it'. It was related by Muslim in his Sahih [1889] in the chapter Kitab Al-Imara, and by Ahmad in his Musnad [2/443] on the authority of Abu Hurayra with a different wording.

of the 28 letters of the alphabet—from *alif* to *dhal*, only two appear among the isolated letters, *alif* and *ha'*. The remaining seven are not used. If we then look to the last nine letters of the alphabet, we find that the True Lord used seven of them and left two, the opposite of the beginning of the alphabet. He used *qaf*, *kaf*, *lam*, *mim*, *nun*, *ha'* and *ya'* and left *fa'* and *waw*.

So far, we have seen 18 letters, there remain ten more in the middle of the alphabet, beginning with *ra'* and ending with *ghayn*. When we look at these we notice that Allah *Glorified is He* has used all the letters which do not have dots on and left the ones which do. He used *ra'* and left *zay*; he used *sin* and left *shin*; he used *sad* and left *dad*; He used *ta'* and left *za'*; and He used *Ayn* and left *ghayn*.

So, this arrangement found in the disjointed letters indicates that they are not uniform, and that there is some wisdom behind them. Since they were not chosen at random, it is our responsibility to derive these wisdoms and understand the indications, each of us in accordance with his ability. Even today, we still, nowadays, examine these letters in order to discover their meanings.

To search for the wisdom therein is a praiseworthy *ijtihad* (independent reasoning: the exercise of critical thinking and independent judgment). Alternatively, you can rest your mind and take them as they are from Allah *Glorified is He* as one would take a key from someone who made a padlock. You do not care if it has one, two, three, or four teeth on it, as long as it opens the lock. Still, the secret of the key will remain with the one who made it.

Yet, the human mind likes to discover things. How? The scholars said that the True Lord wants three things concerning His religion: beliefs, laws and a medium to convey the beliefs and laws, i.e., His speech in the Quran. Each of these three has aspects which are unseen and aspects which are manifest.

As for beliefs, the first of them is faith in Allah *Glorified is He* who is unseen; nevertheless, one can infer His existence from what is manifest in His creation: its greatness and His construction of the visible world. There is no one who claims to have created this marvellous universe, attributing it to himself; for it solely belongs to Allah. Thus, we believe in this unseen Entity because of the things we can see. As for the unseen that has no visible

manifestation, like the True Lord's Attributes, these we believe in based on what we hear of His speech.

Similarly, amongst the obligations and laws are things that are seen and others that are unseen. Take, for example, prayer, poor-due, *hajj* (pilgrimage) and fasting: They are all visible acts, yet within them are unseen aspects, the wisdom of which remains unknown to us to this day. The submission and yielding of servant-hood lays within prayer, fasting develops incessant conscientiousness (*taklif*), *zakat* disperses wealth within society, and *hajj* proclaims one's allegiance to the *Ka'ba*—the House of Allah *Glorified is He*. These are things that we are able to understand with our intellects, but what, for instance, is the wisdom in making the Morning Prayer consist of two *rak'as* (units of prayer); the Noon Prayer four *rak'as*; the Afternoon Prayer four, the Sunset Prayer three and the Evening Prayer four. These are things we do not know.

Thus, with each unseen aspect there is a manifest aspect, and vice versa. Similarly, Allah's speech contains the seen and the unseen. The seen aspects include the speech that we listen to, read and write, and its exegesis and meanings that we understand. The unseen aspects include these disjointed letters, *Alif, Lam, Mim, Nun, Qaf, Sad*, etc.

Each aspect of the unseen is accompanied by something manifest that facilitates to us the belief in the unseen. Had everything been manifest and visible, there would have been no room for faith. You and I are now sitting in the Mosque of Sheikh Sulaiman – do we have faith in its existence? No, because we can see it. The unseen is the domain of faith. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...who believe in the unseen...' (*al-Baqara*: 3).

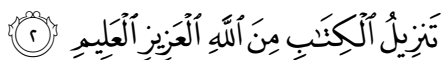
Yet, the unseen must have manifest evidences that corroborate them in the visible world—something to lead us toward them. Think for instance of Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension. This was unseen by anyone except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Night Journey was a terrestrial one and the Ascension a heavenly one. People saw the signs that were present on the earth, but they did not witness anything in the heavens.

That is why, when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desired to introduce a proof of his truthfulness, he described for

them some distinctive features he had seen on earth. He described *Bayt Al-Maqdis* to them and the group he saw travelling and when they would arrive; that they had a camel of such-and-such a description. Thus, it was a terrestrial journey that was possible to prove.

By means of the truthful description he gave of the things he saw on earth, this journey became effectively visible and a means of proving the credibility of the sights—that were beyond the scope of natural laws—he witnessed. So, if he informs you that he ascended into the heavens, believe him, and take from his truthfulness in the manifest world a proof of his truthfulness about the hidden world; for, as we said, every unseen aspect is complemented by a manifest aspect.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:



**This Scripture is sent down from God, the Almighty,
the All Knowing [2] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 2)**

The Arabic root *na za la* (literally: descend) comes in the Quran in numerous forms: *anzalna* (we sent down), *nazzalna* (we sent down), *tanzil* (a message sent down) and *nuzzila* (was sent down). Each of these denotes the lofty status of the thing that was sent down. This attribute of loftiness indicates that the thing that has been sent down is not of human origin. It indicates the station of the thing and its greatness, even if it is something earthly and not heavenly, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Hadid*: ‘...We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind...’ (*al-Hadid*: 25).

It is well known that iron is mined from the ground and does not descend from the heaven. Thus, the meaning of ‘*tanzil*’, here, is that it was sent as a gift from One on-high to those below. The One on high must surely be greater than those below. We say this, too, when we wish to make new laws and legal rulings.

We say: do not leave the laws of the One on-high and take those below because the Higher Legislator *Glorified is He* is different from the human

legislator; for whatever knowledge or wisdom he may have, he will never be free from desires or bias. If he is rich, he will make laws that benefit the capitalists, and if he is from the poor, he will make laws that will benefit the communists.

This is why it is necessary for the one who makes laws to be free from bias, and that he should, by no means, benefit from the laws he makes. He must have knowledge of all matters upon which he judges. Thus, no one would correct him, or there would be a chance that he neglects any of the details of the matter at hand. These conditions are only present in the True Lord. This is why it is not permissible for us to leave Allah's Law and adopt man-made laws.

It is for this reason that Islam is exposed to criticisms and negative campaigns by the non-Muslims. The most recent of these was the uproar that they caused in the Vatican over divorce in Islam. They made their own laws against divorce, whereas, in Islam divorce is legislated by Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, it is the right law, and all other laws are wrong. There is no way you can prolong a relationship indefinitely between spouses who hate each other, when their relationship should be one of mutual responsibility to provide a sense of security to each other. How can they force a man to live with a woman who does not attract him?!

So, divorce is legal in Islam for a reason. The Legislator *Glorified is He* knows best of the nature of His creatures. With the passing of time the problems of society and the cases thrown up by daily life made them recourse to legalising divorce, too. They did not legalise it because Islam permits it, nor out of love of Allah's religion or out of faith in Allah's law, but because life forced cases upon them that could only be solved through divorce.

It was with this argument that we answered when asked in San Francisco about Allah's statement: 'They wish to put His light out with their mouths. But He will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers hate it,' (*as-Saff*: 8) and: 'It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this.' (*at-Tawba*: 33)

They said that Islam has been around for 14 centuries, yet most people are still not Muslims and Islam is not the dominant religion, rather, it is

being fought and is under threat. To this we replied that had they reflected upon this verse, they would have realised that the 'manifestation of religion' does not mean that everybody will believe in it, rather, its law will dominate the other laws and that non-Muslims will find themselves compelled to take from Islam to solve their problems. That Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...however much the idolaters may hate this,' (*at-Tawba*: 33) and: '...even if the disbelievers hate it,' (*at-Tawba*: 32) is proof that the polytheists and disbelievers will still be in spite of the presence of Islam.

The word *al-Kitab* (Divine Writ) refers to the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* named it a Writ because it is written, and He named it a Quran (recital) because it is recited. Alternatively, it could be said that He named it a *Kitab* so as to grant permission for it to be written, and He named it a Quran so as to grant permission for it to be recited. Recitation can be either from written text or from what has been memorised by heart. It is also named *Wahi* (revelation) because it was *uhiya* (revealed) to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. 'The Quran is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him.' (*an-Najm*: 4) Thus, each name has a specific wisdom behind it.

When they wanted to compile the Quran, they stated a condition: that what people had memorised would match with what was written. They did not record any verse unless they found it written down and they found two upright people to bear witness to its correctness. May Allah have mercy on Sheikh Muhammad 'Abdullah Darraz⁽¹⁾ who compared this matter to Allah's saying: '...so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her....' (*al-Baqara*: 282)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...from Allah *the Almighty* the All Knowing.' (*Ghafir*: 2) That is to say, this Book is revealed from Allah *Glorified is He* who is characterized by the attributes of total perfection. To Him belong absolute power, absolute wisdom, absolute mercy and absolute compassion.

(1) Muhammad 'Abdullah Darraz was a scholar of Sacred Law and literature *Faqih Muta a'ddib* from Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He was a member of the group of major scholars at Al-Azhar Hay'a kubbar Al-Ulama' bi Al-Azhar. Among his books is *Ad-Din – Dirasa Tamhidiyya li Tarikh Al-Islam*. He passed away in 1958 CE. (from *Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli 6/236)

So long as the Book has come from one whose attributes are thus, no one can correct it, and as long as it cannot be corrected, then one should have complete faith in the verse: ‘...This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 3)

It is because of this that we wonder at those who call for the modernisation of Islam. To them we say: instead of modernising Islam, let us religionize the modern age.

The Name of Allah, *Al-'Aziz* (the Almighty) means, ‘the One Who conquers and cannot be conquered.’ If this Book has been revealed by The Almighty, then it cannot be conquered. It must necessarily rise up, be spread and be heard by people. None will defeat it because it comes from The Almighty. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* would not send a Messenger and then abandon him. So, no matter how much they resist, and no matter how stubborn or arrogant they are, this Quran will dominate and will never be defeated in any sphere whatsoever.

It is as though the True Lord is telling the disbelievers and the idol-worshippers to take admonition from the reality around them, for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers, after they had been besieged and persecuted, now grew day after day. The lands of Islam were increasing, and an increase in the lands of Islam was a decrease in the lands of disbelief: ‘Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? Allah decides—no one can reverse His decision—and He is swift in reckoning.’ (*ar-Ra‘d*: 41) The True Lord also says: ‘Anyone who thinks that Allah will not support him in this world and the next should stretch a rope up to the sky, climb all the way up it, and see whether this strategy removes the cause of his anger.’ (*al-Hajj*: 15) That is to say, whoever doubts in assistance and victory from Allah *Glorified is He* then let him try to find another way. Let him bring a rope and hang it from the sky, put his neck in it and cut it off, then let him see if his struggle will take away that at which he is enraged. Allah *Glorified is He* says clarifying His custom of giving victory to His Messengers *peace be upon them*, as well as His righteous servants: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers:

it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat*: 171-173)

So, the True Lord will not stifle His religion; He will not let down his Messengers *peace be upon them*; and he will not abandon succouring His chosen friends.

As for Allah’s statement: ‘...the All Knowing,’ (*Ghafir*: 2), it means that His Might is not imposed or without basis, rather, it is backed up by knowledge. It is a Might with wisdom, with mercy and compassion, for He has all the attributes of absolute perfection.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ إِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٣﴾

Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no god but Him; to Him is the ultimate return [3] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 3)

The True Lord does not want His creation to be separated from Him, no matter how much they have been conquered by their passions or how many sins they have committed. He wants to attract them to Him by His Kindness, and encompass them with His grace. That is why He has left the door of repentance and forgiveness open for them, and extended the hand of clemency and pardon. After introducing the first part of this carrot-and-stick approach, He warned them against the stick of punishment so that they would not become deluded. Allah’s Way benefits society as a whole and the individual in particular, for if the sinner knew that his sin would not be forgiven, he would persist in it, do it more frequently, become openly contentious, and spread corruption in the world. With this he will be a trouble to society and especially to the people of faith.

This is one of the most hope-inspiring verses in the Quran, like Allah’s saying towards the end of the chapter of *az-Zumar* (The Troops/throngs): ‘Say, “[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah’s mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”’ (*az-Zumar*: 53)

We said previously that these verses and the like of them do not contradict Allah's statement: 'Allah does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whoever He will,' (*an-Nisa'*: 48) because disbelief is not a *dhanb* (sin). A sin is when one goes against something that has been made obligatory or forbidden by The Lawgiver on high. *Shirk* (ascribing of divinity to other than Allah), however, is a departure from faith altogether, so it is not considered a sin.

The True Lord repeatedly reminds His servants of His acceptance of repentance and His forgiveness so that no one will despair of His mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy...' (*az-Zumar*: 53). There are those who have transgressed against themselves, then, consequently, despaired of the mercy of their Lord. They have sinned so much that they thought that they could never be forgiven

Among these was Wahshi, the killer of Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him*. After he killed Hamza, he perceived the enormity of his sin and the crime he had committed. He felt certain he was doomed and that Allah *Glorified is He* would never forgive him. Some have said that he went to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask him about this matter...etc. Actually, he was in Mecca and this verse was revealed in Medina. It was then recited to him and, when he heard it, he believed and embraced Islam.

It is related⁽¹⁾ that Wahshi met Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said to him: 'I did not want to see you unless you came to seek

(1) *Ibn Jurayj relates from 'Ata' on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas who said, 'Wahshi came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, "O Muhammad, I come to seek your protection, so shelter me that I might hear Allah's speech." 'The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to him, "Indeed, I did not wish to see you in my neighbourhood, but if you have come to seek my protection then under my protection you shall be until you have heard Allah's speech." "But I have been a polytheist, killed a soul forbidden by Allah Glorified is He and committed fornication (zina). Will Allah Glorified is He accept repentance from me?" 'The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him remained silent until Allah Glorified is He revealed the verse: "...and who never invoke any (imaginary) deity side by side with Allah Glorified is He and do not take any human=*

protection; for my Lord says: 'If any one of the idolaters should seek your protection [Prophet], grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah, then take him to a place safe for him...' (*at-Tawba*: 6).

So, Wahshi said: 'I seek your protection so that I might hear Allah's speech.' The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited to him: 'Say, "[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.'" (*az-Zumar*: 53)

Wahshi said: 'But Allah says: "Except those who repent, believe and do good deeds..." (*al-Furqan*: 70) and I cannot guarantee that I will be able to do righteous deeds.' So, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the following verse to him: 'Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty...' (*Ghafir*: 3).

Another one of those who succumbed to despair of Allah's mercy was 'Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi'a⁽¹⁾. It is related that when 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* wanted to emigrate, he agreed with 'Ayyash⁽²⁾ and Hisham ibn Al-'As ibn Wa'il

= being's life – (the life) which Allah Glorified is He has willed to be sacred – otherwise than in (the pursuit of) justice, and do not commit adultery. And (know that) he who commits aught thereof shall (not only) meet with a full requital," (*al-Furqan*: 68) which He, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then recited it to him.' "I see there is a condition attached; perhaps I will not be able to do righteous deeds. I seek your protection until I hear Allah's speech." The verse: 'Verily, Allah Glorified is He does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills...' (*an-Nisa'*: 48) was subsequently revealed so the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called for him and recited it to him. "Perhaps I am amongst those for whom He does not will (forgiveness). I seek your protection until I hear the speech of Allah Glorified is He."

The verse: 'Say: "(Thus speaks Allah Glorified is He): O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves, Despair not of Allah's mercy..." (*az-Zumar*: 53) was then revealed, to which he said, 'Yes, now I do not see any conditions', and so he entered Islam. It was related by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (8/5914).

- (1) The story of 'Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi'a with 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him* and Hisham ibn Al-'As during the immigration.
- (2) His name was 'Amr and his nickname was Dhu Ar-Rumhayn *may Allah be pleased with him*. His paternal uncle was Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him* and he was among the very first Muslims. He emigrated both times, but Abu Jahl tricked him into returning from Medina to Mecca and captured him, and the Prophet Muhammad *peace=*

As-Sahmi⁽¹⁾ that they should emigrate together. They would meet at the *Bi'r* (the well) of Ghaffar. If one of them was detained, the others would wait for him. However, when the time came, 'Ayyash did not. He had been prevented from emigrating by his family. He was tricked by them and fell for their trick. Thus, he did not emigrate with his two companions, and this caused him to despair of Allah's mercy.⁽²⁾

When the verse: 'Say, "[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful"' (*az-Zumar*: 53) was revealed, 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* remembered his Companion, 'Ayyash, who had been tricked by his family. He remembered that there was a time when they met upon faith that he had intended to emigrate. His heart softened, and he sent a message to him with this verse so that he might find peace and return to faith.

Allah's words: 'The Forgiver of sins...' (*Ghafir*: 3) refers to past sins. The '...Acceptor of repentance...' (*Ghafir*: 3) refers to the disobedience that was received by the One Who is '...Severe in retribution...' (*Ghafir*: 3). The True Lord associates forgiveness with punishment for wisdom so that people do not become overly secure, or become deluded by Allah's mercy. Thus, faith is based on both hope and fear. They are like the two wings for a bird: both of them are, together, essential. His words: '...infinite in bounty...'

= and blessings be upon him would pray for him in the qunut prayer. He died in the year 15AH in Sham during the caliphate of 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him*. It has also been said that he was martyred at the battle of Yamama and others said at the battle of Yarmuk. (*Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba* 5/47)

- (1) Hisham ibn Al-'As *may Allah be pleased with him* was nicknamed Abu Al-'As. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him nicknamed him Abu Muti'. He was one of the early Muslims and emigrated to Ethiopia. The biographical scholars state that he was martyred at Ajnadin. Al-Waqidi mentions that Hisham was a righteous man and that at the battle of Ajnadin he saw some of the Muslims retreating, so he threw the helmet from his head and started to advance toward the heart of the enemy shouting, 'O Muslims! Upon me! Upon me! I am Hisham ibn Al-'As! Is it from paradise that you flee?' until he was killed *may Allah be pleased with him* (see *Al-Isaba* 6/286).
- (2) Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani mentioned this in *Al-Isaba* (6/286). He said, it was related by Ibn As-Sakan with a sound chain of narrators on the authority of 'Umar *that...* and he continued to narrate the story.

(*Ghafir*: 3) are just like what we say in Egypt: '*idu taylah*' (he is capable of doing whatever He wishes). So, Allah *Glorified is He* is *dhu at-tawl* (infinite in bounty): He gives whatever He wishes to whomever He chooses, and no one can refuse His gifts. That is why it is said in the supplication, 'None can give what You withhold, and none can withhold what You give.'

When the True Lord says: 'This Scripture is sent down from Allah *the Almighty* the All Knowing,' (*Ghafir*: 2) we understand from the word *tanzil* the lofty status of the One who sends down, the thing sent down, and the one unto whom it was sent, so that it might be a method that guides them in their lives. This loftiness only emerged because the thing sent is a Book from Allah *Glorified is He* Who is necessarily Existent, and to Whom belong all attributes of absolute perfection, as evidenced by our saying: '*la ilah illa Allah*' (there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah) and *Allahu Akbar min kull shay*' (Allah is greater than everything). These sayings we explained when speaking about His saying: 'To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth...' (*az-Zumar*: 63).

'There is nothing worthy of worship but Allah' is a key; 'Allah is the Greatest' is a key; 'Glory be to Allah' is a key; 'His is the praise' is a key; 'I seek forgiveness from Allah' is a key; and 'there is neither power nor strength except by Allah' is a key. 'He is the First' is a key, and 'He is the Last' is a key. 'He is the Outward' is a key, and 'He is the Inward' is a key. 'In His hand is all goodness' is a key, and 'He has power over all things' is a key. You will never find anything in the world that is outside the realm of these keys; everything in it is under Allah's power, as He says: 'He has the keys to the unseen: no one knows them but Him...' (*al-An'am*: 59).

After that, the True Lord goes on to say: '...the Almighty...' (*Ghafir*: 2) i.e., He has no need of His creation. The Almighty *Al-'Aziz* is the one who overcomes and is never defeated. In this is an indication that if Allah *Glorified is He* reveals a Book to a Messenger, then there will not be anybody who is able to stand up to it because it will overcome and will never be overcome. His words: '...the All Knowing' (*Ghafir*: 2) means that He puts things in their correct places according to His knowledge of how they fulfil their roles in the best possible way.

After that He comforts those of His creation who have transgressed against themselves in some points, and mentions the way out: ‘The Forgiver of sins, Acceptor of repentance...’ (*Ghafir*: 3). Yet, alongside His forgiveness and acceptance of repentance He is: ‘...severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no Allah but Him; to Him is the ultimate return.’ (*Ghafir*: 3) Thus, He gathers, in this verse, all His attributes of majesty and all His attributes of beauty.

We understand from: ‘...There is no deity but Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 3) that no one can correct what He says. His words: ‘...to Him is the ultimate return’ (*Ghafir*: 3) mean that there is no return but to Him.

Then, He says to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

مَا يُجَادِلُ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَلَا يَغْرُوكَ تَقَلُّبُهُمْ فِي الْأَلْبَدِ ﴿٤﴾

**It is only the disbelievers who dispute God’s revelations.
[Prophet], do not be dazzled by their movements back and
forth across the land [4] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 4)**

The Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah *Glorified is He* with that which brings people out of ignorance into knowledge. By this, their daily lives are purified from anything that would cause inconsistency or opposition in the world so that everyone may become cooperative and mutually supportive, and so that if one builds there would be no one else who destroys. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘None dispute Allah’s revelations except the disbelievers...’ (*Ghafir*: 4).

Al-jadal means: to conclude a matter so that it is completely settled and cannot be undone. It is like when people in the countryside make a rope. A man takes hemp fibres and he twists them together until they become interwoven and tightly bound. That is why the rope becomes strong and enduring.

Mira’a is commonly called *jadal* (argumentation or dispute) because each of the parties involved wants to establish his proof and his reasoning in order to overcome the other. Each of them argues for himself. The one in the right argues to prove it so, and the one in the wrong argues to establish his falsehood as the truth.

Is argumentation blameworthy in and of itself though? No, because argumentation is judged according to the intention behind it. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 46). This shows that there is *hasan* (good) arguing and *ahsan* (better arguing). Good argumentation is that one tries to prove that the truth is true and that falsehood is false.⁽¹⁾ If the opposite is the case, then it is blameworthy argumentation.

Thus, we understand that Allah's words: 'None dispute Allah's revelations except the disbelievers...' (*Ghafir*: 4) refer to blameworthy argumentation. In Arabic, we can say *jadal Ann ash-shayy*' or, *jadal fi ash-shayy*'. If we say *jadal Ann*, it means he argued for something, to defend it, establish its truthfulness and to manifest such. If we say *jadal fi*, it means he argued against something, and tried to cast doubt on it and refute it.

We said previously that *ayat* from Allah are of three types, and it is these that argumentation may occur over: His *ayat* (signs) in creation, i.e., the *ayat* (signs) that bear witness to the presence of the Creator On-high; the signs of clarification, i.e., the miracles of the Messengers *peace be upon them* that establish their truthfulness in their claim to speak on behalf of their Lord; and the Quranic *ayat* (verses) that bear His Sacred Law.

The signs in creation that establish the power of Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator On-high, are those that we witness in the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind and the water... etc. The Creator made these signs in the best state. He created them according to fixed laws that do not change, and there is no way for man to interfere with them.

We said previously that when corruption befalls the universe, it is because of man's interference – his interfering with Allah's creatures in ways that do not accord with His laws. If man were to interact with the world in harmony with laws of the Creator, we would not see the corruption that now encompasses it. The True Lord alerts us to this issue by His words:

(1) *Al-Qurtubi* says in his exegesis (*The Quran*, 8/5939), as for one's saying *jidat fi*, it refers to elucidating the unclear, solving difficulties, discussion between scholars in figuring out meanings, and defending against people with deviant ideas and refuting them, and this is the greatest jihad in the way of Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘...do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right...’ (*al-A‘raf*: 56). This means the True Lord created the earth in the best state. So, beware of corrupting it. This is why the True Lord attributes any corruption that appears on earth to man. He says: ‘Corruption has flourished on land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned...’ (*ar-Rum*: 41).

Indeed, we have polluted the waters and thrown rubbish and scrap into them until the fish died and diseases appeared. We have polluted the air, and we have polluted the soil, and so on, and so on. This is because we have interfered with Allah’s creation without paying heed to His laws and the way He ordained to set the world right.

So, which of these three types of *ayat* do about which the disbelievers argue? Naturally, they do not argue about the *ayat* in creation, nor do they object to them, primarily because they benefit from them. They also see therein a precise and perfect system with no irregularities or contradictions, so there is no room for argumentation. Rather, they argue about His other *ayat*, the miracles, and the *ayat* of the Book that contain the Sacred Law, trying to cast doubt upon them.

As for the miracles: ‘...and they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’⁽¹⁾ (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) Here, they are not objecting to the Quran itself, but rather to the one unto whom it was revealed. In their view, there would be nothing wrong with the Quran had it not been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Yet, their denial results in their arguments being contradictory. They say: ‘...They also said, “Allahumma, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.”’ (*al-Anfal*: 32)

Rationally, they should have said: ‘Guide us to it.’ This is proof of their doubt over the Quran and their incredulity at what it brought. That is why

(1) *There is some difference of opinion about the man upon whom they wanted the revelation to descend. It is said Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and 'Urwa ibn Mas'id Ath-Thaqafi, and it is said 'Umayr ibn 'Amr ibn Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafi. It is also said 'Utba ibn Rabi'a and Habib ibn 'Amr Ath-Thaqafi. As for the two cities, they were Mecca and Ta'if. Ibn Kathir says in his exegesis (4/127), 'They apparently wanted a great man, whichever of the two cities he came from.'*

the Quran quotes them as saying: 'The disbelievers say, "Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk"...' (*Fussilat*: 26).

Ponder for a moment their prohibition of even listening to the Quran. Why? Because they were Arabs: they had a natural inclination and talent for language and rhetoric. If they listened to the Quran it was bound to affect them. Anyone who listens to the Quran with a heart free of opposition must surely be contented by it. If not, why did they prohibit people from listening to it?

Yet, they were not satisfied with preventing people from hearing the Quran, but they took it upon themselves to obscure it so that whoever wanted to listen to it would fail to do so: '...drown it in frivolous talk...' (*Fussilat*: 26). This is a proof that if the Quran is left to reach the ears, it will permeate to the heart, fill it and turn it towards the truth; if the mind is free of falsehood that is. If the heart is busy with antagonistic beliefs, however, it will not be affected by the Quran, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, "What was that he just said?"...' (*Muhammad*: 16)

Of those who are affected by listening to the Quran Allah says: 'When a *surah* is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, "Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?"' It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice.' (*at-Tawba*: 124)

If one were to ask, 'How can one thing have two opposite effects?' We would say it is because the recipient is different. We clarified this issue previously when we mentioned the example of blowing in one's hands to warm them up in the cold, and blowing on a cup of hot tea to cool it down. The breath is one, but its recipient is different. There is no doubt that the heat of one's breath is less than that of the cup of tea and greater than that of one's hands in the winter. In a similar manner, the effect of the Quran differs according to the one listening.

For this reason, while reading the Quran, there should not be anything that might prevent it from reaching one's heart. The True Lord forbids the clamour of crowds when it comes to arguments concerned with the art of rhetoric because in the chaos voices become mixed up, and one man's faults

become hidden by the others. This happens in demonstrations for instance, where one cannot work out who said what. This matter sheds some light for us on the wisdom behind Allah's words: '*innahu ya 'lamu al-jahra min al-qawli wa ya 'lamu ma taktumun*'; 'He knows what you reveal and conceal.' (*al-Anbiya*: 110)

The orientalist take issue with this verse saying: 'What is so special about knowledge of *ilm al-jahr* (the audible) when everyone knows it? Why does Allah tell us of His knowledge of this?' To this we reply that Allah's words: '...and conceal' (*al-Anbiya*: 110) indicate that *al-jahr* (the audible), too, addresses a group of people, i.e., as if He says: '*wa ya 'lamu ma tajharoon*' (He knows what you say out loud). Thus, the True Lord knows every sound and from whom it issues. He distinguishes every voice and attributes it to its originator, and to do this is actually harder than knowing the inaudible.

Among their arguments regarding Allah's *ayat* (verses) is their saying that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a soothsayer or a sorcerer, or that he was a poet...etc. Such sayings are false, rejected and easily refuted. Were Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a sorcerer who cast a spell on those who believed in him, why did he not cast spells on them as well? Thus, their failure to change is a proof that their accusation is a lie. As for their saying that he was a soothsayer, they had never seen anything of this sort from him before, nor had they heard from him anything that resembled the speech of soothsayers.

Even stranger than this is that they accused him of being a poet, and that what he brought was poetry. These were a people completely given over to poetry. The knights of the field, so to speak, were the most knowledgeable of people about this matter. In fact, anybody with the least familiarity with language can distinguish between poetry and prose. He can recognise both and easily sense when a move has been made from poetry to prose, or prose to poetry.⁽¹⁾

Take for example, this piece of prose written by ibn Zaydun: 'The consequences of this blame are desirable, and this unfriendliness is but an adversity that will clear up. I will not be suspicious if my master's clouds

(1) Here, Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi cited several Arabic proverbs to elucidate his point.

are delayed, or, far from being miserly, he misdirected his giving; for the fullest buckets are the most delayed; and the heaviest and slowest clouds are the most promising. For every day there will be tomorrow, and for everything there is a time prescribed. If he has done one bad deed, He did thousands of things that pleased.'

So, we have to differentiate between prose and poetry. Then, what of them, a people devoted to eloquence and rhetoric; a people who created marketplaces and exhibitions for wisdom? Yet, somehow they failed to differentiate between the Quran and poetry.

The Quran is not poetry, but a unique type of composition. Read, for instance, Allah's words: 'So when she heard of their sly talk she sent for them and prepared for them a repast, and gave each of them a knife, and said (to *Yusuf*): Come forth to them. So when they saw him, they deemed him great, and cut their hands (in amazement), and said: Remote is Allah (from imperfection); this is not a mortal; this is but a noble angel.' She said: This is he with respect to whom you blamed me, and certainly I sought his yielding himself (to me), but he abstained...' (*Yusuf*: 31-32). Such is prose; you do not perceive the least bit of poetry in it. Despite this, if you take, for example, the Arabic words, '*fa dhalika alladhi lumtunnani fihi*,'; '...This is he with respect to whom you blamed me...' (*Yusuf*: 32) you will find that they fit one of the meters of Arabic poetry. Similarly, Allah's words: '*nabbi' ibadi anni Ana al-Ghafur ar-Rahim*,'; '...tell My servants that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful.' (*al-Hijr*: 49) If you replaced the Arabic words with the pattern *taf'il*, you would find it gives you one of the meters of Arabic poetry. Yet, you would never sense that you had moved from poetry to prose or prose to poetry. That is because, as we said, the Quran is a unique composition.

Furthermore, the perfect style of the Quran cannot be imparted to other works. If one takes a scholar who has memorised the Quran and knows the seven recitations well, one may find that he still cannot produce speeches. We advise students to read books of literature, the books of Al-Manfaluti, for instance, or Al-Aqqad, to improve their writing, expression, and style. This is because the Quran does not impart its style to others. While books of literature will improve one's style, the perfection of the Quran remains intransitive.

One of their arguments concerning Allah's *ayat* (verses) is that they said of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...It is a man who teaches him...' (*an-Nahl*: 103). They even specified a particular individual,⁽¹⁾ but the Quran refuted them, saying in effect: 'if you are going to lie, then make sure you have a good memory': '...but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic.' (*an-Nahl*: 103)

They subsequently said that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was crazy. It was strange for them to make such an accusation when they were well aware of his exemplary character and manners before he was declared a Prophet. There is no way someone with exceptional character can be crazy, yet such are the doubts of the intellectually bankrupt: people who could find no real arguments to find fault with the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. What else could they say besides these clumsy remarks? This argumentation is all attacking the person of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They would call him ibn Abu Kabsha, but there is no way such insults would discredit the person of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

They also argued about Allah's laws. They ask for an example of why Allah *Glorified is He* forbade eating from *al-mayta* (dead animals). How could it be that the ones that died on their own, or in other words Allah *Glorified is He* caused them to die, be forbidden, while the ones that you cause to die through slaughtering are permissible? In their view all death is the same; why make this one permissible and forbid that one?

(1) *The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to teach a blacksmith in Mecca by the name of Bal'am. He spoke a foreign language and the polytheists would see the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him come in and out of his home. This led them to say that Bal'am was teaching Him, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so Allah Glorified is He revealed the verse: 'And, indeed, full well do We know that they say, "It is but a human being that imparts (all) this to him!"' – (notwithstanding that) the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear (in itself) and clearly showing the truth (of its source)' (16: 103). Ibn Kathir related it in his Exegesis on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him (2/586).*

They objected to the Sacred Law because it was applied to all; it did not differentiate between the leaders and the slaves. There was one law for all, but they had become over-familiar with their authority.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...except the disbelievers...’ (*Ghafir*: 4) i.e., they concealed their knowledge of the Necessarily Existent, the Most High who created them and the whole universe around them, as evidenced by their own admission about Allah’s signs in creation: ‘If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, “Allah”...’ (*Luqman*: 25). So, even though they believe in the signs in the universe, they nevertheless deny their Creator. They conceal the Necessarily Existent, the Most High who put the laws of nature in order for all His creation, and did so in such a way that they support and do not contradict each other, so that the world may be populated as the Creator wishes.

We have previously described how the word *kufir* (disbelief) is in itself a proof of faith. The word *kufir* means to cover and hide, and if hiding is taking place, then something is being hidden. Thus the thing being hidden exists before its concealment does. So, if they are hiding their awareness of Allah’s existence through disbelief, then it must exist in the first place.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...do not be dazzled by their movements back and forth across the land,’ (*Ghafir*: 4) i.e., do not be fooled by their authority, loftiness and reverence, such that no one can oppose their travels by summer or winter, or their strutting from place to place.

If they knew the reality of this status they are granted—Who put them there—they would not take such a stance towards you, O Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They achieved this status and respect by means of their custody of the House of Allah *Glorified is He* and it is Allah *Glorified is He* who has sent you to them. Hence, it is their responsibility to believe you and have faith in you.

The word *taqallubuhum* (movements back and forth) indicates their ability to move from place to place, and it also indicates physical strength. This is why the other Arab tribes respected them. This status came to Quraysh because of the *Hajj* where all the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula would come during that time and be under the protection of Quraysh. Because

of this, they could travel without fear. They should have been heedful of this blessing, but they denied it and thus they proved Allah's words concerning them to be true: '[Prophet], do you not see those who, in exchange for Allah's favour, offer only ingratitude and make their people end up in the home of ruin, Hell?' (*Ibrahim*: 28)

How could such be? Read Allah's words: 'Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did He not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them [like] cropped stubble.' (*al-Fil*: 1-5)

We know the story of how Abraha came to destroy the *Ka'ba* to turn people away from the House of Allah *Glorified is He* so he could build another *ka'ba* in San'a, for the people to make pilgrimage to. We know what the affair of this army was and how Allah *Glorified is He* repelled it. It is said that the huge elephant that was leading the army stopped moving towards the *Ka'ba*, while at the same time it would go in any other direction, until one of them approached the elephant and said to it, 'Kneel, Mahmud, and return as a guide, for you are in Allah's sacred land.'⁽¹⁾ After Allah *Glorified is He* rained down stones of *sijjil* (pellets of hard-baked clay) upon them, they turned away, defeated by the power of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The point here, however, is what Allah *Glorified is He* says straight after this chapter: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure: secure in their winter and summer journeys.' (*Quraysh*: 1-2) It is as though the preservation of the *Ka'ba* was the preservation of Quraysh's leadership and their safety and security amongst the Arab tribes and by means of this, Allah *Glorified is He* enabled them to continue their summer and winter journeys.

Thus, the reason for: 'He made them [like] cropped stubble' (*al-Fil*: 5) is revealed in the verse: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure' (*Quraysh*: 1) Otherwise, one would have to wonder about the beginning of the chapter: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure,' (*Quraysh*: 1) and ask why is this?

(1) *Ibn Kathir mentions in his Exegesis (4/550) that Nufayl ibn Habib approached the elephant until he stood at its side. He then took its ear and said to it, 'Kneel Mahmud, and return as a guide to the place from whence you came, for you are in Allah's sacred land.' He then let go of its ear and the elephant sat down on the spot.*

We have previously clarified that the chapters of the Quran are connected. Thus, one can recite it saying: 'He made them [like] cropped stubble' (*al-Fil*: 5) in the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure.' (*Quraysh*: 1)

Someone might ask: why were all the verses of the Quran not just put into one chapter? Why would the cause come in one chapter and the effect in another? The scholars, however, say that a thing may be separated from its cause so that each one may have its own ruling.

So, 'they were made like cropped stubble', so that the *Ka'ba* would not be destroyed, for if the *Ka'ba* were destroyed, the position and status of Quraysh would disintegrate. Allah *Glorified is He* maintained their position so that they could travel to the north and south and no one would dare to oppose them. Upon that their sustenance would be based, and they would be free from hunger and fear. He fed them through their trade and their commercial trips, and made them secure so that no one would attempt to harm them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then clarifies the reason for this, saying: 'So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (*Quraysh*: 3-4) Thus, they were immersed in Allah's blessings, and it was inappropriate for them to deny it.

Returning to Allah's words: '...do not be dazzled by their movements back and forth across the land.' (*Ghafir*: 4) We see that Allah *Glorified is He* did not neglect them, but rather gave them respite. Someone may ask what the wisdom was in giving them respite, i.e., given that Allah *Glorified is He* has not ignored them, why did He not just take them to account from the first?

The scholars said that it is because Allah *Glorified is He* sent His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: the Seal of the Messengers, to them. He made his religion the final religion and the guardian over all times and places. There would be no Prophets after him. There comes a time, however, when the Messenger's role is fulfilled and he passes on to the heavenly company. It is then upon the soldiers of truth, those who have proven themselves through tribulations, to carry his message.

For this reason, we said: the leaders of disbelief who persecuted the first Muslims and tortured them, later, became soldiers for Islam. Why? Because

it was this persecution and torture that purified the Muslims and distanced those whose faith or aspiration was weak, those who were put off by persecution, or terrorised by torture such that only the strong remained in the circle of faith; those who were worthy to carry this message and bear its troubles; for this was to be an enduring and ongoing message for every time and place.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not ignore the disbelievers, but He gave them respite for a reason: so that they could partake in the development of the generation that would carry the call to Allah *Glorified is He*: '[and with all] those who deliver Allah's messages and fear only Him and no other...' (*al-Ahzab*: 39).

This was the Muhammadan generation that carried the banner of Islam and journeyed with it to every region. They did not expect payment up front; they only wanted their reward from Allah *Glorified is He* in the next life.

This is the difference between the call for truth and the call for falsehood. The people of truth do not expect any reward up front; the people of falsehood, however, want to be paid before they have even begun work. That is why each of the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them* said to his people: 'And I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 109) Indeed, their reward is only with Allah because it was too costly and no one would be able to furnish it except Allah. No one could recompense a Messenger for his accomplishing his mission of guiding his people, even if they gave him all the riches in the world.

'*Al-taqallubuhum fi al-bilad*' indicates that moving back and forth across the land does not occur except after several things are available: physical health, so that they can withstand the stresses of travel; freedom from fear on the road; and sufficient provision in the places where they would camp on the way. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: 'Do they then who plan evil (deeds) feel secure (of this) that Allah will not cause the earth to swallow them or that punishment may not overtake them from whence they do not perceive? Or that He may not seize them in the course of their journeys, then shall they not escape?' (*an-Nahl*: 45-46)

That is to say: at the peak of their strength and ability to move around freely that Allah *Glorified is He* should bring his punishment down upon

them. This is one way that they could be called to account. Another way would be: 'Or that He may not seize them by causing them to suffer gradual loss...' (*an-Nahl*: 47) i.e., He puts them into a state of fear and terror before taking them. An example of this would be those who were befallen by the lightning strike. He scared them before the actual punishment struck. These are two ways in which Allah *Glorified is He* takes the disbelievers to account.

Then, the True Lord says:

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَالْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ وَهَمَّتْ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ بِرَسُولِهِمْ لِيَأْخُذُوهُ وَجَدَلُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عِقَابِ ۝

Before them the people of Noah rejected the truth and so did those who formed opposition after them: every community schemed to destroy its messenger and strove to refute truth with falsehood; but it was I who destroyed them. How terrible My punishment was! [5] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 5)

This means that they are not the first people to exist and you are not the first Messenger, O Muhammad. Many were your brethren among the Messengers who preceded you, and they denied them as they deny you. Yet, what was the result of their denial? Did Allah send a Messenger, give him up and abandon him? No! By Allah! Verily the way of Allah *Glorified is He* is to give victory to His Messengers *peace be upon them* and forsake the enemies of his message. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.' (*as-Saffat*: 171-173)

This is not just theoretical speech to console you, O Muhammad; it is a reality of which there are previous examples in the succession of Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* says of the deniers: '...and We punished each one of them for their sins...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40) i.e., a wind that blasted them with burning stones. '...some We struck with a violent storm...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40) i.e., these are the people of Thamud. '...some We made the earth swallow...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40) i.e., as was Qarun Korah. '...some We drowned...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40) as He did with the people of Noah *peace be upon him* and the people of Pharaoh.

Thus, Allah's way is that He gives victory to His Messengers *peace be upon them* while routing their enemies. It is because of this that we say that if you see the peoples of Islam defeated in a battle, you can rest assured that one of the conditions of being a soldier of Allah is missing, and that had they fulfilled Allah's conditions that should be found in His soldiers, they would never have been defeated.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Before them the people of Noah rejected...' (*Ghafir*: 5), i.e., before your people who disbelieve in you were the people of Noah *peace be upon him* who also rejected. This is a consolation to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and an easing of his burden; for the denial of the message is nothing new. Allah *Glorified is He* chose to mention Noah *peace be upon him* specifically because his mission was the longest of missions, such that he called his people for a thousand years minus fifty. All this long life did they argue with the Messenger of Allah Noah *peace be upon him* refusing and denying him. This is why he despaired of their guidance and prayed against them saying: 'And Noah said, "Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth—if you leave them they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers."' (*Nuh*: 26-27)

As for the few who had faith with him, he prayed for them, beginning with himself: 'Lord, forgive me...' (*Nuh*: 28) and then his parents, '...my parents...' (*Nuh*: 28) because they were the cause of his existence, '...and whoever enters my house as a believer...' (*Nuh*: 28), i.e., those with whom he had some kind of relationship, and finally the majority of the believing men and women, '...Forgive believing men and women...' (*Nuh*: 28). Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the people of Noah *peace be upon him* specifically because they were a prime example of this issue, the clearest example and the most aggressive. No doubt, you are aware of the mockery, denial and harm that Noah *peace be upon him* had to put up with while he was constructing the Ark.⁽¹⁾

(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says of this: 'And (so Noah) set himself to building the ark; and every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him...' (*Hud*: 38) They would say to him, 'Have you become a carpenter? Why are you making a boat in a land that has no water? Are you going to sail on dry land?' and other similar expressions of mockery and ridicule.

Allah's words: '... and so did those who formed opposition after them...' (*Ghafir*: 5) refer to Ad, the people of Prophet Hud *peace be upon him*, and Thamud, the people of Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him*. This was not hypothetical speech; it was a reality that they witnessed, for they actually saw their ruined buildings: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat*: 137-138)

They would pass the Al-Ahqaf in their travels, as well as mada'in (the towns) of Aalih *peace be upon him*. In Egypt, we have the remnants of the Pharaohs, all of which bear witness to the truth of what Allah *Glorified is He* informed us about. Now, there is the most sophisticated and advanced of the world countries, yet it stands helpless in the face of the civilisation of Pharaoh. See how they reached this level of progress more than seven thousand years ago? Despite this, their civilisation perished, because they could not reach the level that would result in protecting it from such an end.

Read, if you will, Allah's words: 'Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of Ad, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and the Thamud/ who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them. Your Lord is always watchful.' (*al-Fajr*: 6-14) i.e., this matter did not end with Ad, Thamud and the people of Pharaoh. Indeed, it is general for any and all who deny: 'Your Lord is always watchful.' (*al-Fajr*: 14)

Al-ahzab (those who were leagued together) refers to those who join together for a common cause. In this case, they are those who united against guidance and the call to Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why they were called *hizb ash-shaytan* (the party of the Devil)—the opposite of this being *hizb Allah* (the party of Allah): those who aid the Messengers *peace be upon them* and support the call to truth.

'*Wa hammat kullu ummatin bi rasulihim liya'khudhuh*,' '...every community schemed to destroy its messenger...' (*Ghafir*: 5), i.e., to kill him. This matter is explained further in Allah's words: 'Remember [Prophet] when the disbelievers plotted to take you captive...' (*al-Anfal*: 30) i.e., to imprison you or chain

you up so that you would not be able to move here and there, ‘...kill, or expel you. They schemed and so did Allah: He is the best of schemers.’ (*al-Anfal*: 30) These words indicate that they wanted to do these things, but they were unable. The word *hammu* (literally: were about to) refers to an inclination, or a desire that was not actualised.

Another example of this can be found in Allah’s words regarding the two parties at the battle of Uhud: ‘*idh hammat ta’ifatayn minkum an tafshala*,’ ‘Remember when two groups of you were about to lose heart...’ (*Al-Imran*: 122), but they did not lose heart. *Al-Hamm* is the heart’s engrossment with doing something that eventually does not come about. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘*wa hammu bima la yanalu*,’ ‘...they tried to do something/ though they did not achieve it...’ (*at-Tawba*: 74).

An exception to this is the action (*hamm*; desire) on the part of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* because, in the situation referred to, the issue was related to the infallibility of the Prophets. Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And indeed she did desire him and he would have inclined to her desire...’ (*Yusuf*: 24). Some people, when interpreting this verse, add inappropriate meanings that are quite unbefitting to the infallibility of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* and ask how he could have desired her when he was a Prophet?

As we said, (*hamm*) signifies the attachment of the mind to the performance of an action or the attachment of a sense organ to responding to a certain action, but what is important is whether or not one’s limbs will respond to the desire. This verse speaks of two different types of (*hamm*; tending to do something): ‘And indeed she did desire him...’ (*Yusuf*: 24); there is a pause, then: ‘... and he would have inclined to her desire...’ (*Yusuf*: 24). Notice that she got nothing out of her desire, and that is why she is mentioned in the Quran as saying: ‘I did seek to seduce him, but he firmly refused. And now if he refuses to obey my order, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and will be one of those who are disgraced.’ (*Yusuf*: 32)

This proves that her desire came to nothing. So how could desire (*hamm*) be fruitless in her case, despite being bent on disobedience, but be fruitful in the case of Yusuf *peace be upon him*? Thus, she desired him, but nothing happened

despite her wanting it to, and he could have almost inclined to her, but nothing happened because he did not want it to happen.

Ponder the precision of the Quranic diction in using the heavy (*nun*) of emphasis on the verb in: ‘...he shall certainly be cast into prison (*la yusjananna*)...’ (*Yusuf*: 32), and the light (*nun*) of emphasis on the verb in: ‘...and will be one of those who are disgraced (*wa la yukunan min as-saaghirin*).’ (*Yusuf*: 32) Prison was a matter over which the Egyptian Governor’s wife had control and Yusuf *peace be upon him* could be imprisoned at her command, so the heavy (*nun*) of emphasis was used to indicate her ability to execute the action. As for reducing him to one of those despised, this was something beyond her control, for perhaps the guards would admire him and be kind to him. So the light (*nun*) of emphasis was used here to demonstrate her inability to execute this action.

Finally, the answer with which we conclusively put an end to the implication of the word (*hamm*) in this story, and clear Yusuf *peace be upon him* of the false accusations forged against him, is that we say, yes, she desired him, but did she fulfil her desire or not? She did not, and the proof of this is her saying: ‘...And now if he refuses to obey my order...’ (*Yusuf*: 32). Also: ‘...and he would have inclined to her desire...’ (*Yusuf*: 24). Yes, he, at some point, could have had a desire, but he did not do anything, as evidenced by the previous verse. So why are they so keen to attribute this accusation to the Prophet of Allah *peace be upon him* when nothing resulted from either his or her desire?

Furthermore, the desire mentioned here is a completely natural occurrence because it is a natural disposition of human beings to be drawn into such an act. That is, it is something which is possible for him as a human being because he is by nature capable of this action. Otherwise, we would have said that he was congenitally celibate and incapable of such deeds. But no, he was capable of it; so what then prevented him from it? It was as Allah says: ‘...had he not seen [in this temptation] the evidence of his Lord...’ (*Yusuf*: 24). That is, of this being prohibited. It is as one says, ‘I would have visited you, if so-and-so were not with you,’ which evidently means that I had not visited you. Therefore, ‘...he would have inclined to her desire, had he not seen the evidence of his Lord. Thus it was, that We might turn away from him evil and immorality. Surely, he was one of Our chosen, guided

slaves.’ (*Yusuf*: 24) So (*hamm*) means that the desire occurred to him, but he did not act upon it. So, the judgement here mentioned declares the innocence of Yusuf *peace be upon him* even of desire.

We return to Allah’s saying: ‘...and every (disbelieving) nation plotted against their Messenger to seize him...’ (*Ghafir*: 5). So, although this happened, they could not accomplish their evil plan and lay their hands on him. ‘...And they disputed by means of falsehood to refute therewith the truth...’ (*Ghafir*: 5). That is, they wanted to defeat and erase the truth by means of falsehood, but what was the result? ‘...So I seized them (with punishment)...’ (*Ghafir*: 5). That is, I (Allah) destroyed them, not just in the realm of desire, like them, but in reality, and this is what becomes the Supreme Power. ‘...And how (terrible) was My Punishment.’ (*Ghafir*: 5) Did you know it? Were We (Allah) able to punish them?

It is similar to Allah’s saying: ‘Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. And when they returned to their people, they would return jesting. And when they saw them, they would say, “Indeed, those are truly lost.” But they had not been sent as guardians over them. So today those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers, on adorned couches, gazing. Have the disbelievers [not] been paid [this Day] for what they used to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-36)

That is, have We (Allah) not ably requited them for their deeds and crimes? It is as though the True Lord *the Exalted* wants to alert the people of faith and reassure them of His Justice *Glorified is He*. These people will not escape the punishment, and there can be no doubt that the people of faith find relief in knowing that the disbelievers and criminals are to be punished.

Reflect here for a moment on the precision of the Quranic diction in Allah’s saying: ‘...and every (disbelieving) nation plotted against their Messenger (*rasulihim*) to seize him...’ (*Ghafir*: 5). Allah has not said: ‘...and every (disbelieving) nation plotted against its Messenger (*rasuliha*)...’ on the basis that a community is a singular entity; rather, He says: ‘...plotted against their Messenger (*rasulihim*)...’ (*Ghafir*: 5). Allah attributed the Messenger to a group in the masculine plural because the confrontation between Islam and

disbelief was between men. Women did not take part in this confrontation. The proof of this is that when they plotted against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* on the night of his emigration (from Mecca to Medina) they were all men. There was not one woman among them.

The same applies to Allah's saying: '...and they (masc.) disputed by means of falsehood to refute therewith the truth...' (*Ghafir*: 5). These were confrontations involving no women.

وَكَذَلِكَ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّهُمْ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ﴿٦﴾

**In this way your Lord's sentence was passed against
the disbelievers that they would be the inhabitants of
the Fire [6] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 6)**

The word *haqqat* (has become incumbent) in this verse means that punishment has become necessary, justified and certain regarding them, and nothing will happen that can revoke it. Why? Because the One Who has uttered it knows what is going to happen afterwards. Especially that these people, who are perpetrating such actions, still have a choice to behave or refrain from behaving in certain ways.

So Allah *the Exalted* has declared and passed down this sentence on them while they are still alive in this world, and it is still possible for them to make choices, yet, despite this, they do not contradict it and act differently. This is one of the grand aspects of Allah's Speech. He challenges you in something in which you have a choice, and yet, despite that, you do not depart from that which He has decreed.

We stated the same thing concerning Allah's saying about Abu Lahab and his wife: 'Perish the two hands of Abu Lahab, and perish he! His wealth and his children (etc.) will not benefit him! He will be burnt in a Fire of blazing flames! And his wife [as well] - the carrier of firewood, Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fibre.' (*al-Masad*: 1-5)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed that they shall be disbelievers and that they shall end up in the hellfire, even though belief and disbelief are matters which Allah has left free for His slaves to choose which to follow.

This is evidenced by the fact that disbelieving men of Mecca, who were like Abu Lahab, entered Islam, such as Khalid ibn Al-Walid, 'Amr ibn Al-'As, 'Ikrima and other men *may Allah be pleased with them all*. Abu Lahab could have, after the revelation of this Quranic chapter, testified that there was no god but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was His Messenger. Abu Lahab could even have said so just out of hypocrisy, yet it did not happen and Allah's Word regarding him proved true.

This is an issue that the True Lord *the Exalted* has explained in His saying: '...and know that Allah intervenes between a person and his heart...' (*al-Anfal*: 24). So although his heart may tell him to do something, Divine Grandeur prevents him from it.

Therefore, Allah *the Most High* said to Musa's mother: '...suckle him [Musa (Moses)], but when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve...' (*al-Qasas*: 7). Such a solution is unacceptable, as judged by human logic. How could any reasonable person say that if a woman fears for her child she should throw him into the sea? Yet Musa's mother did not listen to the voice of reason and was not swayed by her emotions toward her child. She listened to her Lord – to this ultimate, supreme inspiration that could not be opposed by any base satanic thoughts. She had no hesitation about casting her child into the sea because Allah *Glorified is He* intervened between her and her emotions.

The same can be found in the story of Musa *peace be upon him* with Pharaoh. The soothsayers had told Pharaoh that he would lose his kingdom at the hands of a youth from the children of Israel; so what did Pharaoh do? This allows us to understand the mentality of those who claim divinity, and how Allah comes between a person and his heart. What did Pharaoh do? He started searching out all the children and killed them. He did not know that Allah had stored up this child for him and that he would come to him and knock on his door – in his cradle as you know – and that he would even feel safe toward him and take him as his own son. His wife said: '...A joy to the eye [could this child be] for me and you...' (*al-Qasas*: 9). So, he took him and raised him in his own house. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: '...and know that Allah intervenes between a person and his heart...' (*al-Anfal*: 24).

Allah's saying: 'Thus has the Word of your Lord been justified against those who disbelieved, that they will be the dwellers of the Fire,' (*Ghafir*: 6) signifies that punishment has not been imposed on them through compulsion or oppression, but rather by their own choice. The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows the choices they will make through His Eternal Knowledge, and so He has passed sentences concerning them by His Foreknowledge (of their choices). It is impossible that something could happen that contradicts this decree because it is Allah Who has pronounced it.

We have previously clarified that the Arabic word *kalimah* (word) can be applied to a single utterance or it can be applied to speech in general. An example of this is Allah's saying: '...No! It is but a word that he speaks...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 100). Regarding those who say: '...Allah has taken to Him a son...' (*Yunus*: 68). He says: '...dreadful is this saying (*kalimah*) that comes out of their mouths [and] nothing but falsehood do they utter!' (*al-Kahf*: 5). We also call a long speech a (*kalimah*).

The word which has become justified and incumbent in the verse under study is not just any word; it is: '...the Word of your Lord...' (*Ghafir*: 6). Allah's Word must necessarily come true. It is not possible that Allah *the Exalted* could say something and then events prove otherwise. The word that has come true in this case is that the disbelievers: '...will be the dwellers of the Fire.' (*Ghafir*: 6)

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ
وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا
فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him. They beg forgiveness for the believers: 'Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them from the pains of Hell [7] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 7)

These are the angels whom Allah has created to praise Him *Glorified and Exalted is He*. They have no work except praising Allah. These angels are the

Carriers of the Throne and those around it. We have previously said that glorification of Allah is part of the keys of creation. Allah's saying: '...glorify the praises of their Lord...' (*Ghafir*: 7) means that they declare His Transcendence above any resemblance to His creation, whether it is respect to His Names, Attributes or Actions.

That is why we said that if the True Lord *the Most High* shares some aspect with His creation, we must look at it through the frame of: '...there is nothing like unto Him...' (*ash-Shura*: 11). Allah has actions and you have actions. We cannot compare your actions to those of your Lord. We clarified this matter in our explanation of the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra'*. The events mentioned in the beginning of this chapter were extraordinary; therefore, Allah *the Exalted* started it by declaring His Transcendence: 'Exalted is He who took His servant by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* to *Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*...' (*al-Isra'*: 1) Allah stated this at the beginning so that we might not compare His Actions with human actions, or His Abilities with our abilities. Allah has His own Actions and you have your own actions. Allah's Actions are not like yours, so beware of seeing this event as unlikely based on the factors of time or distance.

The term (*subhan Allah*) refers to Allah's Transcendence above anything that resembles humanity. That is why it is said: 'anything that occurs to your mind (regarding Allah's Appearance), Allah is other than that.' Allah's Transcendence is not contingent upon the existence of somebody who would declare His Elevation beyond any similarity to His creatures, but rather, it is pre-eternal, existing before Allah created anyone to proclaim it. He is Transcendent in and of Himself and has been so before the existence of any creature who affirms this.

Thus, after the creation of the heavens and the earth, He *the Most High* proclaimed: 'Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah...' (*al-Hadid*: 1) That is, at the very time they were created, they celebrated His Glories, saying: 'Glory be to Allah, the Creator, the Most Great,' and they are still extolling His Majesty, as Allah says: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols the Glory of Allah...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 1). This glorification is continuous and perpetual. Since the whole universe glorifies

Allah and continues to glorify Him, and since the universe has been created for you, O humankind, you should all the more glorify Him. Therefore, Allah says: 'Exalt the Name of your Lord, the Most High.' (*al-A'la*: 1)

The glorification of Allah is the declaration of the transcendence of Allah's Attributes and Actions. When, for example, you think of the process of creation, and you find that Allah has created the human of clay, could you take some clay, fashion it into the shape of a human and breathe a soul into it? This is an act that none but the Creator *Glorified is He* can accomplish.

When Allah wanted to give 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* a miraculous sign relating to creation, He instructed him to say: 'Indeed I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Permission of Allah...' (*Al-Imran*: 49) Concerning breathing the soul into the form, 'Isa empathically clarified that it would happen: '...by Permission of Allah...' (*Al-Imran*: 49). By his nature alone, he could not accomplish this. As for fashioning a statue in the shape of a man or a bird, this was something easy.

So, O human being, whom Allah has ennobled, it is your duty to glorify your Lord. All animate and inanimate beings and the whole universe that Allah has created for you glorified Him and continue to do so.

Allah's saying: 'Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah)...' (*Ghafir*: 7) refers to the angels who carry Allah's Throne. Thus, the Throne is borne by angels. Even the number of the Throne Bearers is inimitable. The True Lord *the Exalted* has informed us that they are eight in number: '...and eight angels will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them.' (*al-Haqq*: 17) Why has Allah not made them four, as we are used to, in that most buildings have four corners? Why are they not five even? There must be some wisdom and something miraculous in this specific number.

The miraculous aspect of these numbers is also evident in Allah's saying: 'Over it⁽¹⁾ are nineteen...' (*al-Muddaththir*: 30). Why nineteen specifically?

(1) 'Over it', i.e., the Fire. It refers to the gatekeepers of hell. They are nineteen in number and in the hand of each angel is an iron rod which has two prongs. One blow from it=

Why has He not made them twenty? This is evidence that there must be some wisdom behind this number. Allah *the Exalted* has also informed us that this number has been fixed to nineteen as a trial: ‘And We have not made the keepers of the Fire except angels. And We have not made their number except as a trial for those who disbelieve...’ (*al-Muddaththir*: 31).

Faith requires that one believe in what the True Lord *the Exalted* has informed us of, and that we do not argue such matters, whether it has been said or not, and whether it has happened or not. What did Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* say when they informed him that his Companion (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) claimed to be a Messenger? He asked, ‘Has he said so?’ ‘Yes,’ they replied. ‘He has spoken the truth,’ answered Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. He did not investigate the matter further.

The same goes for us every time we face a matter that brings the intellect to a standstill; so long as the information has come to us from Allah, we should accept it and have faith in it: ‘...and whose word could be truer than Allah’s?’ (*an-Nisa*: 87)

Whether your intellect can encompass this information or not is another matter because there is a difference between the existence of something and how it exists. Something may exist, but you do not know how it exists.

Reflect for a moment on the story of the father of the Prophets, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he said: ‘And [mention] when Abraham said, “My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.” [Allah] said, “Have you not believed?” He said, “Yes, but [let me see it] that my heart may be satisfied.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 260)

You will find that people who have a superficial understanding of Allah will accuse the Quran of being self-contradictory in this issue. How so? They say that the word (*bala*) means ‘Yes, indeed (I have faith),’ and faith requires

= *causes the one struck to keep descending in the fire for seventy thousand years. [Narrated by Al-Qurtubi in At-Tadthkirah, p. 455] At-Tirmidhi related on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him that the Jews asked the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him: ‘How many are the gatekeepers of the fire?’ So the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him put both his palms on the ground, once with ten fingers extended and once with nine extended and a thumb pulled in. ‘Yes,’ they said.*

that one's heart is tranquil in its beliefs; so why does he say afterwards: '...but [let me see it] that my heart may be satisfied' (*al-Baqara: 260*)?

We would reply to them that they are excused because they did not understand the meaning of the question. Had they understood the question, they would not have made these accusations against the Quran. Did Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* say to his Lord, 'Do you give life?' or did he say, '...show me how You give life to the dead...' (*al-Baqara: 260*)? So he did not ask about the possibility of the action; he had no doubt about Allah's Power. Rather, he was asking how it was done: '...show me how You give life to the dead...' (*al-Baqara: 260*). Giving life to the dead was, therefore, a previously established matter of fact, what Abraham *peace be upon him* was asking about was the manner with which it was done. If I ask you, 'How did you build that house?' it means that the house is already actually standing.

So, his saying, 'Yes,' meant, 'I believe, O Lord, that you resurrect the dead.' After that, he sought peace of mind about how it was done. When it comes to the matter of creation and bringing into existence, it is necessary to ask about the manner of it because this is an affair that cannot be spoken of. Allah's actions do not consist of a process like human's actions do.

If I asked you how you built your house, you would say that you dug the foundation, brought the steel and the cement and that you did such-and-such. That so-and-so designed the house, and that so-and-so supervised the work, and so-and-so carried out the construction while so-and-so poured the cement mixture, etc. You could tell me how you did it such that I could do the same if I wanted to, and there would be no difference between the two outcomes. If, however, we want to show how the dead are brought to life, how could we do that?

This is a matter that could not be explained with words. It requires the actual carrying out of it. We contemplate here that Allah wanted Abraham *peace be upon him* to perform this deed himself, not that it be done for him. He himself should undertake it. There is a considerable difference between imparting your power to another person in a way that causes things to be done for him, and imparting your power to another person such that he himself can do the action. You might, for example, be incapable of carrying

something and so I carry it for you, and this would be quite ordinary. What would be great is when I make you able to carry it yourself.

This is what the True Lord *Glorified is He* did with His Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him*. ‘...He said: “Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you...”’ (*al-Baqara*: 260) that is, keep them close to you and study their characteristics. ‘...Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them...’ (*al-Baqara*: 260) that is, slaughter them and distribute the cut pieces over the hills. ‘...Then call them, they will come [flying] to you in haste...’ (*al-Baqara*: 260).

It was Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* who slaughtered the birds, cut them into pieces, distributed them, and he himself who summoned them to him, and they assembled together by Allah’s Power and flew to him as they were previously. So if I can make somebody able to do something that they could not do alone, am I not able to do it Myself?

The word *al-`arsh* (the throne) is a mark of the firm establishment of sovereignty and rule and total mastery over it. It is not necessary that a person actually sits on the throne. That is why when the hoopoe spoke of the Queen of Sheba, he said: ‘...she has been given of everything, and she possesses a mighty throne.’ (*an-Naml*: 23) A sovereign only sits on his throne when matters are under control and his lands obey him. If there is a region that is resisting or in rebellion against the king, then he will not sit on his throne until they yield to him and his dominion is re-established.

When the True Lord *the Exalted* spoke of His *Istiwa’* (Allah’s rising over the Throne in a manner that befits Him), He said: ‘Say, “Do you indeed disbelieve in He Who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds.” And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures’] sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask. Then He *Istawa* (rose over) towards the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, “Come both of you willingly or unwillingly.” They both said, “We come, willingly.” And He completed them as seven heavens within two days and inspired in each heaven its

command.' (*Fussilat*: 9-12) Thus, His establishment on the Throne came after He had completed the creation and exercised absolute dominion.

So, Allah's saying: 'Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah)...' (*Ghafir*: 7) signify the eight angels who carry His Throne. Whereas, His saying: '...and those around it glorify the praises of their Lord, and believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe...' (*Ghafir*: 7) refers to another type of angels known as (*Al-Kurubiyyun*) who have no other task than to glorify Allah. They have no concern for this world at all, nor do they know anything about it. They only: '...glorify the praises of their Lord ...' (*Ghafir*: 7).

Do these angels, who surround the Throne and glorify Allah and have no other occupation than that, see Allah on His Throne? The scholars *may Allah have mercy upon them* say that despite their status, they do not see Allah *the Exalted*. The clearest of their scholarly positions in this regard is that of Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi⁽¹⁾ *may Allah have mercy upon him* when he discussed the verse: 'Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah) and those around it glorify the praises of their Lord, and believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe...' (*Ghafir*: 7) he inclined towards the position of the author of Al-Kashshaf⁽²⁾ who preceded him. He said that: '...and believe in Him ...' (*Ghafir*: 7) means that they do not see Him because there can be no belief or disbelief when it comes to visible things. Faith is reserved for the unseen. Had they seen Allah upon the Throne, He would not have said

(1) He was Muhammad ibn `Umar Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi. He was born in Ray (now Teheran) in the year 544 A.H. He was an Imam and an exegete. He was also known as the Preacher of the City of Ray. Among his works are *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, an exegetical book, and *Muhassal Afkar Al-Mutaqaddimin wa Al-Muta'akhkhirin* besides many others. He also wrote poetry in Arabic and Farsi and was thoroughly proficient as a preacher in both languages. He died in Herat in the year 606 A.H. at the age of sixty-three. [Al-A`lam by Az-Zirikli, vol. 6, p. 313]

(2) The author of the Exegetical book, Al-Kashshaf. His name was Az-Zamakhshari Mahmud ibn `Umar Jar Allah Abu Al-Qasim. He was born in Zamakhshar, one of the villages of Khwarizm in the year 467 A.H. He travelled to Mecca and stayed there some time, and was consequently nicknamed Jar Allah (Allah's Neighbour). He was one of the great scholars in the fields of religion, exegesis, language, and literature. He died in Al-Jurjaniyya (Khwarizm) in the year 538 A.H. Among his other books was *Asas Al-Balaghah*. He openly subscribed to the School of the Mu'tazila and was a harsh critic of the Sufis. [Al-A`lam vol.7]

regarding them: ‘...and believe in Him ...’ (*Ghafir*: 7). Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi⁽¹⁾ then added that had this great scholar, the author of *Al-Kashshaf*, said nothing else but this observation, it would have sufficed him all his life,⁽²⁾ This was his viewpoint, despite the difference of opinion that existed between these two Imams.

So, we should not understand from the closeness of these angels to the Owner of Majesty and Honour *the Exalted* that they see Him. Certainty not; for them Allah is Unseen. This is emphasised by Allah’s saying: ‘...and believe in Him ...’ (*Ghafir*: 7). Now, in this gathering, you would not, for example, say, ‘I have faith that Sheikh Ash-Sha’rawi is sitting surrounded by his friends, and he is talking about such-and-such a subject’ because what we are doing now is visible; there is no role for faith to play in it. Faith only relates to things unseen, and this is its distinguishing feature. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* often repeats the phrase: ‘...who believe in the Unseen.’ (*al-Baqara*: 3)

We previously gave an example of this when we asked you to imagine that I am afraid of thieves, so I take the money that I fear for to the far end of the garden and put it under a heavy rock. The time comes when I want my money, so I call the gardener and ask him to lift the rock. He replies that he cannot do it alone because it is too heavy, so I ask him, ‘Do you know what is under that rock? Beneath it is the money from which I will pay you your wages.’ Hearing this he goes to the rock and lifts it up. So what is

(1) Tafsir Ar-Razi

(2) In his exegesis *Al-Kashshaf*, the exact wording of Az-Zamakhshari’s opinion regarding Allah’s saying: ‘...and believe in Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 7) is as follows: ‘This brings our attention to the fact that had the matter been as the anthropomorphists claim, the Throne Bearers and the angels around it would see Allah, and consequently they would not have been described as having belief. Belief only relates to things absent. Since it is attributed to them by way of praise, it is thus known that their belief, and the belief of all the inhabitants of the earth and all who are absent from such a situation, is the same with respect to being attained by way of deduction and inference and none other. There is no way to know Him except this. He is transcendent above the characteristics of bodies.’ Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi praised this opinion in his exegesis of this verse in *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, saying: ‘The author of *Al-Kashshaf* gave an excellent viewpoint on it. Had he achieved nothing else in his book, this note would have been sufficient distinction and pride for him.’

important is not one's obedience to a command the benefit of which is apparent to one, but one's obedience to a command the benefit of which is hidden.

Allah's saying: '...glorify the praises of their Lord (*yusabbihun bi hamd rabbihim*)...' (*Ghafir*: 7) means that their glorification is accompanied by praise. The term *tasbih* (glorification) denotes a form of praising Allah, while *hamd* (thankful praise) is gratitude to Allah for the previous blessings He has bestowed. One of the greatest of Allah's Blessings is that He *the Most High* does not resemble anything. Had anything resembled Him, there would have been much conflict and confusion in the universe: '...(if there had been any god along with Him), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have tried to overcome others!...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 91) For Allah is the One and Only God to be worshipped, and He is the Only One Who deserves to be praised.

Then after that Allah says: '...and ask forgiveness for those who believe...' (*Ghafir*: 7). That is, one of the jobs of these angels is that they seek forgiveness for the believers. The Quran relates their words: 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who repent and follow Your Way, and save them from the torment of the blazing Fire.' (*Ghafir*: 7)

This is one of the supplications of the angels for the believers. Usually, when saying (*Rabbana*; our Lord) at the beginning of a supplication, the vocative particle (*ya*; O!) is elided. One does not say (*ya Rabbana*) because the vocative particle (*ya*) indicates that the person being addressed is at a far distance. If the addressee is even further away, one employs (*ayya*). And if the addressee is near, one uses a letter (*hamzah*) as in (*a Muhammad*).

As for the True Lord *Glorified is He* He is so close that we do not use any of the vocative particles when calling on Him. He has described Himself as nearer to the human beings than their jugular vein. That is why we invoke Allah directly saying, (*Rabbana*). You can study the whole Quran, but you will not find one instance of Allah being called on with a vocative particle.

Even when the disbelievers called on the True Lord, they said: 'O Allah (*Allahumm*), if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal*: 32) It is

well known that the letter (*mim*) at the end of Allah's Name here replaces the vocative (*ya*). They did not say (*ya Allah*). Instead they said, '*Allahumm*.'

The True Lord continues narrating the supplication of the angels for the believers, saying:

رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ
وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّتِهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٨﴾

And admit them, Lord, to the lasting Gardens You have promised to them, together with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and offspring: You alone are the Almighty, the All Wise [8] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 8)

'...Gardens of perpetual residence...' (*Ghafir*: 8) that is, everlasting gardens for permanent residence in paradise. Reflect here on the fruits of faith in Allah, the fruits of the declaration of the Oneness of God: 'There is no true god worthy of worship except Allah.' As long as there is belief, disobedience will not harm the person. The angels in the highest heavens speak of you, O believer, and concern themselves with you. They supplicate for you because you believe in Allah.

This is a solace for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and his followers who bore the hardship of calling people to Allah, and those who come after them until the Day of Judgement. Thus, O Muhammad, if the disbelievers of Mecca adopted an obstinate stance against you and your followers, do not grieve. It suffices you that the angels should seek forgiveness for you and your worldwide community. And what category of angels are these? They are the Throne Bearers and the angels that surround it.

Upon reading this supplication, one finds hints and points that deserve reflection. The first of them is that you, O believer, are talked of by the Throne Bearers. You are the subject of their concern, despite their lofty status and your lowly status. These angels have no other task but to exalt Allah with praise and seek forgiveness for the believers.

Ponder how their supplication includes the two stages of *takhliyah* (purifying the soul from bad traits) and subsequent *tahliyah* (adorning the

soul with beautiful virtues). They say: '...forgive those who repent and follow Your Way, and save them from the torment of the blazing Fire.' (*Ghafir*: 7) First must come the removal of the causes of distress and then comes the adornment of the soul with the blessings that bring happiness, as expressed in Allah's statement: 'Our Lord, and admit them to the Gardens of perpetual residence which You have promised them...' (*Ghafir*: 8). This is because ridding one's soul of evil and saving it from the causes of punishment is a higher priority than getting blessings. The principle here is that warding off evil takes precedence over bringing benefits. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and whoever is removed away from the Fire and admitted to paradise, he indeed is successful...' (*Al- 'Imran*: 185).

Further, we can see that their supplication is not only for the believers, but also includes their whole families: '...and whoever was righteous among their fathers, their spouses and their offspring...' (*Ghafir*: 8). Thus, they have mentioned the whole family tree; for the parents are made happy by the presence of their offspring, so Allah does not deprive them of this bounty.

In another verse, Allah states the grounds behind this favour, saying: 'And those who believe and whose offspring follow them in faith, to them shall We join their offspring...' (*at-Tur*: 21). The factor here is belief. Joining one group to the other indicates that one of them is perfect while the other is less perfect. Had they been equal in deeds, Allah would have accepted both with open arms.

Allah's saying: '...to them shall We join their offspring...' (*at-Tur*: 21) does not mean taking the average of their deeds; that is, adding the deeds of the fathers to those of the offspring and then dividing the outcome by two, no: '...and We shall not decrease the reward of their deeds in anything...' (*at-Tur*: 21). That is, Allah does not reduce their rewards in the slightest. Bringing them together is a favour from the True Lord *Glorified is He* to please the parents through their children, but the condition is belief. Why? It is because the parents would dislike their company if they were not believers.

If someone were to say that this would mean that some people would get for which they did not work. In other words, they would get the fruits of other people's labour, we would say no, because they have believed and

belief is part of one's deeds. It is true that: '...man will only have what he has worked towards; that his labour will be seen and that in the end he will be repaid in full for it,' (*an-Najm*: 39) but we should not look at their deeds alone, but rather, expand the circle and look at who has made them perform these righteous deeds. It is the result of a good upbringing. Therefore, it is said in a noble Hadith: 'When the son of Adam dies, his deeds come to an end, apart from three things...' one of which is, '...a righteous child who supplicates for him.'⁽¹⁾ The word 'righteous' here is the result of whose efforts? It is the result of the parents' efforts.

So, when the parents receive reward for the good supplications of their offspring, they are only being given what they deserve and the fruit of their labour for this child. If the father is righteous, he will be careful to provide for his child from lawful earnings. His keenness to seek what is lawful often means that his expenses have to be constrained. On the other hand, there are some wealthy people who do not care to have lawful sources of income and work. They buy extravagant food, clothes, cars and other material possessions for their children because they have gathered their wealth from unlawful means.

A righteous father, however, will distance himself and his children from ill-gotten gains. That is why a righteous man may well suffer because of his righteousness in this world. He is patient in hardship and deprivation, and all this is credited to him as good deeds.

It was for this reason that we found many people arguing with us about Allah's saying: '...man will only have what he has worked towards.' (*an-Najm*: 39) They wanted to know how a person could benefit from the work of others. To answer this, we gave them an example: We are commanded to pray over the deceased. Does this prayer benefit the deceased or not? It is pointless if it does not benefit him; and if it does benefit him, then has he not benefited from the work of others?

(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* [vol. 2, p. 372], At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [1376], and Abu Dawud in his *Sunnan* [2880] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The Hadith in full is as follows: 'When the son of Adam dies, his deeds come to an end, apart from three: Ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, or a righteous son who supplicates for him.'

Surely, he benefits from the supplications of the living for him at his funeral prayer, yet this prayer in and of itself will be considered from the deeds of the deceased. It is one of the fruits of his faith in Allah. Had he not been a believer, we would not have prayed over him. When one prays over the deceased, one is not praying over all dead people, but only over those who have believed in their Lord *Glorified is He*. The beliefs of a dead person are part of his deeds, and so your prayer for him is also one of his deeds.

Alternatively, we could also say concerning Allah's saying: '...man will only have what he has worked towards' (*an-Najm*: 39), that it means that the human being has no further right than that. Accordingly, this verse precludes justice, but not Allah's Favour and Bounty. There is a difference between justice and bounty. For example, a person may have a worker with whom he has an agreement to pay him 50 pounds, but that does not mean that he cannot pay him 70.

The verse ends with Allah's saying: '...indeed, it is You Who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' (*Ghafir*: 8) But the angels have not said, for example, 'Indeed, You are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful,' so that it would fit with the rest of the supplication.

This is similar to Allah's saying in the story of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O 'Isa, Son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as gods besides Allah?' He will say, 'Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the Unseen. I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness. If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them - indeed it is You Who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.'"' (*al-Ma'ida*: 118)

'Isa *peace be upon him* has not said: 'Indeed, it is You Who is the Much-Forgiving, the Merciful.' Why? Because they deserve to be punished, yet if You forgive them, no one will dare to revoke your forgiveness. For no one

can put back Allah's Judgement or repel His favour. So, O Lord, it is through Your Power and Wisdom that You forgive them, O Lord, even though they deserve to be punished. Thus the forgiveness does not emanate here from Allah's Attributes of Pardon and Compassion; rather, it comes from His being the Almighty, the Wise. The Divine Attribute of *Al-'Aziz* (Almighty) means the One Who Conquers all and cannot be conquered or opposed.

That is why we said that Satan (Iblis) was truthful when he said: '...By Your Might, then I will surely mislead them all.' (*Sad*: 82) The meaning of the oath *bi'izzatik* (by Your Might) is: 'By Your independence of Your creation, and Your complete lack of need for them; so whoever desires may believe, and whoever desires may disbelieve. By means of this might and self-sufficiency shall I misguide them. Had You wanted them all to be believers, I would not have interfered with them nor dared to tempt them.' This is evident from the exception which Satan then made: 'Except Your chosen servants among them.' (*Sad*: 83) I have no power over such servants and cannot seduce them. Thus the issue is not between Satan and his Lord, rather, it is between Satan and mankind.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then states more of the angels' supplications for the believers:

وَقِهِمُ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَمَنْ تَقِ السَّيِّئَاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ
رَحِمْتَهُ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

**Protect them from all evil deeds: those You protect
on that Day from [the punishment for] evil deeds
will receive Your mercy – that is the supreme
triumph [9] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 9)**

The verbal form *waqihim* (guard them) here is imperative, or supplicatory, and is derived from the verb *waqa*. It means to say: O Lord, turn them away from sin. It is also correct to say that it means: Protect them from the consequences of sin or protect them from sin itself. True mercy is that Allah averts sins and all evil from you. Therefore, Allah says: '...whomsoever You guard against evil deeds on that Day, on him You have had mercy...' (*Ghafir*: 9).

This is similar to Allah's saying regarding the Bounteous Quran: 'And We send down from the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe...' (*al-Isra'*: 82) The healing effect consists in removing the sickness that already exists in the human soul; for example, the Quran treats illnesses such as miserliness, cowardice, dishonesty, etc. As for the aspect of mercy, it is that one is not afflicted by sickness in the first place. There can be no doubt that avoiding a sickness is better than curing it. Prevention, as they say, is better than cure. '...And that is indeed the supreme triumph.' (*Ghafir*: 9). Yes, indeed, what triumph could be greater than being protected by Allah from falling into sin? The word *fawz* (triumph) denotes success and prosperity. It is described as being supreme because in this world one can have success with children, wealth, or status, and this is a triumph. But the supreme triumph is in the afterlife, because it is a permanent and eternal triumph. Any triumph in this world will eventually end.

The True Lord says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُنَادُونَ لِمَقْتُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ مَقْتِكُمْ
 أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِذْ تُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ فَتَكْفُرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

But those who disbelieved will be told, 'When you were called to the faith and rejected it, God's disgust with you was even greater than the self-disgust you feel [today]' [10] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 10)

If we look at this subject from the beginning, we see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has called mankind to believe in Him by means of His Messengers and His Law. Among them are those who answered and believed, and among them are those who disbelieved: '...when you were invited to faith, but you refused.' (*Ghafir*: 10) Those who did not answer the summons of the True Lord *the Exalted* did not want to be bound by Allah's Principles of right and wrong – 'do this and do not do that.' They did not want to constrict themselves by adhering to a principled path, but rather desired to live their lives as they pleased. This is what drew them to disbelief.

On seeing the punishment in the next world, the disbelievers will be filled with regret at a time when regret will be of no avail. They will hate

themselves most severely for not taking the path of faith. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: 'Indeed, those who disbelieve will be addressed, "The hatred of Allah for you was [even] greater than your hatred of yourselves [this Day in Hell] when you were invited to faith, but you refused."' (Ghafir: 10)

The word *maqt* (loathing) refers to the most intense hatred. The True Lord *the Exalted* is saying to them, if you detest yourselves to the worst degree because you have not believed in Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and the message of truth that he brought, you should know that Allah's loathing of you and your disbelief in Him is greater and more intense than your own self-hatred. You detest yourselves because you deprived yourselves of good and brought evil upon yourselves by disbelieving in Allah. The True Lord, however, loathes you because you have distanced yourselves from the sphere of His Goodness. You have put yourselves outside His Mercy and Care. This is because the Lord *Glorified is He* becomes enraged when His slave removes himself from His Care and deprives himself of His Goodness.

This denotes that your Lord loves you and loves that goodness comes to you. He wants you by His side and in His company. He is protectively jealous when you break away or deviate from His Path, for you are His handiwork and His servant. Thus, it appears that Allah's loathing of the disbeliever is actually borne of His Mercy and protective jealousy for him. Therefore, Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Had you created them, you would have had mercy on them.'⁽¹⁾ So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* first clarifies that the disbelievers detest themselves and that His detesting of them is greater than their own.

(1) This Hadith was related by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din* [vol. 4, p. 52] on the authority of some of the (*salaf*; the pious predecessors). The exact wording is: 'There is no slave who disobeys except that his place on earth seeks permission to swallow him up, and the sky above him seeks permission to fall upon him in fragments. Allah then says to the earth and the sky, "Leave my slave be and give him respite, for you did not create him. Had you created him you would have had mercy upon him. Perhaps he will repent to Me and I will forgive him, or perhaps he will become righteous and I will change his deeds to good ones.'"

قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَمَتْنَا اثْنَيْنِ وَأَحْيَيْتَنَا اثْنَيْنِ فَاعْتَرَفْنَا
بِذُنُوبِنَا فَهَلْ إِلَى خُرُوجٍ مِّن سَبِيلٍ ﴿١١﴾

**They will say, ‘Our Lord, twice You have caused us to be
lifeless and twice You have brought us to life. Now we
recognize our sins. Is there any way out?’ [11]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 11)**

In order for us to understand the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘...twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life...’ (*Ghafir*: 11), we need first to understand what death is. Death is the elimination of life after it has been previously present. If death shall occur, it is, therefore, evidence that there has been life before it. Death also refers to a complete non-existence that has not been preceded by life at all.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘How can you disbelieve in Allah?...’ (*al-Baqara*: 28) This is an incredulous question, meaning, ‘tell us how on earth you can disbelieve,’ ‘...Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life...’ (*al-Baqara*: 28). That is, you were non-existent and He gave you life. ‘...Then He will cause you to die...’ (*al-Baqara*: 28) that is, He will take away the life that you have, ‘...then He will bring you [back] to life...’ (*al-Baqara*: 28) that is, in the Hereafter.

So there are two deaths and two lives to be experienced by mankind. The difference of opinion in this matter is whether death must come after life, or whether it can refer to the nothingness that precedes life.

We say that death refers to complete non-existence, whether or not it is preceded by life. For example, when a person sees a small mosquito and a huge elephant, he says, ‘Glory be to the One Who made the elephant big and the mosquito small!’ Were the mosquitoes once big and then Allah caused them to become small, or were they created like that? Thus, it is not necessary that life should precede death. It is sufficient that something has been lifeless. After that Allah brought us to life, we spend our time in this world, and then death comes.

So this verse contains both meanings: first is absolute lifelessness or non-existence which is not preceded by life; and second is death, which is the

removal of existing life. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life...’ (*Ghafir*: 11).

Some scholars⁽¹⁾ believe that the first death designates the removal of life after a human’s appointed time on earth is over. The human is then brought to life in the grave for questioning after which he dies again. Finally, the human is resurrected on the Day of Judgement. But the first opinion⁽²⁾ that we have chosen is more appropriate.

Allah then says: ‘...Now we confess our sins. Is there any way out?’ (*Ghafir*: 11) The question stated here is wishful thinking, but it will never happen. Even if they were returned to life, they would go back to their previous bad ways. There is no benefit in repeating the experience. The True Lord *the Exalted* clarified this issue in His saying: ‘...No! It is but a word that he speaks...’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 100).

If they were returned to life, they would revert to their bad nature and they would continue to disbelieve. When they say ‘way out,’ they mean a way ‘from this predicament that we are in, and from the punishment that we now suffer.’ ‘...Is there any way out?’ (*Ghafir*: 11) In other words, any means to escape and be saved.

What we have mentioned here relates solely to the life and death of the bodies. As for the life of the hearts and souls, this is another issue. The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of it in His saying: ‘O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...’ (*al-Anfal*: 24). There is no doubt that Allah is addressing them while they are living their material lives, so there must be some other

(1) This was the opinion of As-Suddi as narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis [vol. 8, p. 5945]. Al-Qurtubi said, ‘They only arrived at this opinion because the word “dead” is not applied in classical usage to reproductive fluids, and the scholars used this as evidence to prove the questioning in the grave.’

(2) The first opinion intended by Sheikh Ash-Sha’rawi is that they were dead in the loins of their fathers and then they were brought to life. Then they died the death that all must die in this world and were subsequently resurrected for the Gathering and the Judgement, and this totals two deaths and two lives. This was the opinion of Ibn Mas’ud, Ibn ‘Abbas, Qatadah and Ad-Dahhak. [See Tafsir *Al-Qurtubi* vol. 8, p. 5945].

form of life that He is inviting them to. It is the spiritual life after which there is no death, and that is life in paradise.

So, there is the material life in which we live, eat, drink and move, and there is the spiritual life with which we enter Paradise, the place of never-ending blessings and life without death. The material life has a spirit that is appropriate to it, and it is a kind of life that ends in death. As for the spiritual and moral life, it must have a loftier spirit that is attained through adherence to the path of 'do this and do not do that.' That is why Allah calls His Book a (*ruh*) in His saying: 'And thus We have revealed to you (O Muhammad) a *Ruh* (spirit) of Our Command...' (*ash-Shura*: 52). He also calls the one who delivers it a (*ruh*): 'The Trustworthy Spirit (*Ruh* – Angel Gabriel) has brought it down.' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 193)

Each of these two lives lasts in a way appropriate to it. The first has an appointed end, while the other is extended and ever lasting. This is why we say of the martyr who has sacrificed himself and ended his life striving in Allah's Path that Allah rewards him for that by safeguarding him from any further death after that.

ذَٰلِكُمْ بِأَنَّهُ إِذَا دُعِيَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ كَفَرْتُمْ وَإِنْ يُشْرَكَ
بِهِ تَوَلَّوْا فَالْحُكْمُ لِلَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْكَبِيرِ ﴿١٢﴾

[They will be told], 'This is all because when God alone was invoked you rejected this, yet when others were associated with Him you believed [in them].' Judgement belongs to God the Most High, the Most Great [12] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 12)

When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* informs us of the beliefs required of us and supports them with miraculous signs, it is our duty to accept His Laws willingly and with pleasure. Allah *the Most High* has obligated us to act in accordance with the principles of right and wrong only after He gave us the foundations for having ultimate belief in the Supreme God. Then, some people chose to believe, while others choose not to believe, despite all the benefits that we gain through organising our lives according to Allah's Law.

If He gives you a certain rule, you must obey it, but if some opposition persists in your mind after that, then your reality affirms that you have not believed with your hearts. ‘...That is because...’ (*Ghafir*: 12) that is, your opposition to the call to Allah, and your taking an adverse stance against it is the result of: ‘...when Allah was called upon alone, you disbelieved...’ (*Ghafir*: 12).

In another place in the Quran, Allah says: ‘and when Allah is mentioned alone, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with aversion, but when those [worshipped] other than Him are mentioned, immediately they rejoice.’ (*az-Zumar*: 45) That is, they manifest resentment and irritation when they hear Allah’s Speech. Why? Because they have not realized the meaning of faith and the subsequent responsibility of applying the law of ‘do this and do not do that.’ They know that this law will restrict their desires and forbid them from certain things they love. It will also demand from them other duties that lie heavy upon the soul. That is why they become resentful when reminded of Allah and the path of faith, while if they hear of their false gods: ‘...immediately they rejoice...’ (*az-Zumar*: 45) and feel glad. Why? This is so because these idols and false gods, which they worship besides Allah, make no demands of them. They do not require them to ‘do this, and not do that.’ So in their worship, they are left to the dictates of their desires and the evil of their selves. This is the meaning of their rejoicing and the significance of: ‘...but if others were associated with Him, you believed...’ (*Ghafir*: 12).

Yet, there remains a reality that should not be forgotten: ‘...So the judgement is with Allah, the Most High and the Grand.’ (*Ghafir*: 12) So rejoice in your alleged gods as you like. My Decree will rule over you against your will. I will make you ill as I wish, and I will cause you to die when I wish. I will make you rich and I will make you poor, and so on. You can never withdraw yourself from My Dominion, except in those things in which I have given you a choice.

You have been given a choice between belief and disbelief; so whoever wishes may believe and whoever wishes may disbelieve. Whoever wishes may obey and whoever wishes may disobey. Yet, your obedience is of no benefit to Me and your disobedience cannot harm Me. No matter how much you rebel in those matters in which you have been given a choice, in the end you will come back to Me.

‘...So the judgement is with Allah the Most High the Grand.’ (*Ghafir*: 12) Indeed, His Decree cannot be rebelled against. So, even if you are accustomed to rebelling in matters of belief and obedience, show me how you are going to rebel against Allah in those matters in which you have no choice.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then goes on to mention aspects of His Magnificence and Exaltedness.

هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُنَزِّلْ لَكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ رِزْقًا
وَمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ إِلَّا مَنْ يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾

It is He who shows you [people] His signs and sends water down from the sky to sustain you, though only those who turn to God will take heed [13] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 13)

The word (*ayat*) is the plural of *aya* and, as we have mentioned, it is of three types: cosmic signs that demonstrate the enormous power and superior wisdom of the One True God Who is the Possessor of Majesty and Glory; the miraculous signs with which Allah strengthens His Messengers and affirms the truthfulness of their mission of delivering the message on His behalf; and, finally, the revelations and verses of the Quran that carry Allah’s Rulings.

Allah says: ‘It is He who shows you His *Ayat*...’ (*Ghafir*: 13) that is, His cosmic signs so that you may believe in the Supreme God. He also shows you miracles through the hands of His Messengers. After that He reveals to you the verses of the Quran that contain His Rulings, which protect your faith and religion. Because just as I have protected your bodies with the water I have sent down from the sky and brought forth your provisions by means of it, by which you are nourished and sustained, you should also accept this other thing that I have made to sustain your religion. They are the rulings that will protect your beliefs in the legal domain of ‘do this and do not do that.’

Thus, Allah’s saying: ‘It is He who shows you His *Ayat* (signs, proofs, verses of the Quran or revelations) and sends down to you from the sky, provision...’ (*Ghafir*: 13) covers both matters together, neglecting neither of them for the sake of the other.

‘...But none will remember except he who turns back [in repentance].’ (*Ghafir*: 13) That is, the one who repentantly returns to Allah and divests

himself of the arrogance of denying Him. He shakes the dust of heedlessness from himself so that he may return to his primordial, natural state of belief, of which Allah spoke in His saying: ‘...Am I not your Lord’ (*al-A’raf*: 172) The response of course was that all replied, ‘Yes, indeed, You are our True Lord.’

﴿١٤﴾ فَادْعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

**So call upon God and dedicate your religion to Him alone,
however hateful this may be to the disbelievers [14]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 14)**

The word *du`a`* (supplication) is the manifestation of humility and submission to Allah *the Exalted*. Why? Because among mankind are those who rebel against Allah *the Most High* and are too arrogant to obey Him and too proud to manifest any humility before Him. So when you show lowliness and humility to Allah and sincerity in worship, it becomes clear to them that this rebellion is not the fundamental nature of mankind, rather, it is born of their own caprice (*hawa*). The proof of this is that some people do show humility and submission and that some people do call on their Lord, obey Him and demonstrate sincerity.

So, rebellion is not an essential characteristic of mankind, rather, it is a characteristic of the rebel alone. When the human preserves his primordial nature, he will necessarily seek help and refuge from Allah. That is why you should invoke Allah with sincere devotion to Him, even if the disbelievers hate you praying like this.

We have mentioned regarding the virtues of *du`a`* (supplication) that it is: ‘The marrow (essence) of worship.’⁽¹⁾ Supplication is essentially the humility of the worshipper before the Might of his Lord. It is simply a manifestation of humility, regardless of the results of one’s supplication, for the True Lord *the Exalted* has already given to you before you ask Him. He has created many things for you before your existence. That is why it is not necessary

(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [Hadith no. 3371] as *Hadith Marfu`* from the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi said, ‘It is (*gharib*; strange to come) from this route of narration. We only know it from the Hadith of Ibn Lahi`ah.’ It was also narrated by Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Bukhari in *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* on the authority of An-Nu`man ibn Bashir with the wording: ‘Supplication is worship.’ [See *Kashf Al-Khafa`* by Al-`Ajluni, vol. 1, p. 485]

for Allah to grant every person his request. It is as though Allah is saying to us, do not forget that there are those among you who supplicate to me, but I do not answer them. For when I leave them unanswered, I am in fact giving them a greater gift. One's supplication for good may in fact bring evil, as a person may pray for something and not realize that his destruction lies in it.

We have previously given the example of a mother overcome by anger who invokes Allah saying, 'Oh Allah! Punish my son by your fire'. What will be the state of this mother if Allah *Glorified is He* were to answer her prayer? Allah *Glorified is He* knows that her prayer is foolish and that she prayed for evil thinking it to be good, and for this reason He corrects her prayer. That is why we say in praise of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Glory be to the one who corrects the error of the supplicants by not answering them'. By that He protects us from harm, for how often does a man request something harmful although he thinks he is praying for good?!

This verse: 'Invoke, then, Allah, with devotion to Him alone, however hateful this may be to those who deny the Truth!' (*Ghafir*: 14) It incites us to vex the disbelievers and enrage them by manifesting our lowliness and humility to Allah *Glorified is He*. This vexes them because it manifests the Might and the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* Whom they were too proud to obey, Who they wrongly placed themselves above and in Whom they disbelieved. For this reason one should continually supplicate in front of them, being very humble before Allah *Glorified is He*:

رَفِيعُ الدَّرَجَاتِ ذُو الْعَرْشِ يُلْقِي الرُّوحَ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ لِيُنْذِرَ يَوْمَ التَّلَاقِ
يَوْمَ هُمْ بَدْرُؤٌ لَا يُنْفَخِي عَلَى اللَّهِ مِنْهُمْ شَيْءٌ لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ

He is exalted in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He sends revelations with His teachings to whichever of His servants He will, in order to warn of the Day of Meeting [15] The Day when they will come out and nothing about them will be concealed from God. 'Who has control today?' 'God, the One, the All Powerful [16] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 15 - 16)

The word *rafi* ' (high above) means that Allah *Glorified is He* raises others, as when He *Glorified is He* raises some of His creatures above others. It can

also have the meaning of the passive participle, in that He is elevated in and of Himself. In fact, the one who raises others cannot raise them unless He himself is elevated. That is, '*rafi*' here means that He is elevated above everything, as we say 'Allah is greater' or 'higher' or 'more majestic'.

Allah's Existence is elevated because it is pre-eternal and not preceded by non-existence. Our existence on the other hand is preceded by non-existence. His existence is never-ending while ours is finite. His existence *Glorified is He* is a basic and essential reality, while ours is only by means of Him. Thus He *Glorified is He* is the ultimate pinnacle of existence, yes indeed He is.

Allah *Glorified is He* is elevated in the way He upholds and sustains all (*qayyumiyatuhu*). We work and become tired, and then we sleep in order to rest. As for Allah *Glorified is He* He is not tired by work nor does He sleep to rest. That is why He says, 'Allah—there is no deity save Him—The Ever-Living, The Self-Subsisting by Whom all subsist (*Al-Qayyum*). Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep' (*al-Baqara*: 255). It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us, sleep to your heart's content because neither sleep nor slumber affect me, wanting thereby to make us feel at peace knowing that He is looking after us.

By means of His All-Supporting, All-Sustaining Nature, Allah *Glorified is He* raises whomever He wills. And through His Absolute Power He keeps whomever He wills raised and he lowers whomever He wills. He says: 'Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, over all things You have power' (*Al-Imran*: 26).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'High above ranks...' (*Ghafir*: 15) because being high necessitates one being above another; these are the *darajat* (ranks), that is, the difference between one level and another. The word *darajat* (ranks) refers to movement in an upward direction, as for going down, these are called *darakat* (depths).

Allah *Glorified is He* raises whatever He wills of His creation over whatever He wills. With regard to times, He elevated *Ramadan* over the other months, and of places He raised the Holy Sanctuary (*Ka'ba*) and *Bayt Al-Maqdis* in Jerusalem. He raises some of the angels as He says on their tongue:

‘...Among us, too, there is none but has a place assigned to it [by Him]’ (*as-Saffat*: 164). With regard to the Messengers, He raised ‘The Resolute Ones’ *ulu al-‘azm*, as He, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Some of these Messengers We have endowed with more [gifts] than others...’ (*al-Baqara*: 253). Allah *Glorified is He* also raises some of the masses: ‘...Allah will exalt by [many] degrees those of you who have attained to faith and [above all] such as have been vouchsafed [true] knowledge...’ (*al-Mujadala*: 11). And just as He *Glorified is He* has raised those who have been given knowledge, He also raises those who are active but do not have knowledge. They only have the energy to act on this knowledge, apply it and realise its goals in this life. The application of knowledge requires active hands—artisans, manufacturers and workers. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘For, He it is who has made you inherit the earth and has raised some of you by degrees above others...’ (*al-An‘am*: 165).

That is, we have times that have been elevated, places that have been elevated, angels that are elevated, prophets that have been elevated, believers that are elevated, scholars that are elevated and finally the masses on earth that are elevated.

Ponder over the Divine Justice in raising some above others. Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention who was raised, nor over whom they were raised, for Him *Glorified is He* to show us that each is raised in one area but others are raised over him in another area. Thus the rich man is not higher or better than the poor man, nor is the handsome man higher than the ugly, nor is the intelligent better than the dull-witted. Each is only raised in accordance with his actions, as we are told in Allah’s saying: ‘O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, Allah is All Knowing, All-Aware’ (*al-Hujurat*: 13).

We see that all the creation, apart from those whom we have already mentioned as being elevated by Allah, are raised in some aspects, but others are raised over them in others. Hence, the carpenter who makes a desk for me is elevated above me in this area and is better than me therein because he knows this craft and is a master of it, while I do not know it.

When this worker comes and asks me about a matter, I am raised above him in that because I know it and he does not. We have said previously that Allah *Glorified is He* choses the daily life of his creatures to be based upon needs, not graces. Each one of us is in need of others; and without this reciprocal need, society will not be complete.

If society were based upon grace and being given blessings, most of the good things will cease to be and life will collapse. Imagine if all of us graduated from university and became scholars, who will do the other jobs for us? Who will clean the streets? Who will work in the sewers? Who will sell in the marketplace? And so on. This is what the poet⁽¹⁾ spoke of who said:

People for people, be they nomads or city-folk,
Are one to another, even if unaware, servants⁽²⁾.

None of us are totally subservient; rather, each of us is subservient in one thing and serve others in another. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us this lesson in His saying: 'O you who have attained to faith! No men shall deride [other] men: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. And no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves...' (*al-Hujurat*: 11).

For this reason, no one should look at one job as being better than another; rather, some workers are better than others. The best one is he who does his job best. The worker who does a job which is considered less respectable but does it excellently is better than one who does a more respected job poorly.⁽³⁾

(1) He was *Abu Al-'Ala' Al-Mu'arri Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah*, a poet and a philosopher. He was born in 363 AH and died in 449 AH in Mu'arrat An-Nu'man. He went blind at the age of four and began to compose poetry at the age of eleven. He prohibited cruelty to animals, did not eat meat for 45 years and wore coarse clothes. He authored *Luzum ma la Yalzam* and *Saqt Az-Zand* (*Al-Mawsu'ah Ash-Shi'riyya*).

(2) The couplet is from a poem by Abu Al-'Ala' Al-Mu'arri written with the rhyme of *Bahr Al-Basit*. It has five couplets, and the line as quoted in *Al-Mawsu'ah Ash-Shi'riyya* is:
People for people, of the city or the countryside,
Are one to another, even if unaware, servants.

(3) Al-'Ajluni related in *Kashf Al-Khafa'* [1/285], 'Indeed, Allah loves that when one of you performs his work (*al-'aml*) he perfects it'. In another narration the word 'work' is indefinite. He said, 'It was narrated by Abu Ya'laand Al-'Askari on the authority of 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her*'. Al-'Askari also related it (*marfu'*: *elevated to Prophet* =

To this end Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'The value of each individual is in that which he does well'⁽¹⁾. Therefore, whoever wants greatness, let him perfect his work, no matter how lowly his work may be in the eyes of some, for there is no lowly work in Islam; there is only a lowly worker, and he is the careless one who does not perfect what he does or does it with sincerity.

We previously drew an example from something that happened ⁽²⁾ in France at a debate at the Council of French Youth. They were presenting us with some important arguments in these debates. Among these was that the workers' union leader used to make many demands on their behalf and spend extravagantly on these, but the minister in charge of authorising these requests used to overrule his budget.

Time passed and the workers' leader became the minister. The new leader stopped him and said to him, 'I ask nothing from you except what you yourself used to seek, but still you overrule my budgets'. Then he added, 'Do not forget that there was a time when you used to polish shoes', in the hope of arousing his compassion, or perhaps of making him feel ashamed. The minister was unperturbed by what he said. He replied to him plainly, 'Yes indeed', he said, 'But I used to do a good job'.

Clearly, greatness does not lie in the work itself, but in its quality. That is why we say, if a worker who does his work carefully and is sincere, knows that his employer is absent; he will still do his job to the best of his ability for the sake of Allah.

If such a worker really knew what he had done to strengthen people's faith in Allah *Glorified is He* he will brag about this work among the scholars.

= *Muhammad*) with the wording, 'he masters it'. The practise of the great scholars dictates favouring them (that is, these narrations and others).

(1) *Ibn Ash-Shajari related in his book Al-Amali Ash-Shajariyya on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'I will tell you four things that Allah Glorified is He confirmed in His Book', and he mentioned among them, 'The value (or he said worth) of each person is in that which he does well'. 'Ali continued, 'And Allah the Glorified and Exalted subsequently revealed in the story of Talut: "Behold, Allah has exalted him above you, and endowed him abundantly with knowledge and bodily perfection..." (al-Baqara: 247)'.*

(2) The story of the French leader of the workers' union who became a minister

How is that? What does a worker do to strengthen people's faith, someone might ask? We answer that it is because whoever sees his excellent work will explain, 'O Allah!' Thus, it is excellent work that spreads Allah's Good Name throughout creation and leads people to remember Allah—and the rewards involved in such are not hidden from anyone.

Allah's saying: '...in almightiness enthroned...' (*Ghafir*: 15) means, 'the one who owns creation, and this creation submitted to Him without any opposition'. In His Absolute Power and Divinity, He is immovable. It is not for a king to sit and be firmly established on the throne of authority until matters are under his control. However, there is a great difference between Allah being 'seated' and 'firmly established' on His Throne and the sitting of the kings of this world on their thrones. We believe that Allah is 'seated and firmly established' upon His Throne in a way that cannot be likened to creation or can be explained. As long as His Existence is completely unlike our existence, then His being 'seated' is completely unlike our sitting. We have said previously that these matters are to be seen through the lens of: 'There is nothing like unto Him...' (*ash-Shura*: 11).

Allah subjugated the universe *Glorified is He* without any difficulty; the proof of which is Allah's saying: 'And He [it is Who] turned to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke; and He [it is Who] said to them and to the earth, "Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly!"—To which both responded, "We do come in obedience"' (*Fussilat*: 11).

Also, because He *Glorified is He* is 'high above ranks', and He *Glorified is He* is 'in almightiness enthroned', He wanted to grant those who believe in Him something of His Elevation, thereby raising them over others and not leaving them neglected and abandoned without a Message to follow. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* sent revelation to them: 'By His Own Will does He bestow inspiration upon whomever He wills of His slaves...' (*Ghafir*: 15). Allah *Glorified is He* did not take the creation as His slaves and then abandon them; He sent down a clear Message of 'do this and do not do that' to govern their daily lives for them. This is the law that results in prosperity, elevation, and exaltation of mankind. But He made this Message optional—whoever wants can believe and whoever wants can disbelieve, and whoever wants can obey

and whoever wants can disobey—so that in the next world the believer will see how Allah elevated him when He makes him enter paradise, the abode of eternal pleasure, where blessings never end and there is no death.

This Message came to us in the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It sets our daily lives in order for our actions to be consistent with one another and not contradictory. When you see that the Sacred Law has restricted your actions in some field, you should realise that it has restricted the lives of millions for your sake. When, for example, it forbids you as an individual from stealing, it restricts your actions. It forbids you from extending your hand to that which is not yours, but at the same time it has restricted a million other hands from taking what is yours. When it commands you to lower your gaze and honour the sanctity of the forbidden, it has also commanded the rest of creation to lower their gaze from members of your family, and so on. Reflect upon whom it is who really benefits from the application of this Divine Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He bestow[s] inspiration (*ar-ruh*)...’ (*Ghafir*: 15). The word *ar-ruh* has many meanings. What springs to mind is that it refers to the spirit which enters material objects and gives them life and motion. This is the *ruh* (spirit) that the Creator cast into Adam *peace be upon him* for him to be able to move and for his limbs, having previously been mere clay, to fulfil their roles.

Allah *Glorified is He* then wanted to restrain the actions of such material objects for them not to follow their base passions, therefore He sent down another *ruh* from Himself: the system of values contained in the Glorious Quran. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the Call of Allah and the Messenger [Mohammad] whenever He calls you to that which will give you life...’ (*al-Anfal*: 24).

But how can He bring them to life when they are already alive, as is mentioned in this speech? Yes, they are alive in a material sense, in that the spirit has entered their bodies and they move by means of it, but what is referred to here is a type of life higher than the material one—the spiritual life that elevates man’s actions and makes them always for the good of those around him and for himself. Just as the material life has a spirit, the spiritual life has a spirit as well.

That is why the Quran is called a *ruh*, and the angel who brought it is also called a *ruh*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And thus, too, [O Muhammad] have We revealed to you a life-giving Message (*ruh*), [coming] at Our behest...’ (*ash-Shura*: 52), and: ‘A trustworthy spirit (*ruh*) has brought it down’ (*ash-Shu’ara*: 193).

This is the spiritual life, the life of lofty ideals, the life that qualifies one for another eternal, never-ending life. You can be the judge between a life that qualifies you only for this perishing world and a life that qualifies you for the eternal life in next world. You can only come to the conclusion that the latter is greater than and preferable to the former.

It is sufficient a distinction between them that the first spirit, the material one, exists in the believer and the disbeliever. By means of this spirit the disbelief of the disbeliever and the sin of the sinner exist. As for the spirit that gives us true values, that is the Message, it exists only in the believer, and it moves him only towards goodness, in a balanced way that makes him and those around him happy in this world before the next.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Behold, the life in the Hereafter is indeed the only [true] life (*hayawan*): if they but knew!’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 64) The word *hayawan* (only true life) means ‘the true eternal life whose pleasures never end or perish’. In this world, the pleasure of man is governed by his activity and his opportunities, but the pleasure of the next world is governed by the Bestower *Glorified is He*.

On top of this, you live in the world and you are continually exposed to death, threatened by it in every moment. It may come upon you suddenly. It has no set time or age, and there is no way to know it. Some die after one year, some after a hundred years, and some in their mother’s womb. Death does not differentiate between the old and the young or between the sick and the healthy. Allah *Glorified is He* has obscured it. Why? This is for us to always remember it, waiting for it to pounce on us. Thus, it is as though its obscurity is clarity itself.

Allah *Glorified is He* alerts us to this matter in His saying: ‘Blessed is He in Whose Hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: He who has created death as well as life so that He might put you to a test

[and thus show] which of you is best in conduct...' (*al-Mulk*: 1-2). Ponder over Allah's Words: '...He who has created death as well as life...' (*al-Mulk*: 2). He began with death, putting it before life. It is as though He *Glorified is He* is saying to us: do not face life except with death on your mind. Why? Because the remembrance of death prevents one from becoming deluded by the world or inclining towards it. It checks man's behaviour for him to not do anything except good deeds, for he is constantly keeping account of the punishments that are in store for him.

Allah's saying: '...upon whomever He wills of His slaves...' (*Ghafir*: 15), means, 'those whom He chooses and elects for this station'. This is like His saying: 'Allah chooses Messengers from among the angels as well as from among men...' (*al-Hajj*: 75), and: 'Allah knows best upon whom to bestow His Message...' (*al-An'am*: 124).

Allah *Glorified is He* then clarifies the reasoning behind His saying: 'By His Own Will does He bestow inspiration upon whomever He wills of His slaves...' (*Ghafir*: 15). Why? He explains: '...So as to warn [all human beings of the coming] of the Day when they shall meet Him' (*Ghafir*: 15). That is to say, beware of thinking that this matter will end with the end of the life in this world, that the sinners will get away with their sins and the oppressors with their oppression. No! They will be returned to Allah in whom they disbelieved, or whose prohibitions they disobeyed and dared to violate. Remember this reality no matter how averse you feel in your denial or how distant you feel from your Lord. You will be returned to Him in spite of yourself and made to stand before Him. There can be no escaping Him in the slightest.

We mentioned previously that 'warning' means to frighten somebody about some evil in the future for them to prepare for it and thus avoid what results in the matter that is feared in order to be safe from it. There can be no warning if the event is already at hand. It must be before the event by a margin that allows one to take account of the situation and take steps to prevent it from happening.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...the Day when they shall meet (*at-talaq*)' (*Ghafir*: 15). But the word *at-talaq* means *at-talaqi* (meeting) which cannot happen unless there is now some distance between the things that will meet

in the future. What, then, are the things that will meet? The scholars say that what is intended here is the Day of Judgement, and the meeting will take numerous forms. In the next world you will see the angels in whom you had faith in this world, and you will meet them clearly.

In the next world you will see your relatives and your extended family, from Adam *peace be upon him* right down until the last child in this world. You will meet all of them, even until Adam. You will see the relatives who you used to shun in this world. This amazing huge tree with all its intertwining branches will be manifest before you and you will say, 'How did I cut these intertwining branches by not keeping contact with my relatives? How did I shun these relatives, regardless of having a reason or not? You used to think that you are from a special race and others are lower than you are. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'You are all from Adam, and Adam was from dust' ⁽¹⁾.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I am the Most-Merciful (*Ar-Rahman*) and this is the womb (*Ar-rahim*); I have derived a name for it from My name. Whoever upholds its connections, I will uphold his connection, and whoever breaks its connections, I will break his connection'. ⁽²⁾

One day ⁽³⁾ the doorman of Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan ⁽⁴⁾ came to him and said, 'O Commander of the Faithful, there is a man at the door who says he is your brother'. 'Do you not know my brothers?' he asked. 'That is what the man says', he replied. 'Bring him in', said Mu'awiya. When he entered

(1) Ahmad related this in his *Musnad* [2/361] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him with the wording, 'People are the children of Adam, and Adam was from dust'.

(2) It was related by Ahmad in his *Musnad* [1/191-194] and At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [1907], who said it is a good/sound Hadith. Abu Dawud also related it in his *Sunnan* [1694], and they all related it on the authority of 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf Allah be pleased with him.

(3) The story of the man who claimed to be Mu'awiya's brother

(4) Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan was Sakhr ibn Harb ibn Umayya, the founder of the Ummayyad dynasty in *Sham* and a shrewd man. He was born in Mecca 20 years before the emigration and entered Islam on the day that Mecca was liberated. He died in the year 60 AH at the age of 80. His conquests reached the Atlantic Ocean and he was the first Muslim to take to the sea to fight the Romans (*Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli Vol. 7).

he said to him, 'Which of my brothers are you?' 'I am your brother from Adam', answered the man. Mu'awiya laughed and said, 'A relative (*rahim*) who has been cut off! By Allah, I will be the first to re-establish the connection'. Consequently, he brought him close to him and gave him what he wanted.⁽¹⁾

Among the meetings that will take place on the Day of Judgement are those between the victim and his oppressor and between one adversary and another. Indeed, the enemies will be gathered with Allah; therefore, it is upon the intelligent person to hold himself to account a thousand times in preparation for this meeting. And whoever ponders the consequences deeply will be saved.

Another meeting that will take place that Day is the meeting of a man with the record of his actions, wherein every deed, big and small, is recorded: '...Allah will have taken [all of] it into account, even though they [themselves] may have forgotten it...' (*al-Mujadala*: 6), and: 'On the Day when every human being will find himself faced with all the good that he has done and with all the evil that he has done; [many a one] will wish that there was a long span of time between himself and that [Day]...' (*Al-'Imran*: 30), the Day when your Lord will say to you: '[It will be said], "Read your record. Sufficient is your soul this Day to make an account against you"' (*al-Isra*': 14).

Then the meetings will reach an apex; the believers will meet with their Lord *Glorified is He* when He *Glorified is He* manifests Himself to them, and they will then see Him. This is the greatest pleasure, granted from Allah's Generosity and Bounty. Read: 'Some faces on that Day will be bright with happiness, looking up to their Lord; and some faces on that Day will be

(1) Nur Ad-Din Al-Yusi (1102 AH) mentioned in his book *Al-Muhadarat fi Al-Adab wa Al-Lugha* that a man entered upon Mu'awiya and said to him, 'I ask you by the relation (*ar-rahim*) between you and I that you help me' So he asked him, 'Are you from the tribe of 'Abd Munaf?' 'No', he replied. 'Are you from Quraysh?' 'No'. 'Are you an Arab?' 'No'. 'Then, what is the connection between you and I?' he asked. 'Adam', he answered. So Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'A relation which has been spurned! Verily, I will be the first to re-establish our relationship', and he gave him [what he wanted].

This was mentioned by Al-Abshihi in his book *Al-Mustatraf fi kull Fann Mustazhaf*, and he attributed it to Abu 'Ali Al-Qali in his book *Al-Amali*.

overcast with despair, knowing that a crushing calamity is about to befall them' (*al-Qiyama*: 22-25).

While the vision of Allah is the greatest blessing for the believers, it is the worst type of punishment for the disbelievers because they are denied it: 'Nay, verily, from [the grace of] their Lord shall they on that Day be debarred' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 15). That day their sadness and regret will become even worse: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the Truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water—until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full—for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur*: 39) He finds Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he disbelieved in this world, and he finds the punishment of which we spent such a long time warning and reminding him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'The Day when they shall come forth [from death], with nothing of themselves hidden from Allah' (*Ghafir*: 16), that is, on this day, the Day of Meetings, they will come openly and publicly after they and their evil deeds were hidden in this world. That day their covers will be removed and their affairs will be disclosed: '...with nothing of themselves hidden from Allah' (*Ghafir*: 16). All will be gathered, the kings and their subjects, the masters and their slaves, the presidents and their peoples, all in a state of slavery.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* will call out: 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day?' (*Ghafir*: 16) Allah *Glorified is He* will say this because in this world He made some of us kings. In the next world, however, there will be no dominion for anyone except Allah *Glorified is He* alone. Thus, the believer and the disbeliever will all reply to this question saying: '...with Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir*: 16) Yes, because there is no object that deserves worship but Him and no true king but Him.

Allah's saying: 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day' (*Ghafir*: 16) means that on that day dominion will belong to Allah *Glorified is He* just as it did before it. But this is a reality that the disbelievers denied in the world, while the believers who were happy to have Allah as their Lord affirmed it. He gives

dominion to whomever He wills, and He strips dominion from whomever He wills. He elevates whoever He wills and He abases whomever He wills.

The words: ‘...that Day...’ (*Ghafir*: 16) are directed here at the disbelievers who denied this reality in the world. In the Hereafter, however, they will recognise and affirm it: ‘...with Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir*: 16)

الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ لَا ظُلْمَ
 الْيَوْمَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٧﴾

**Today each soul will be rewarded for whatever it
has done; today no injustice will be done. God is
swift in reckoning [17] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 17)**

Allah says: ‘On that Day...’ (*Ghafir*: 17), that is, the Day of Judgement: ‘...will be requited...’ (*Ghafir*: 17), that is, brought to account: ‘...every human being... for what he has earned (*kasabat*)...’ (*Ghafir*: 17). We mentioned previously that the verb *kasaba* (earned) is used for good, while the verb *iktasaba* (earned) is used for evil. The scholars of the Arabic language say that every letter added to the base root of a word adds more meaning to the base root. That is why the words *kasab* and *iktasab* are different. The word *kasaba* has the pattern (*fa’ala*) meaning that the action happens naturally, without trouble. The word *iktasaba*, however, has the pattern (*ifta’ala*) indicating that it is contrived and requires effort.

Doing good does not require one to tire oneself out, as opposed to evil which necessitates troubles, weariness, and stealth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In his favour shall be whatever good he does (*kasabat*), and against him whatever evil he does (*iktasabat*)...’ (*al-Baqara*: 286). We explained this matter with the example of a man who sits amongst his family and sees beautiful faces: his wife, his daughters, his aunts, etc. and he may look at this beauty without trouble or shame. As for those outside his immediate family, he steals glances to enjoy their looks, yet he must try not to be seen by anyone. Similarly, we see this matter in the difference between a woman who becomes pregnant in a permissible manner and one who becomes

pregnant in an impermissible way. See how the first displays her pregnancy and is proud of it, while the other tries her up most to conceal and rid herself of it. The happiness of the former and the grief of the latter is the difference between the permissible and the impermissible.

Another example is a man who takes something from his house; he takes it openly without any trouble or without needing to work out any scheme. If, however, he wants to steal from someone else's house, he must scheme and plot. Hence, we say that the permissible does not trouble a person, while it is the impermissible which causes everyone trouble.

As for Allah's saying: 'Nay! Those who earn (*kasab*) evil...' (*al-Baqara*: 81), the word *kasab* (earn) has been used here in reference to evil. How is this case? The scholars say it is because when an evil deed becomes a familiar habit for someone, he does it without any trouble, as if it were a good deed. Thus, because he has grown used to it, it has become *kasab* for him, and not *iktisab*. Such a person is said to be dissolute (*faqid*), that is, someone who has delved into the impermissible and grown so used to disobedience that it has become second nature for him. Allah *Glorified is He* gave an example of this in His saying: '[For] He is aware of the treacherous glance...' (*Ghafir*: 19). That is, there are treacherous glances and there are trustworthy glances. Trustworthy glances are those that look at the permissible and treacherous ones are those that look at the prohibited.

Even from the standpoint of economics, the philosophy that rules the people these days and according to which the progress of nations and their development is judged, we say that the permissible costs nothing, while it is the impermissible that is costly. This is from the standpoint of economics because the basis for the permissible is: 'Eat and drink [freely], but do not waste...' (*al-A'raf*: 31). It is also stated in a Hadith that, 'We are a people who do not eat until we get hungry, and when we eat we do not fill ourselves up'.⁽¹⁾ If we lived upon this basis we will make do with little. You

(1) It is narrated on the authority of *Al-Miqdam ibn Mu'id Yakrib* that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The son of Adam does not fill a vessel worse than his stomach. A few morsels are enough for the son of Adam to keep his back straight, yet if he absolutely must, then a third for his food, a third for his drink and a third for air'. It is related by Ahmad in his *Musnad* [4/132], *At-Tirmidhi* in his *Sunnan* [2380], and *Ibn Majah* in his *Sunnan* [3349].

can try this for yourself. Do not eat until you are hungry and you will find that a morsel is delicious, even if only with salt. It is as though following Allah's Religion gives you rest; it does not trouble you in your daily life, it does not require much work and it does not require much money. In the same way, when we eat we do not eat until we are full. You have seen people who eat until they get indigestion and need medicine to aid their digestion. Yet he has only given himself trouble, exhausting himself eating and spending on food.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'No oppression (*zhulm*) [will be done] on that Day...' (*Ghafir*: 17). Yes indeed, because the judge on that day will be Allah *Glorified is He* the Absolutely Just. It is as though Allah is saying to us; injustice and oppression (*zhulm*) one of your features, O mankind. We gave you respite in the world, and you dwelled therein in oppression. The strong oppressed the weak, the rich oppressed the poor, and the ruler oppressed his charge. But today: 'No oppression [will be done]...' (*Ghafir*: 17).

In the world, injustice and oppression reached their limit in that you ascribed partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with Him] is a great injustice' (*Luqman*: 13). Indeed, it is clear, manifest oppression because injustice is that you take someone else's right for yourself, or you take somebody's right and give it someone who has no right to it. This is what happened when they associated partners with Allah *Glorified is He*. They took His Divinity and gave it to the idols.

Injustice can come about from a number of angles; it could be that you do a good deed and are not rewarded good for it. It could be that you do a good deed for which you deserve ten but you are only given five rewards. It could be that you do a bad deed and are not held to account for it, or that you are held to account for a bad deed you did not do.

That is, any upset in the balance of property and benefits derived from work done is considered an injustice. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'O my slaves, I have forbidden oppression for Myself, so do not oppress one another'.⁽¹⁾

(1) It is related by *Muslim* in his *Sahih* [2577], *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* [5/ 160], *Al-Bayhaqi* in his *As-Sunnan Al-Kubra* [6/93], and *Al-Bukhari* in *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* [pg. 172,=

That is in this world, as for the Day of Judgement you will be before the unbiased Judge, in the court of the Absolutely Just, Who shows no favouritism to one over another. He has no son or spouse that might make Him swerve from the Truth.

It is for this reason that we said that the jinn were more truthful in their response when they said: ‘For [we know] that sublimely exalted is the Majesty of our Lord⁽¹⁾: no consort has He ever taken unto Himself nor son’ (*al-Jinn*: 3) because the majority of oppression comes from these two: the spouse and the child.

Allah’s saying: ‘Verily, Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*Ghafir*: 17) hints at His Absolute Power to judge between people and repay them for their deeds. It is as though He is saying to us: beware of thinking that judging you will be difficult or that it will take a long time. No! For Our affair is something entirely different. Allah’s judgement of our cases is not prolonged nor is it delayed.

‘Verily, Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*Ghafir*: 17) because Allah’s Deeds are achieved through Divine Command—not by means of a process, like your deeds. The proof of this is that in the world there are hundreds of thousands of judges judging among people in hundreds of thousands of towns and cities at the same time in different courts and different lands, yet the truth by which they judge does not differ from one to the next; rather, it is something that affects them all, a brush that has painted all their judgements.

Clearly, if one of Allah’s creations, in this case the truth, can overcome all the judges in the world at one time, then the One Who created this truth is more capable of judging between all His creatures at one time. Thus, when Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked how all people will be judged at once despite their numbers, he replied, ‘Just as Allah provides for them all at once’.⁽²⁾

= 490], on the authority of *Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him*. Its wording is, ‘O My slaves, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another’.

(1) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘For [we know] that sublimely exalted is the Majesty of our Lord...’ (*al-Jinn*: 3), that is, the Greatness of our Lord is Exalted, and the Majesty of our Lord is Exalted (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim* 1/118).

(2) *Ibn ‘Abd Al-Barr Al-Qurtubi* mentions in his book *Bahjat Al-Majalis* that it was said to ‘Ali *ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him* ‘How does Allah judge so many people?’ To which he replied, ‘Just as He apportioned their provision between them’.

وَأَنْذِرْهُمْ يَوْمَ الْآزِفَةِ إِذِ الْقُلُوبُ لَدَى الْحَنَاجِرِ كَظْمِينَ
 مَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ يُطَاعُ ﴿١٨﴾

**Warn them [Prophet] of the ever-approaching Day, when hearts are at throats, choking them. The evildoer will have no friends, nor any intercessor to be heeded [18]
 (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 18)**

We mentioned previously that the phrase: ‘...that Day that is [ever] drawing nearer’ is a warning meant to inform and warn of evil before it arrives. The coming day is death because it comes all of a sudden; no one knows when it will strike. It could also refer to the Day of Judgement, and this is also close because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah's Commandment has come; therefore do not desire to hasten it...’ (*an-Nahl*: 1). He *Glorified is He* uses the verb ‘has come’ in the past tense to indicate certainty and the nearness of its occurrence, for all that is impending is near.

On this day, the Day that is ever drawing nearer: ‘...the hearts will come up to the throats, choking them as they restrain their agony and anger (*kazhimeen*)...’ (*Ghafir*: 18). Imagine the heart coming away from its place in the chest, moving out of its confines until it reaches the throat and blocks one’s breath because of the intense fear and distress. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘...and when [your] eyes became dim and [your] hearts came up to [your] throats, and [when] most conflicting thoughts about Allah passed through your minds’ (*al-Ahzab*: 10).

Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘*kazhimeen*’ (those who restrain their anger). The verb ‘*kazhm*’ (to restrain) means that one tries to hide something in something else. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And who restrain anger (*kazhimeen*) and who pardon the people—and Allah loves the doers of good’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 134).

These are levels of progress in the ranks of good deeds. The first of them is restraining one’s anger. Better than that is removing anger by pardoning and better than that is *ihsan* (doing good): ‘...Allah loves the doers of good (*muhsineen*)’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 134).

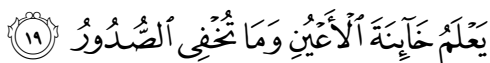
Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...no loving friend will the evildoers have, or any intercessor who will be heeded’ (*Ghafir*: 18). This is the time

when Allah *Glorified is He* gathers the evildoers together in hell—we seek refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* from this. These people joined together in this world to disobey Allah *Glorified is He* and meandered through life following his desires, but now in the Afterlife they flee from each other, and the one who had followers will flee from them. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On a Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children: on that Day, each one of them will have enough concern [of his own] to make him indifferent to the others’ (*Abasa*: 34-37). Similarly, they will not find anyone who can intercede for them or defend them. Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified that the leaders of the people, the leaders of disbelief and these so-called intercessors, will precede their followers into Hell. When they enter they will find that their leaders had arrived there first, and this will further cut off their hope of being saved and will increase their woes. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says of Pharaoh: ‘[And so] he shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, having led them [in this world] towards the fire [of the life to come]; and vile was the destination towards which they were led’ (*Hud*: 98).

In the next world, the evildoer will not find any friends or anyone who can intercede for him. Their friends fled from them because in this world they came together to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On that Day, [past] friends will be foes to one another—[all] save the righteous’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 67), that is, on the Day of Judgement each one will renounce the other, blame him and hate him.

Then Allah says: ‘...nor any intercessor who will be heeded’ (*Ghafir*: 18), that is, even if someone stood up to intercede for one of these evildoers, he will be ignored because there are conditions for intercession in the next world: Allah must give permission to the intercessor to intercede and Allah *Glorified is He* must be content with the one for whom the intercessor wants to intercede. Allah *Glorified is He* will not be content with the intercession for an evildoer and He will not grant permission for this. That is why intercession such as this will not be accepted, and the prospective intercessor will be ignored, for he is asking Allah *Glorified is He* in Whose Hand is the punishment, to give him what he

is asking and pardon the one for whom he wishes to intercede, and how could Allah *Glorified is He* become subservient to His slave?



**God is aware of the most furtive of glances,
and of all that hearts conceal [19]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 19)**

This means that we should know that Allah's Knowledge is All-Inclusive; He is not unaware of anything, no matter how small it may be. Thus, even if you deceived Allah's creatures in this world and you stole glances at things that were not permissible for you, you should realise that you are not hidden from Him. If the believer were to have full certainty of Allah's All-Inclusive Knowledge of him, his eyes will not be treacherous in this way.

We once⁽¹⁾ saw a judge presiding over a case, being careful to be just in his judgement. He sensed that the witnesses were lying but what could he do given that everything they said agreed with each other? No matter how much he cross-examined them and turned things around to uncover their lies, he found they spoke with one tongue. Perhaps this was because the lawyer had made them memorise the answers. What did he do, then? He became jealous for the truth by which he was to judge; he became furious and said something that shook all the witnesses and made them tell the truth. He said, 'By Allah, even if you deceive all the judges of the world, you will not deceive the Judge of heaven'. They were words that were inspired by Allah, and it shook them to their depths, brought them back to their senses, and made them return to the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '...and of all that the hearts conceal' (*Ghafir*: 19), that is, He *Glorified is He* knows the secrets hidden in the hearts, and this is something Allah alone knows.

(1) The story of the astute judge with the false witnesses

وَاللَّهُ يَقْضِي بِالْحَقِّ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا
يَقْضُونَ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

**God will judge with truth, while those they invoke
besides Him will not judge at all. God is the All-Hearing,
the All-Seeing [20] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 20)**

The word *yaqdi* means (He will judge with truth). Allah continues: ‘...whereas those [beings] whom they invoke beside Him’ (*Ghafir*: 20), that is, the idols and the other things they worshipped instead of Allah: ‘...will not [be in a position to] judge at all...’ (*Ghafir*: 20), that is, they are not qualified and have no ability to judge. They will not be able to even judge in error.

Allah then says: ‘For verily, Allah alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing’ (*Ghafir*: 20). He hears every word that deviates from His Way, and knows every deed that disagrees with His Path. He witnesses everything. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Witness, Judge, Jury, and Executioner. The authorities on earth are many, but the authority in the next world is Allah’s alone, there is nobody with Him.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* asks what is wrong with these disbelievers who resist the call and oppose the Messenger [Muhammad] whom Allah *Glorified is He* has sent to them as a mercy. Have they not looked to their predecessors among the nations who refused the Message and the punishment and destruction that befell them, the remains of which they can see?

Allah *Glorified is He* made a record of His Promise when He said: ‘For, long ago has our word gone forth unto Our slaves, the Messengers, that, verily, they will certainly be assisted’ (*as-Saffat*: 171-172). We know that man remembers things that are in his favour but forgets things that are against him. Allah *Glorified is He* however, remembers and records His Promises: ‘Behold, it is We Ourselves Who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this Reminder: and, behold, it is We Who shall truly guard it [from all corruption]’ (*al-Hijr*: 9). Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed aid and victory for His Messengers, and He *Glorified is He* will not say anything and then let reality contradict it. Clearly, victory for the Messengers is the normal way Allah *Glorified is He* deals with creation. He says:

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا هُمْ أَشَدَّ
 مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَءَاثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُمْ مِنْ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَاكِ ^(٢١)

Have they not travelled through the land and seen how those who lived before them met their end? They were stronger than them and made a more impressive mark on the land, yet God destroyed them for their sins – they had no one to defend them against Him [21] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 21)

This asks, ‘Did they not stop to take a look at the ruins of those nations who preceded them, even though they pass by them in their summer and winter journeys?’ Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And, verily [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your mind?’ (*as-Saffat*: 137-138) Did they not see the remnants of the people of Saleh (Shelah), ‘Ad, Thamud⁽¹⁾ and others of those who denied the Messengers?

The ruins show how Allah *Glorified is He* took them to account and the extent of the punishment that befell them in order for us to learn a lesson from them. Know that your end will be as theirs, and that there is no way for you to prevent Allah *Glorified is He* from such, for these nations whom Allah *Glorified is He* took to account were more powerful than you and had a greater impact on earth. Are you greater than Iram, the town of pillars, or Pharaoh with his poles? Where are they now? Were they able, with their civilisations, to protect themselves? Their civilisations and their power did not help them one bit before Allah *Glorified is He*; Allah’s punishment came down on them in this world before the punishment of the next, and He gave them no respite.

Allah *Glorified is He* said to Prophet Muhammad: ‘And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to

(1) The title ‘*Mada’in Saleh*’ is the name given to the buildings that were the houses of *Thamud*. It is as mentioned in the Gracious Quran: ‘And [likewise] indeed, the people of al-Hijr gave the lie to [Our] Messengers’ (*al-Hijr*: 80). They are to be found 25 km to the north of the City of Medina. They consist of huge boulders of varying sizes that have had palaces carved into them with great precision. There are about 80 of them. Some, however, consider these to the dwellings of the Nabateans and the people of Dad, and not the people of Thamud.

Us they will be returned' (*Ghafir*: 77), that is, if you do not see what We have promised them of punishment in this world because you died before it happened, you will see their punishment in the next life. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And we will surely let them taste the lighter punishment before the greater punishment, that perhaps they will repent' (*as-Sajda*: 21).

Allah *Glorified is He* wants two things from us when we travel through the land: that we reflect and take admonition, and that we profit and benefit. Thus, travelling through the land is something desirable from the standpoint of faith. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says of travel for the sake of reflection: 'Have they, then, never journeyed through the earth, and beheld what happened in the end to those [deniers of the Truth] who lived before their time...' (*Ghafir*: 21). Of travel for the sake of profit, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Go all over the earth and behold how [wondrously] He [Allah] has created [man] in the first instance..."' (*al-'Ankabut*: 20), and: 'Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves. [The angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer, "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say, "Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?"...' (*an-Nisa'*: 97).

Clearly, there is nothing wrong with combining travelling for reflection and travelling for profit and benefit when one journeys across the world. One need not deprive oneself of reflecting upon what is new in Allah's creation, yet one should not be distracted from this by trade and profit.

There is a point to be made here regarding Allah's saying '*fi al-ard*' (literally 'in the earth') which we have drawn from contemporary science. The scholars used to explain this saying as meaning 'on the earth', that is, on the ground upon which we walk. Now we realise that the earth is encompassed by its atmosphere. This air that covers the ground is an essential and necessary element for life on earth. Without it there could not be life on earth, for man cannot do without it for even one breath. Hence, we travel literally 'in the earth', as stated by the Quran which preceded modern science in stating this reality.

When one travels through Allah's earth to reflect upon his creatures one sees great variety one never knew of before: innumerable people, places, crops, and cattle. One sees that the Creator has given each a place appropriate for it.

Each environment has food appropriate for it, which is why you find different crops grow better in some places than others. In one climate bananas proliferate, in another it is potatoes, and in yet another it is wheat.

It is from this that some people have said that when there are many diseases being transmitted from place to place it is a result of people living off food that is not native to their region. The inhabitants of hot climates import food from cold climates and vice versa, and it is from this mixing that diseases spread.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[See] what happened in the end to those [deniers of the Truth] who lived before their time...' (*Ghafir*: 21), that is, what was the outcome of their denial of the Messengers, their standing in the way of the call to Allah, and their attempts to extinguish His light with their speech? Allah *Glorified is He* took them, and their power and influence on earth were unable to protect them from Him. Allah explains: 'And they had none to defend them against Allah' (*Ghafir*: 21), that is, there was no protector who could protect them from Allah, and no guardian to guard them. Their civilisation did not help them in the slightest because when they founded this civilisation, they did not establish laws that protected them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then tells us why He took them to task as only the Almighty, Who determines all things, can take to task:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانَتْ تَأْتِيهِمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَكَفَرُوا
فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ قَوِيٌّ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٢٢﴾

Because messengers repeatedly came to them with clear signs and still they rejected them. God destroyed them: He is truly full of strength, severe in punishment [22] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 22)

Allah says: 'with clear evidence of the Truth...' (*Ghafir*: 22), that is, with clear signs and dazzling miracles to indicate the truthfulness of the Messengers. These signs that they were incapable of imitating despite the fact that they fell within their field of their expertise were sufficient proof for them to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger that He sent to

them with guidance. Yet they disbelieved: ‘...and so Allah took them to task’ (*Ghafir*: 22). The verb *akhadhahum* ([He] took them to task) indicates that this was done forcefully: ‘...for verily, He is Powerful, severe in punishment!’ (*Ghafir*: 22)

There can be no doubt that the taking or seizure here is in proportion to the strength of the one who is seizing. When a child seizes something it is not the same as when a youth seizes, and this is not the same as when a man seizes. What, then, do you think if the one seizing is Allah, the Strong, the severe in punishment? If the one seizing is Allah *Glorified is He* then the one being seized will have no power to be obstinate or resist.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place: ‘...We took them to task as only the Almighty, Who determines all things, can take to task’ (*al-Qamar*: 42). This is the greatest power. The Almighty is the One Who conquers all and cannot be conquered, and the Omnipotent (*Al-Muqtadir*) is the One Who can do anything, for whom nothing is too difficult.

Allah tells us some of the stories of the Messengers who were refused and harmed. First, He narrates to us part of the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٣﴾ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَمَانَ وَكَذَّابٍ ﴿٢٤﴾ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ مِنْ عِنْدِنَا قَالُوا اقْتُلُوا أَبْنَاءَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ، وَاسْتَحْيُوا نِسَاءَهُمْ وَمَا كَيْدُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

**We sent Moses with Our signs and clear authority [23]
To Pharaoh, Haman, and Korah and they said, ‘Sorcerer!
Liar! [24] When he brought the truth to them from Us, they
said, ‘Kill the sons of those who believe with him; spare only
their women’– the scheming of those who reject the truth
can only go wrong [25] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 23 - 25)**

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the story of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* here because it is different from the stories of the other prophets by virtue of the fact that while the other prophets came to cure the people of some defects in their beliefs and to take them out of ignorant systems of law,

returning them to the straight path, Prophet Musa came to confront a man who claimed divinity and who became very arrogant and tyrannous. Thus, Musa had a more troublesome task. That is why his story is told the most in the Gracious Quran.

Allah's saying: '...Our signs...' (*Ghafir*: 23), refers to the nine clear signs that Musa *peace be upon him* was given to assist him in proving the truthfulness of His Message. The first of these was his staff. The staff has a long history and plays important roles in the story of Musa *peace be upon him*. With it he struck the sea for it to part and for the water to come to a standstill, each side becoming like a huge mountain. With the same staff he struck the mountain from which twelve springs burst forth. Clearly, this was not a question of water and mountains; rather, it is a miracle from the Creator of the water and the Creator of the mountain Who only says to a thing, 'Be!', and it is.

It is because of this that the orientalisists have made an issue with the story of Musa. They noted that it occupies the greatest portion among the stories of the prophets and that the Quran went into it in great detail—repeating it, as they claim—especially regarding the staff which is mentioned three times. In reality, however, there is no repetition, only different glimpses of one common event.

In the beginning when Allah *Glorified is He* gives Musa *peace be upon him* the staff as a miracle, He asks him about it: '...“Now, what is this in your right hand, O Moses?” He answered, “It is my staff; I lean on it and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep, and [many] other uses have I for it”' (*Ta Ha*: 17-18).

We mentioned previously that Musa *peace be upon him* did not reply to the question keeping the reply as short as he was asked because He was being asked by his Lord and he therefore wanted to prolong his speech with Him. He did not just say, 'It is a staff,' or, 'my staff'. When he sensed, however, that he had talked for too long, he gave a summary and said, '...and [many] other uses have I for it' (*Ta Ha*: 18).

The second time the staff is mentioned is when Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to train Musa *peace be upon him* in its usage and let him test it out for himself in order for him to have experience and be ready when the time came to face Pharaoh, the claimant to divinity. Allah says: 'He [Allah] said,

“Throw it down, O Musa (Moses)!” So he threw it—and lo! it was a snake, moving rapidly. He said, “Take hold of it and fear not: We shall restore it to its former state” (*Ta Ha*: 19-21). This was the purpose of having this trial run for Musa *peace be upon him* for him not to be afraid of it after seeing it in front of him, alive. In fact, had it remained a staff as it was Musa will not have been frightened of it, and his Lord will not have said to him: ‘...and fear not...’ (*Ta Ha*: 21).

The final situation was when Musa *peace be upon him* met with Pharaoh and his sorcerers to confront their sorcery with his staff. He cast it down and it devoured their contrivances, and of this meeting Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘They [the sorcerers] said, “O Musa (Moses)! Either you throw [your staff first], or we shall be the first to throw”. He answered, ‘Nay, you throw [first]’. And lo! by virtue of their sorcery, their [magic] ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly: and Musa (Moses) conceived (*awjas*) in his heart a fear⁽¹⁾. [But] We said, “Fear not! Verily, it is you who shall prevail!’ (*Ta Ha*: 65-68).

Clearly, there is no repetition in the story of Moses; rather, these are different situations and various instances of the one common occurrence.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and a manifest authority (*sultan*)’ (*Ghafir*: 23). The word *sultan* can mean ‘a clear proof’ or it can mean ‘strength’, that is, either the power of proof or the power to prevail. This is what it means when Iblis (Satan) uses it on the Day of Judgement: ‘And when everything will have been decided, Iblis (Satan) will say, ‘Behold, Allah promised you something that was bound to come true! I, too, made [all manner of] promises to you—but I deceived you. Yet I had no power (*sultan*) at all over you: I but called you—and you responded to me’ (*Ibrahim*: 22). That is, I had no strong proof to convince you and neither did I have the strength to force you to disobey Allah; rather, you had a choice, I only had to call you and you responded. Allah continues to relate what *Iblis* said: ‘...Hence, blame

(1) The word ‘*awjas*’ means that he became afraid inside himself when he saw the works of the sorcerers. Allah the Glorified and Exalted also says in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘He conceived a fear (*awjas*) of them...’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 28), that is, he was shocked and frightened (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/321).

me not, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...' (*Ibrahim*: 22).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...to Pharaoh, Haman and Qarun (Korah)...' (*Ghafir*: 24). Indeed, it was Pharaoh who claimed divinity and who was the prime source of trouble, yet Allah *Glorified is He* mentions Haman, his minister and aide, and Qarun (Korah), the owner of great riches, along with him. The three of them were partners and that is why they also shared in levelling accusations against Musa *peace be upon him*: '...but they [only] said, "A sorcerer is he, a liar!"' (*Ghafir*: 24)

Allah then says: 'Now [as for Pharaoh and his followers] when he [Musa] came to them, setting forth the Truth from Us...' (*Ghafir*: 25), that is, with clear signs: '...they said, "Slay the sons of those who share his beliefs"' (*Ghafir*: 25). The killing of sons happened twice under Pharaoh; the first time was when Musa (Moses) was a baby and Pharaoh had learnt from his astrologers that his kingdom will be undone at the hands of one of the Children of Israel. Consequently, he took to killing all the small children out of fear of this child who was to be born and who will bring down his dominion.

What is strange about this is that we see the stupidity and heedlessness of Pharaoh in killing the sons of the children of Israel and his keenness to make sure that none of them escaped, to the extent that his men used to search the houses looking for young children.

This situation manifested Pharaoh's stupidity in two ways: first, he killed all these small children although the prophecy said that his kingdom will be undone at the hands of only one of them. Second, when a boy came to him in a strange way, brought to his door inside a basket floating in the water, he inclined towards it, took it in and raised that very child up, completely heedless of its significance.

This situation exemplifies for us Allah's saying: '...and know that Allah intervenes⁽¹⁾ between man and [the desires of] his heart' (*al-Anfal*: 24). Yes

(1) *Ibn 'Abbas* said this means, 'He intervenes between the believer and the disbeliever, and between the disbeliever and faith'. *As-Suddi* said, 'He intervenes between a man and his heart so that he is unable to believe or disbelieve except by His Permission' (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir* 2/298).

indeed, the hearts are between the two fingers of the All-Merciful, He turns them as He wishes.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says, ‘...and spare [only] their women...’ (*Ghafir*: 25) which means kill the boys because they are the cause of apprehension; it is among them that rebels will appear, and among them is he who will bring down Pharaoh’s kingdom. As for the women, keep them alive for them to serve us.

This explains to us why the Arabs used to take their women with them if they went out to war—so that they will all have the same end. If they won they all returned home safely, and if they were killed then they will all be killed, and their women will not be left behind to be taken captive and made subservient.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘But the guile of those deniers of the Truth could not lead to aught but failure’ (*Ghafir*: 25). Yes indeed, this was guile on the part of Pharaoh and his helpers, but did he pull off his plan for the children of Israel? No, instead Allah turned his scheme back upon him and it brought him nothing but failure and loss.

Allah *the Most High* then says:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ذَرُونِي أَقْتُلْ مُوسَى وَلْيَدْعُ رَبَّهُ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ
يَبَدِّلَ دِينَكُمْ أَوْ أَنْ يُظْهِرَ فِي الْأَرْضِ الْفَسَادَ ﴿٢٦﴾

And Pharaoh said, ‘Leave me to kill Moses – let him call upon his Lord! – for I fear he may cause you to change your religion, or spread disorder in the land’ [26] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 26)

Pharaoh said: ‘Leave me to slay Musa (Moses)...’ that is, let me kill him, indicating that there were some people who did not want him to kill Musa *peace be upon him*. If this was not the case, why did he say *dharuni* (let me, in the plural). Who were these people? They were probably followers of Pharaoh who believed in Musa and what he brought. They wanted to defend Musa in a way that did not arouse Pharaoh’s suspicion, and therefore they had to be astute.

This is proof that righteous people can trick people given to evil in order to make good prevail, and that Allah *the Most High* will help them in that.

They came to Pharaoh and said to him, 'If you kill Musa, the people will say that you were unable to refute his proofs; that he was right and thus you killed him to gain respite from him. And then they will stand against you'. Among those who defended Musa was a believer from the people of Pharaoh who hid his faith out of fear of Pharaoh's punishment, but he forwarded a strong defence for Musa, arguing that: 'If he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is a man of Truth, something [of the punishment] whereof he warns you is bound to befall you...' (*Ghafir*: 28).

Let us pause here to ponder on Pharaoh's mockery of Musa: 'And let him invoke his [alleged] Lord...' (*Ghafir*: 26) referring to his Lord to whom he prays, for Him to save him. Had he not been ridiculing him he will have said, 'and let him invoke our Lord'. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Behold, I fear lest he causes you to change your religion, or lest he causes corruption to prevail in the land!' (*Ghafir*: 26) Glory be to Allah! Look how the people of falsehood invert reality. Pharaoh was afraid that Musa will change the religion of his people, that is, their belief in Pharaoh being their god and worshipping him instead of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Or lest he causes corruption to prevail in the land' (*Ghafir*: 26). From what will this corruption spring? From having two parties in the society, one party believing Pharaoh to be a god and another party having faith in Musa and his Lord, the True Lord. Therefore, the people will be divided and at odds with one another. The people in the centre of power who benefit from the 'godhood' of Pharaoh were not going to keep silent. There is no doubt that there will be a tribulation that, in Pharaoh's view, will bring about corruption. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ إِنِّي عُذْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مِّنْ كُلِّ مُتَكَبِّرٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِيَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٧﴾

**Moses said, 'I seek refuge with my Lord and yours
from every tyrant who refuses to believe in the Day
of Reckoning' [27] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 27)**

Here Musa *peace be upon him* reaffirms the Lordship of the True Lord after Pharaoh threatened to kill him: 'Leave me to slay Musa (Moses)...' (*Ghafir*: 26), and mocked his Lord: 'And let him invoke his [alleged] Lord...'

(*Ghafir*: 26). Consequently, Musa replied to him saying, *inni* (indeed), which is a form of emphasis. The phrase: ‘With my Lord... have I indeed found refuge’ is also an affirmation of his servitude to the Might of the Lord Who Pharaoh is mocking. Thus, he did not say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah from your actions’, but he emphasised that Allah is his Lord, and indeed, ‘...your Lord...’ as well.

The phrase: ‘...I [have] found refuge...’ means ‘I have sought shelter with Him and He is fully capable of protecting me and giving me victory’. His saying: ‘...With my Lord ... have I indeed found refuge...’ shows us the importance of seeking refuge with Allah, for when one seeks refuge with Allah *the Most High* from something that one is not strong enough to deal with he has done the right and most appropriate thing because he has brought to deal with this one who has harmed him, and whom he is unable to repel, One Who is capable of repelling him. That is why Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Whenever you read this Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Iblis (Satan), the accursed’ (*an-Nahl*: 98).

Why? Because when you recite the Quran, you interact with it. You are with it in Allah’s Presence. He is speaking to you and you are listening. When you interact with the Quran and ponder over its meanings, you obtain new understandings and new feelings, and this enrages Satan (Iblis), and for this reason he hastens to turn you away from your recitation. This is similar to what happens in prayer, for example; many are those who complain of being distracted in their prayers by the whisperings of the devil.

One will not be surprised by this if he looks at what Allah *Glorified is He* narrates to us of Satan’s stance towards us: ‘I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight way’ (*al-A‘raf*: 16). Indeed, this is the case. And what path is straighter than that of prayer and the recitation of the Quran? This is why we have said, Satan (Iblis) does not need to go to the wine bars, for example, he only needs to go to the mosque to ruin our prayers and distract us from the path of guidance. This is why Allah has ordered us to seek refuge from him in order for this refuge to be a protection and a fortress for us.

Here Musa *peace be upon him* says, ‘I seek refuge with Allah from you, O Pharaoh, for Allah is stronger than you and capable of protecting me from

your schemes. He is my Lord, that is, the One Who created me and took care of my upbringing, and I rely on Him. He created me by His Power and He protects me by His All-Sustaining Power. Do you not see that every creator preserves his creation and guarantees its maintenance?' Is it not more likely that my Creator will guarantee for me my life that He created? Indeed, this is the case. It is on condition that one says, 'I seek refuge in my Lord'. It was sufficient for Musa to say: 'With my Lord ... have I indeed found refuge' This makes us ask why he said: '...as well as your Lord...' (*Ghafir*: 27). The scholars say it was to emphasise the Lordship of his Lord, and to emphasise his contentment with this Lordship—that is, He is my Lord *the Most High* and the Lord of others, indeed the Lord of all of you—so that they might say with him, 'Indeed, we have sought refuge with our Lord from Pharaoh and his deeds'. It is as though he wants to gather the forces of faith and goodness, to strengthen himself with a group of believers, so that his supplications will more likely be accepted.

This matter shows us the importance of unity and its spirit in Islam. In our prayers, for instance, we recite from the chapter of *al-Fatiha*: 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for aid' (*al-Fatiha*: 5), using the plural. Why did Allah *the Most High* not say, 'You alone do I worship; and to You alone do I turn for aid'? It is because the prayer of the group is stronger. Being in a group makes you be present among the righteous. If you are not righteous, you should keep their company in the hope that what came to them of acceptance and reward will come to you. For this reason you should be wary of showing contempt for the pious and the righteous, for perhaps your deeds will be accepted along with them, out of sheer grace.

So the prayer of the group is more likely to be accepted than the prayer of the individual. That is why the Congregational Prayer is better than the prayer of an individual by 27 times⁽¹⁾.

A merchant, for example, sells goods, some of which are good and some are bad. If you take him to task and say that you will not accept a flawed

(1) *It is related on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Umar that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The Congregational Prayer is better than the prayer of the individual by 27 degrees'. It was related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [645] and Muslim in his Sahih [650].*

item, he will say to you, ‘It is one deal, with all its good and bad items’. Similarly, in the Congregational Prayer, we hide the flawed amongst the good out of hope that the whole batch will be accepted as one unit.

But from what did our master Musa seek refuge? It was: ‘From everyone who, immersed in false pride, does not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning!’ (*Ghafir*: 27) Note that this is in the plural, and that there is a description: ‘...from everyone ... immersed in false pride...’ (*Ghafir*: 27). Nevertheless, he did not name his enemy: Pharaoh, the person in question, the claimant of divinity who threatened to kill him. Why is this? The scholars say that Pharaoh is not mentioned here for two reasons: The first is in order not to place Pharaoh opposite Allah by saying, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from Pharaoh’. Moreover, Pharaoh was not alone, there were others like him with him, and by saying this Musa included them all as he used words that encompass every arrogant person. The second reason is that Musa was taking care here to give his upbringing its due, and not to disrespect the good that Pharaoh had done for him. Thus, he did not name him personally. It is sufficient that he falls under the rubric of this description: ‘...from everyone who, immersed in false pride, does not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning!’ (*Ghafir*: 27)

We find that the Gracious Quran treats upbringing like the sibling of birth meaning the son through upbringing is like the son through blood. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents...’ (*Luqman*: 14). He then mentions the mother and the reason why man should be good to her: ‘His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain...’ (*Luqman*: 14). Why does the Quran mention the reason for the mother here?

The scholars say it is because when he is small, a child does not grasp these things; however, at the same time he grasps his father’s merits. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the virtue of the mother because he did not witness it. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘And say, “O my Lord! Bestow Your Grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!”’ (*al-Isra*: 24) The reasoning behind the supplication here is his upbringing, whether it is for his mother who bore him or his mother who raised him. Whoever raises children other than his own, is entitled to be prayed for with

this supplication: ‘And say, “O my Lord! Bestow Thy Grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!”’ (*al-Isra’*: 24)

To continue we say, Allah’s saying: ‘...from everyone who, immersed in false pride, does not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning’ (*Ghafir*: 27), mentions two evil characteristics. Firstly, he is arrogant, that is, hard-hearted, and if he is hard-hearted, he will not refrain from coercion and tyranny. Next, he does not believe in the Reckoning; he does not fear retribution and does not keep count of the consequences of his actions. There is no hope of rectifying someone like this.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

وَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ مِّنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَكْتُمُ إِيمَانَهُ أَتَقْتُلُونَ رَجُلًا أَنْ يَقُولَ رَبِّيَ
 اللَّهُ وَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَإِنْ يَكُ كَذِبًا فَعِلَيْهِ كَذِبُهُ وَإِنْ يَكُ
 صَادِقًا يُصِيبْكُمْ بَعْضُ الَّذِي يَعِدُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ كَذَابٌ

A secret believer from Pharaoh’s family said, ‘How can you kill a man just for saying, “My Lord is God”? He has brought you clear signs from your Lord – if he is a liar, on his own head be it – and if he is truthful, then at least some of what he has threatened will happen to you. God does not guide any rebellious, outrageous liar [28] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 28)

When Musa *peace be upon him* sought refuge in his Lord *the Most High* saying: ‘With my Lord ... have I indeed found refuge...’ (*Ghafir*: 27), Allah *Glorified is He* answered his supplication and granted him a safe haven, not by means of a Messenger, a king, or any of his believing followers, but rather by means of a believer among the people of Pharaoh who was hiding his faith out of fear of Pharaoh’s punishment. He stood up to defend Musa, and because of this his argument was clearer and more effective.

But why had this man, ‘concealed his faith’ if he was a believer? The scholars say that such people hid their faith because they did not have the power to defend themselves from tyranny. Their faith stayed in their hearts until they found an opportunity to manifest and declare it. Here we see it manifesting itself on the tongue of a believer, announcing his faith in front of Pharaoh and his

tyranny. He is making a request very similar to that of a Messenger, and speaking about Allah's Path as if he himself were a Messenger.

The practice of concealing one's faith has a history and a place in Islam. The meaning of hiding one's faith is that faith manifests itself in one's actions, but one does not actually declare it. It is a desire to keep one's faith a secret between oneself and one's Lord in order for one to speak the Truth openly in front of the people, apparently as a non-believer and thus avoid being harmed.

Faith is an act of the heart that has an effect on all the limbs of the human body. You will find the believer is humble; he responds to the Truth and submits to it. The believer is compassionate, generous, forbearing, and merciful. We see his faith in his behaviour, yet he tries to hide it until the time comes when he can declare his Islam openly and vigorously.

This is why they say that faith is an act of the heart, a secret between the slave and his Lord. There is also an aspect of it which is manifested between the person and the people. And there may be a conflict between these two affairs, his secrecy and his openness, between him and his Lord and between him and the people. One may be a believer between oneself and one's Lord, yet among the people he may or may not show his faith because there is more to faith than just declaring it openly. This is something the Messenger established. How was this?

In the battle of Al-Ahzab (the Confederates), the tribes of Quraysh, Ghatafan⁽¹⁾ and the Jews joined forces. In this way, the Jews drew both Quraysh and Ghatafan into war with them against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because they wanted to take revenge against the Prophet after he defeated them in the battle of Banu Qaynuqa'.⁽²⁾

(1) Ghatafan was a large tribe who were descended from Ghatafan ibn Sa'd ibn Qays 'Aylan, and from him back to 'Adnan. In both the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods, they formed an important bloc among the tribes of Qays whose rule spread throughout the outlying areas of the Arabs. Many of the tribes of Ghatafan moved to Egypt and concentrated in Libya. Some also went to Palestine into the mountains of Nablus and some to Iraq (Wikipedia).

(2) *Banu Qaynuqa' were the first of the Jews to break their agreement with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. They declared war on him in the period between the battles of Badr and Uhud, and consequently Prophet Muhammad besieged them until they agreed to his terms (Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 3/174). After that, but before=*

When Huyay⁽¹⁾ went with Salam ibn Mashkam⁽²⁾ to Mecca to rouse Quraysh and Ghatfan against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* they said to them, 'We must stand together, as one block, against Muhammad, because if we leave him he will humiliate us as well as you. You must bolster us with your strength'. Quraysh, knowing that the Jews were people of the Book, said to them, 'We want to ask you first, is it Muhammad who is on the Truth or us?'

They knew what the stance of the Jews regarding Prophet Muhammad was previously, as they used to wait for a victory against the disbelievers, saying, 'A prophet is coming, his time is due, and when he comes we will follow him and kill you, just as `Ad and Iram⁽³⁾ were killed'.

Nevertheless, the Jews said to them, 'Indeed, you are on the Truth and Muhammad is on falsehood'. They did indeed unite to fight the Messenger

= *Uhud, came the conflict with Banu Nadir. They refused to make a treaty with Prophet Muhammad, and therefore he fought them until they agreed to leave their houses, taking with them whatever their camels could carry of possessions, even the doors and wood from their houses (Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 3/179).*

- (1) *He was Huyay ibn Akhttab An-Nadari, a fierce and arrogant man from the pre-Islamic period who was known as 'The master of the city dwellers and the country folk'. He lived into the time of Islam and used to harm the Muslims. They captured him on the day of Qurayza and killed him. He died in 5 AH (626 CE) (A-A'lam by Az-Zirikli 2/292).*
- (2) *Salam ibn Mashkam Al-Qurazi was a Jewish poet who was known as Aba Ghanam. He was the leader of Banu Nadir in his time and the caretaker of their treasures. He was one of those who said that 'Uzayr (Ezra) was the son of Allah, and his wife, the Jewess Zaynab bint Al-Harith, was the one who tried to poison Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.*
- (3) *Allah Glorified is He says: 'And whenever there came to them a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the Truth already in their possession—and [bear in mind that] before then they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the Truth—whenever there came to them something which they recognized [as the Truth], they used to deny it. And Allah's Curse is on all who deny the Truth' (al-Baqara: 89). Abu Nu'aym Al-Asbahani related in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa [1/52] on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that the Jews were awaiting a victory over the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj by means of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him before he was sent as a prophet. But when Allah sent the Prophet from among the Arabs, they disbelieved in him and denied what they previously used to say. Consequently, Mu'adh ibn Jabal and Bishr ibn Al-Bara' said to them, 'O Jews, fear Allah and enter Islam. You used to await a victory over us by means of Muhammad when we were polytheists. You used to tell us that he was coming and used to describe him as he actually is'. But Salam ibn Mashkam replied, 'He is not the one we used to tell you about. We know nothing of what he brings'. Hence, Allah Glorified is He revealed the aforementioned verse.*

of Allah *peace and blessing be upon him* and this was the battle of which Allah *the Most High* said regarding the believers: ‘...and so shaken were they that the Messenger [Muhammad] and the believers with him exclaimed, “When will Allah’s Help come?” Oh, verily, Allah’s Help is [always] near!’ (*al-Baqara*: 214)

This battle was called the battle of Al-Ahzab (the Confederates), or the battle of Al-Khandaq (the Trench). During it, one of Allah’s soldiers became manifested: ‘...And none can comprehend Your Lord’s soldiers save Him alone...’ (*al-Muddaththir*: 31). He came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, my heart has become filled with faith, but no-one knows of it, and I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah’.

The man was Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud Al-Ashja`yy⁽¹⁾. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* replied to him, ‘You are one man, what can a single man do? Yet, conceal your faith and be a double agent for us’⁽²⁾. This is the first instance a person’s faith was concealed, and we see from it that hiding one’s beliefs is permissible and that it has a role to play. The man said, ‘But, O Prophet Muhammad, I will have to speak other than the truth!’ (that is, lie). ‘Do as you like’, he *peace and blessing be upon him* replied. (Lying is permissible in Islam only in very limited occasions, like war).

Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud then went to Quraysh and Ghatafan and said to them, ‘You know how close we are and my fondness for you. I bring you advice for me to discharge my duty of fidelity to you. The Jews regret making an enemy of Muhammad and want to give up, but they will not do this without something that will help them when making a treaty with Muhammad. You want to fight against Muhammad with them and believe for sure that they

(1) He was Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud ibn `Amir Al-Ashja`i, a Companion of considerable intelligence. He came to Prophet Muhammad secretly during the days of *Khandaq* and the gathering of the Confederates, and hid his Islam. He stirred up trouble between the tribes of Qurayzha, Ghatafan and Quraysh. He lived in Medina and passed away during the caliphate of `Uthman. It is also said that he died on the day of Jumal before `Ali came to Basra. He died around 30 AH (*Al-A`lam* by Az-Zirikli 8/41).

(2) Al-Abshihi related in his book *Al-Mustatraf fi kull Fann Mustazhraf* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Deceive them for us, for indeed war is deception’. It was narrated by At-Tabari in *Tahdhib Al-Athar* [4/175] and Abu Nu`aym Al-Asbahani in *Ma`rifat As-Sahaba* (Hadith 5797).

are not going to betray you, Yet, I tell you that they will ask you for seventy men from Quraysh and Ghatafan as hostage, out of fear that you will return to your lands if the war becomes too difficult and leave them to face Muhammad as his enemy’.

He then went to the Jews and said to them, ‘You know how close we are and my fondness for you. I tell you, these people (that is, Quraysh and Ghatafan) are not from your lands and they have a high status in their own lands; they have their own wealth and families. If they sense trouble, they will flee and leave you to face Muhammad. Why do you not request seventy of their men as hostage for you to be sure of them?’ When Abu Sufyan came, he said, ‘The situation has become unbearable. We have waited too long and the feet and the hooves are all tired; come, O Jews, let us get ready for our task’. They replied, ‘This is the Sabbath and we do not fight on the Sabbath. Indeed, we will not fight this man unless you guarantee that you will stay with us until the battle is done. Give us seventy of your men as hostage’. Upon hearing this Abu Sufyan became certain that what Nu`aym had said was true, and he said, ‘The only thing for us to do is to return to our lands’. Then he said, ‘O people, let each of you look to who is on his right and his left for we are about to say something important’.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* had already sent Hudhayfa into their midst and he was between their ranks, and therefore he turned quickly to the person on his right and asked him, ‘Who are you?’ and to the one on his left and asked him, ‘Who are you?’ This was an astute and incisive thing to do on his part, as like this no-one will ask him and thus his true identity will not be uncovered⁽¹⁾.

After that, Abu Sufyan said, ‘There remains nothing before us but departure. Let us not get caught in the talons of the Jews. Come, hurry!’, and he struck his mount to stand up. It was, however, still tied up, so it broke its cord.

The point here is that Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud concealed his faith from the people for him to be able to say the things he said, even though they were

(1) *It was related by As-Suhayli in his book Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf [3/433] in the story of the Confederates and their gathering to raid Medina.*

untrue. Yet he did not do this without first seeking permission from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is proof that hiding one's faith is permissible and that it has a role to play.

Similarly, there can be no doubt that Al-'Abbas had believed in Prophet Muhammad, although at the time they took the covenant⁽¹⁾ with the Messenger of Allah he had not yet announced his Islam. He went and said, 'Here is Muhammad being embargoed by his people—if you want to accept him then give him your covenant over such-and-such, but if not, then leave him'. But how could he support the covenant with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* if he was still on the religion of Quraysh?

Thus, he must have been hiding his faith in order for Quraysh not to even dare harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* out of deference to his uncle Al-'Abbas. This is why he hid his faith. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As for anyone who denies Allah after having once believed—and this, to be sure, does not apply to one who does it under duress while his heart remains true to his faith, but [only to] him who willingly opens up his heart to disbelief: upon all of these [falls] Allah's Condemnation, and a tremendous suffering awaits them' (*an-Nahl*: 106).

At the battle of Khaybar, a Jew named Al-Hajjaj ibn `Allat As-Sulamī⁽²⁾ came to Prophet Muhammad and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, Allah has

(1) *Al-Bayhaqi related in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa [2/446] on the authority of Ka'b ibn Malik in a long Hadith, 'At the beginning of the night when we gave our oaths to Prophet Muhammad at Mina, we were with our people. When they were sleeping heavily we snuck away from Quraysh like sand grouse, finally meeting at 'Aqaba. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him came to us with his uncle Al-'Abbas and no-one else. He wanted to attend the affair of his nephew and he was the first to speak. He said, 'O people of Khazraj, indeed Muhammad has the status with us that you know of. His people and his city are protecting him. We have forbidden him from those who have similar views to ours, and he has chosen to be cut off in favour of you and to what you have called him. If you believe that you will be true to him in your claims, it is up to you to bear the burdens you have taken upon yourselves. But if you fear that you will forsake him, leave him now with his people. Indeed, he is protected by his family and in his own place'.*

(2) *His full name was Al-Hajjaj ibn `Allat ibn Khalid ibn Thuwayra and he was a Companion. According to his lineage, he was a Salami and then a Fihri, and was known as Abu Kilab. He came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he was at Khaybar and entered Islam. He settled in Medina and built a house and a mosque there (Al-Isaba fi ma'rifat As-Sahaba 1/212).*

opened my heart to Islam. I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah. I am going now to Mecca to collect some wealth I have there and to return some trusts. They will question me, and therefore permit me to speak⁽¹⁾ (deceitfully)'. 'Say whatever you wish', Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* replied.

Consequently, Al-Hajjaj *Allah be pleased with him* went to Quraysh, who said to themselves, 'He must surely have some news'. They asked him, 'Has the disrupter gone to Khaybar?' This refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* for they accused him of breaking up families and tribes after becoming a prophet. 'Yes', he replied, 'he was defeated most heinously and his companions were killed. The Jews will take him prisoner and bring him to you for them to do a favour for you which you should remember for the rest of your lives. I have come to collect the money I have left with the people in order to go and buy some captives before they are all sold'. Therefore, they helped him to gather his wealth and assisted him in his tasks.

This news subsequently reached Al-'Abbas, who came to him and asked, 'O Al-Hajjaj, what is this you are saying? 'It is as you have heard', he replied. 'Is it really true?' said Al-'Abbas. 'Will you keep my secret?' said Al-Hajjaj. 'By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, I will, indeed', replied Al-'Abbas. 'Then leave me alone until the people leave', said Al-Hajjaj. He sat for a while longer and then went to him and said, 'By Allah, nothing of the news that has reached you from me came to pass. Verily, I left Muhammad victorious at Khaybar and the groom of Safiyya bint Huyay ibn Akhttab, yet I needed a scheme to restore my money from these people. Keep my secret for three days until I escape them and am beyond their reach, then spread it as much as you like'.

After three days, Al-'Abbas took his staff, put on his perfume and went to walk around the *Ka'ba*. He met one of the people of Quraysh who said to him, 'By Allah, O Abu Fadl, this is indeed great forbearance', referring to what had supposedly happened to his nephew.

(1) *That is, to say what he needed to in order to deceive the polytheists into letting him take his wealth that he had left with his wife. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him granted him permission to deceive them.*

Consequently, Al-'Abbas said to the man, 'By the One Whom you swore by, this is not forbearance, it is due to the reality of the matter; what your companion told you was the opposite of what really happened. My nephew was victorious over his enemies and he is now the groom of Bint Huyay ibn Akhttab at Khaybar'. 'Could it be true?' 'It is as I said'. 'That scum has escaped us now, woe to him'.⁽¹⁾

Clearly, we see that these people concealed their faith for them to give victory to the religion and be among its soldiers. Islam has different types of forces; it has soldiers who are openly visible, soldiers who are hidden, and soldiers for spying on its enemies.

Some of the exegetes⁽²⁾ said that Allah's saying: '...[he] concealed his faith...' (*Ghafir*: 28) meant from Pharaoh's people, but this is incorrect. The proof of this is that he will speak and let his faith be known, going into details as though he were a Messenger. Were he hiding his faith from Pharaoh's people, Allah will have said, 'He concealed (*yaktum*) his faith from the people of Pharaoh' because the verb *katama* (conceal) can take two objects, as in Allah's saying: '...but they shall not [be able to] conceal (*la yaktumoon*) from Allah anything that has happened' (*an-Nisa*: 42).

What did this believer say, then? He said, '...Will you slay a man because he says, "Allah is my Lord"...' (*Ghafir*: 28)? Look at the courage of this believer for the sake of the Truth, positing this incredulous question, '...Will you slay a man...', openly in front of Pharaoh: '...because he says, "Allah is my Lord"...', and has committed no offense other than this? He is saying this plainly in the presence of Pharaoh. And do you know who Pharaoh was? He was the one who claimed divinity for himself. He said to his people: 'I did not know that you could have any deity other than myself...' (*al-Qasas*: 38). There can be no doubt that this man's words, 'Allah is my Lord', will enrage him, undermining, as they did, the very foundations of the divinity he claimed.

(1) It was related in the *Musnad of Ahmad* from the collection of Anas ibn Malik. Al-Bayhaqi also related it in *As-Sunnan Al-Kubra* [9/151], 'Abd Ar-Razzaq in his *Musannaf* [5/466, Hadith 9771] and Ibn Sa'd in his *Tabaqat Al-Kubra* [2/108].

(2) This is the opinion that Ibn Kathir inclined towards in this matter

The believer goes on to say: ‘...when he has indeed brought you clear signs of this Truth from your Lord?...’ (*Ghafir*: 28) That is, he has brought you clear signs and then you want to kill him?! Let us suppose that he is a liar; even then his lies will not harm you because he will be lying about Allah *the Most High* and he will bear the consequences of these lies: ‘And if he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is a man of Truth, there will strike you some of what he promises you...’ (*Ghafir*: 28). This means that if he is truthful, you will not be deprived of his good and some of it will come to you. In such a case, why will you kill him? All in all, it will be more cautious not to have him killed.

Does that mean, however, that we should leave any heretic to say whatsoever he likes and speak about matters of religion, not preventing him therefrom relying upon the verse: ‘And if he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him...’? No, this is not the case; rather, we should infer a sentence here. We should say, prevent him from speaking but do not kill him. We hear much of heretics these days who delve into matters of Allah’s Religion. What are we to do? Do we leave them and say, ‘Their lies will fall back on them’? No, this is not possible; rather, it is incumbent upon us to oppose and prevent them from this foolish talk and restrain them in order that they do not say things that harm Allah’s Religion.

Similarly, this believer from Pharaoh’s people defended Musa *peace be upon him*. It is as though he wants to preserve the proof of the Truth, as perhaps there will be those who will come later and listen to him, and give him victory.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then affirms the following reality: ‘... for verily, Allah will not grace with His Guidance one who has wasted his own self by lying [about Him]’ (*Ghafir*: 28). This speech is insinuating and could be considered to be an insult to Pharaoh. The Lord *the Most High* does not let anybody lie about Him without exposing his lies. Why? It is because not burying these lies will result in things that Allah did not reveal being included in the Divine Revelation; but the Divine Revelation is too pure for that. That is why we see that whenever someone claims prophethood, his affair is exposed and the people will come to know of his lies. This is because it is not right for a liar to claim prophethood and Allah does not

expose him. This is understood from Allah's Promise: 'Behold, We shall indeed help Our Messengers and those who have believed ... in the life of this world...' (*Ghafir*: 51), and: '... that, verily, Our hosts—they indeed—will [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat*: 173)

يَقْوَمَ لَكُمْ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ ظَاهِرِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَنْ يَنْصُرُنَا مِنْ بَأْسِ اللَّهِ إِنْ
جَاءَنَا قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ مَا أُرِيكُمْ إِلَّا مَا أَرَىٰ وَمَا أَهْدِيكُمْ إِلَّا سَبِيلَ الرَّشَادِ ﴿٢٩﴾

**My people, as masters in the land you have the power today,
but who will help us against God's might if it comes upon us?'
But Pharaoh said, 'I have told you what I think; I am guiding
you along the right path' [29] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 29)**

Allah's saying: 'O my people! Yours is the dominion today...' is quoting the believer who is advising his people. Indeed, they did have the dominion—the dominion of Pharaoh, his tyranny, his whips (different signs of strength) and his claims to divinity, etc. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Most eminent are you on earth...' which means victorious and empowered over others; but beware because this situation is temporary, it will not last—it is restricted temporally: 'Yours is the dominion today...'.

It is as though he is saying to them, 'Beware of letting this dominion slip from your grasp', for perhaps this man, that is, Musa, is truthful, and will gather helpers and followers around him and put an end to your dominion. Seek to prolong it then, even if it is just the misguidance that you are currently upon, and do not enter into a conflict the outcome of which you cannot guarantee: 'But who will rescue us from Allah's punishment, once it befalls us?' No one will because Allah's revenge and punishment when aiding His Messengers is a punishment that cannot be averted. It will necessarily destroy any opponents, so be warned. This is how the believer speaks with words of faith that are firm in his heart. He tells his people nothing but the total Truth.

Here, Pharaoh must stand up and try to take control of matters for his own ends: 'Pharaoh said, "I just want to make you see what I myself see; and I will never make you follow any path but that of rectitude!"' (*Ghafir*: 29) Notice how obsessive he is when he speaks, saying: 'I just want to make

you see what I myself see...’, and the lie in his saying: ‘...and I will never make you follow any path but that of rectitude!’

Yet Pharaoh’s interjection does not stop the man from advising his people, nor from continuing his summons.

وَقَالَ الَّذِي آمَنَ يَفْعَلُ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِثْلَ يَوْمِ الْأَحْزَابِ ﴿٣٠﴾
مِثْلَ دَابِّ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظَلَمًا لِلْعِبَادِ ﴿٣١﴾

The believer said, ‘My people, I fear your fate will be the fate of those others who opposed [their prophets]: [30] the fate of the people of Noah, ‘Ad, Thamud, and those who came after them – God never wills injustice on His creatures [31] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 30 - 31)

Here, the believer continues his advice to his people; Pharaoh’s interjection has neither frightened him nor prevented him from his call. He says: ‘...O my people! Verily, I fear for you the like of the day that befell those others who were leagued together [against Allah’s Truth] (*yawm al-ahzab*)’ (*Ghafir*: 30) meaning even if you are in eminence upon the earth and dominion is yours, you are not more eminent than those who preceded you in the line of prophets, starting from Nuh , then ‘Ad, Thamud and the others who came after them: ‘The like of what happened to Nuh’s (Noah’s) people, and to [the tribes of] ‘Ad and Thamud and those who came after them! But Allah does not will any wrong for His creatures’ (*Ghafir*: 31).

Allah *Glorified is He* has shown us amazing things regarding those who denied the Messengers: ‘For every one of them did We take to task for his sin. And so, upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm wind; and some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast; and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown. And it was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves’ (*al-‘Ankabut*: 40).

Therefore, it is upon you to take a lesson from those who preceded you in denial, especially considering the fact that you can see their ruins which

show you that they were more powerful than you and more influential on earth. Yet despite that, their power did not benefit them, and their influence did not avert Allah's punishment when it came upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* did not preserve these ruins except that they might be a reminder for those who came after them: 'And verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time, and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*as-Saffat*: 137-138)

Had their ruins been completely obliterated there will not have been any actual proof. The persistence of these ruins until today shows us that the people who built these civilisations and left these ruins were unable to protect them despite the fact that they were stronger than you, more influential on earth, and reigned over more of it than you. Therefore, given that this actually happened and you can see it with your own eyes, accept what the Messenger says and the reality in front of you in the world.

We notice that the word *yawm* (day) comes in the singular here, and that the word *al-ahzab* (those who were leagued together) is in the plural. Allah *Glorified is He* did not say '*ayyam al-ahzab*' (the days of those who were leagued together). The word '*hizb*' is singular for '*ahzab*', and refers to a group who deny and oppose a Messenger. Hence, there was a group who opposed Nuh, a group who opposed Hud (Eber) a group who opposed Saleh (Shelah), etc.

Clearly, the days spoken of here are numerous, but despite this Allah *the Most High* says: 'The like of the day that befell those others who were leagued together [against Allah's Truth]' (*Ghafir*: 30). Allah spoke of one day yet made the groups that were leagued together plural. How is this the case? It is because what happens is effectively one thing, the same for all even if there are numerous leagues and numerous Messengers, it is still '*yawm al-ahzab*' in the singular, not in the plural. This is because if we were to say it in the plural, it will mean that one day had one reason for the punishment, while another day had another reason, etc. But the reason was the same in all instances—their denial of the Lord's Creed and Law for creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to expand upon what was summarised in the word '*al-ahzab*' (those who were leagued together): 'the like of what happened to Nuh's (Noah's) people and to [the tribes of] 'Ad and Thamud

and those who came after them! But Allah does not will any wrong for His creatures' (*Ghafir*: 31). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not take them to task as He did out of oppression. He calls them His 'creatures', that is to say, how could He oppress them when they are His creation and His slaves? He merely recompensed them in proportion to their deeds and their denial of their Messengers for them to be an enduring warning in the world for anyone who opposes the Path of the Lord *Glorified is He*.

وَيَقَوْمِ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَوْمَ التَّنَادِ ﴿٣٢﴾
يَوْمَ تُولُون مُدْبِرِينَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنَ اللَّهِ مَن عَاصِرٍ وَمَن يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِن هَادٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

**My people, I fear for you on the Day you will cry
out to one another [32] The Day you will turn tail
and flee with no one to defend you from God!
Whoever God leaves to stray will have no one to
guide him [33] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 32 - 33)**

The '*yawm al-ahzab*' (the day that befell those who were leagued together) was in this world the '*yawm at-tanad*' (the day of calling to one another), however, is the Day of Judgement. As such, it seems that this believer first warned them by means of '*yawm al-ahzab*' of the troubles that may come upon them in this world, and then he warned them of the day of recompense, the Day of Judgement, saying: 'And, O my people, I fear for you [the coming of] that Day of [Judgment—the Day when you will be] calling to one another [in distress]' (*Ghafir*: 32). The word '*tanad*' signifies give-and-take, meaning, you call me and I call you. This mutual calling on the Day of Judgement will take a number of forms. Allah *the Most High* says, '[But] one Day We shall summon all human beings [and judge them] according to the conscious disposition which governed their deeds [in life]...' (*al-Isra*': 71). This is the first call. It will be said, 'O people of Muhammad, O people of 'Isa (Jesus), O people of Musa (Moses)...etc., or perhaps they will call out to each other.

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions several instances of people calling out. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And the inmates of paradise will call out to the inmates of the fire, "Now we have found that what our Lord promised us has come true; have you, too, found that what your Lord promised you has

come true” (al-A`raf: 44) And: ‘And the inmates of the fire will call out to the inmates of paradise, “Pour some water upon us, or some of the sustenance [of paradise] which Allah has provided for you!”...’ (al-A`raf: 50). And: ‘...they who [in life] had possessed this faculty of discernment (*ashab al-a`raf*) will call out to those whom they recognize by their marks...’ (al-A`raf: 48). The ‘*ashab al-a`raf*’ are a group of people whose good deeds and bad deeds were equal and did not enter paradise, yet nevertheless they gloat over the disbelievers.

On the other hand, the word *at-tanad* may not refer to people calling each other but may be derived from the verb *nadda*, meaning ‘to run away and flee’. Hence, ‘*yawm at-tanad*’ means the day when you will flee from me and I will flee from you. This is like Allah’s saying: ‘On a Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children’ (*Abasa*: 34-36). The meaning here is that he flees from them and they flee from him. Each one flees from the other because he is worried about himself.

But what did this believer intend with this speech? He wanted to tell them that even if you help one another in falsehood in this world, you should realise that in the Afterlife you will flee from each other: ‘the Day when you will [wish to] turn your backs and flee...’ (*Ghafir*: 33).

Consider the great style of the structure of the Quranic phrase here. The Quran sometimes uses a word that could have more than one meaning. When the Quran uses a word that refers to two different meanings at the same time, these two meanings are appropriate for the verses in which the word is mentioned. Here, for example, ‘*yawm at-tanad*’ gives the meaning of ‘calling to one another’, and ‘the Day when you will [wish to] turn your backs and flee’ gives the meaning of fleeing from one another, which is another meaning of ‘*at-tanad*’. Hence, the two meanings of the word ‘*at-tanad*’ are mentioned.

Another example of this is found in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* in Allah’s saying: ‘[At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses; [before Him] prostrate the stars (*an-najm*) and the trees’ (*ar-Rahman*: 5-6). The sun and the moon are heavenly creations while the tree is earthly creation; but between the two is the word ‘*an-najm*’ which has two meanings.

One, the first that springs to mind, is that it refers to a heavenly body (a star) like the sun and the moon. The other meaning is that it refers to a plant that has no stem, and thus it is similar to a tree.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* then says in the verse under discussion: '...having none to defend you against Allah: for he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide' (*Ghafir*: 33). This means that no one can protect you from Allah or stave off His punishment if it should come upon you. And: '...For he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide' (*Ghafir*: 33) means no one can guide someone whom Allah has judged to be misguided. Why? Because Allah *Glorified is He* will assist him and establish him in his misguidance

For the same reason, we say that if the slave of Allah loves something, Allah *the Most High* will say to his slave, 'Do you love it my slave? Then I shall test you by it'. An example of this is one who has a loved one who has died and as a result he went into deep mourning, taking it to extremes and wallowing in it. For that reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says to him, 'Do you enjoy the sorrow and revel in it? Then I will give you more of it—whenever it wanes I will renew it for you'.

That is why the people of knowledge say, 'Close the gates of sorrow with the nails of contentment'. If you befriend sorrow and revel in it, Allah will prolong it for you. This is because He is your Lord and the one in charge of your affairs. He gives everyone what he desires. Even the disbeliever who loves disbelief, Allah *the Most High* has promised him that He will help him in it. That is why He seals his heart in order for no faith to enter it and for denial to not leave it.

The believer from the people of Pharaoh continues to advise his people, saying⁽¹⁾:

(1) Al-Qurtubi says in his Exegesis [8/5961] that this speech is that of Musa to his people, but he also says, 'And it is said that it is a continuation of the admonition of the believer from the people of Pharaoh, speaking of their long-standing recalcitrance in the face of the prophets'.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِنْ قَبْلُ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا زِلْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا
جَاءَكُمْ بِهِ حَتَّى إِذَا هَلَكَ قُلْتُمْ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ
رَسُولًا كَذَلِكَ يَضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ مُرْتَابٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

**Joseph came to you before with clear signs, but you never ceased to doubt the message he brought you. When he died, you said, “God will not send another messenger.” In this way God leaves the doubting rebels to stray [34]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 34)**

When Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* came there was no pharaoh in Egypt, rather, there was a king known as *Al-`Aziz*. That is why when you read the story of Yusuf (Joseph), you find no mention of Pharaoh, as opposed to the story of Musa. When the successive events of history were uncovered and scholars managed to align certain events with the times in which they occurred, they discovered that Yusuf (Joseph) lived in the time of the shepherd kings, the Hyksos. When these came to Egypt, they defeated the pharaohs, removed them from power, and made themselves kings. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the story of Yusuf: ‘And the King said...’ (*Yusuf*: 43)—He did not say, ‘Pharaoh’. When the pharaohs restored the rule of Egypt, they took to oppressing the children of Israel because they used to support the kings and fight for them.

Allah *the Most High* mentions the believer saying: ‘...with all evidence of the Truth...’ (*Ghafir*: 34) which refers to clear signs indicating the truthfulness of his being a Messenger of Allah. Allah then says: ‘...But you never ceased to throw doubt on [the Message] that he brought you...’ (*Ghafir*: 34). This means you were not convinced of his being a Messenger⁽¹⁾: ‘...so much so that when he died, you said, “Allah will never send any Messenger after him!”...’ (*Ghafir*: 34). They said this because they denied the prophecy of Yusuf and were hypocrites. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘In this way Allah

(1) Ibn Kathir mentioned a sidenote in his Exegesis [4/79] that the Egyptians remained doubtful of the revelation that Yusuf brought them. He said, ‘Yusuf was a Messenger who used to call his people to Allah to uphold justice, but they only obeyed him because he was a minister and had worldly authority’.

lets go astray such as waste their own selves...' that is, by overstepping the boundaries: '...by throwing suspicion [on His revelations]' (*Ghafir*: 34) which means doubting and denying the Messengers and their Messages.

الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ أَتَاهُمْ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
وَعِنْدَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كَذَلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ قَلْبٍ مُتَكَبِّرٍ جَبَّارٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

Those who dispute God's messages, with no authority given to them, are doing something that is loathed by God and by those who believe. In this way God seals up the heart of every arrogant tyrant [35] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 35)

Is there some dispute about Allah that has evidence '*sultan*' to support it? The scholars say that yes there is. The dispute in question here is about Allah (*fi Allah*), which means about Allah's Commandments to us to do things or the opposite, not do to things. We have said previously that Allah's signs are of three kinds: signs in creation that show the Absolute Power of The Creator, and signs that affirm the truthfulness of the Messengers in their conveying from Allah, referring to their miracles, and the verses of the Quran that bear Allah's Rulings. We can ask about which of these types they were disputing.

First, they disputed about the miracles saying that they were sorcery. The refutation of this claim is simple. We will say to them, if he cast a spell on those who believed in him, why did he not cast a spell on you too in order for you to believe in him and then the matter will be finished?

Similarly, they disputed about the verses bearing Allah's Rulings. Why? Because every ruling that Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to His slaves forbids the oppression of one generation by another or one individual by another, and this contradicts with the interests of the people who have earthly power and cause tyranny. Allah *the Most High* explains: 'As for that [happy] life in the hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek to exalt themselves on earth, nor yet to spread corruption: for the future belongs to the Allah-conscious' (*al-Qasas*: 83).

As for the signs in creation which affirm the Power of the Creator, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, and others, there is no room for dispute here. That is why they did not dispute about them.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues by saying: ‘...exceedingly loathsome...’; this arguing over Allah’s signs without right is repulsive and Allah hates it most vigorously. Similarly, the believers themselves who care for Allah’s Religion and want to make faith strong hate this type of arguing.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...It is in this way that Allah sets a seal (*yatba*) on every arrogant, self-exalting heart’ (*Ghafir*: 35). The word ‘*yatba*’ means He seals the heart. The word ‘arrogant’ refers to anyone who considers himself great and claims such for himself without having the necessary requirements to be great. He considers himself great but he lacks the proof required for greatness. There is a Qudsi Hadith that clarifies this matter; the society of believers is divided into twelve types: six of them are loved: three at a high level and three at a lower level and six are detestable: three more and three less. Let us look and see in which group the arrogant falls:

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith, ‘I love three, yet My love for three others is greater: I love the poor humble man, yet My love for the rich humble man is greater. I love the obedient old man, yet My love for the obedient young man is greater. And I love the generous rich man, yet My love for the generous poor man is greater. Moreover, I loathe three, yet My loathing for three others is greater: I loathe the rich arrogant man, yet My loathing for the poor arrogant man is greater. I loathe the disobedient young man, yet my loathing for the disobedient old man is greater. And I loathe the miserly poor man, yet my loathing for the miserly rich man is greater’.⁽¹⁾

Thus, we see in light of this Hadith that in the society of the believers the rich man should be humble, the poor man generous, and the youth obedient.

(1) *Abu Layth As-Samarqandi related something similar to this in his book Tanbih Al-Ghafileen in the nineteenth chapter which deals with envy and its prohibition (page 58 of the Azhari manuscript, No. 307071). He related it using the word ‘yuqal’ (it is said), indicating the weakness of the Hadith, and he does not mention a chain of narrators or any authority for it. Its wording is, ‘Indeed, Allah loathes three, yet His loathing for three others is greater: He loathes the sinner, yet His loathing for the elderly sinner is greater. He loathes the miserly man, yet His loathing for the miserly rich man is greater. And He loathes the arrogant man, yet His loathing for the arrogant poor man is greater. Moreover, He loves three, yet His love for three others is greater: He loves the pious, yet His love for the pious youth is greater. He loves the generous man, yet His love for the generous poor man is greater. And He loves the humble, yet His love for the humble rich man is greater’.*

This is how the best and most noble society should be. After that, the next level in society is that the poor man is humble, the rich man generous and the elders obedient.

To continue, we said that the arrogant man is the one who considers himself great but without basis. But what if he has a basis for his claims? To this we will reply that if he does have a basis for considering himself great he is still lacking in that he prides himself on something that is not basically his—something that can be taken away from him. Someone may pride themselves on their health, yet Allah may take it away for it is an incidental quality that can be removed. Furthermore, when the arrogant man sees someone who is greater than him, his arrogance diminishes. And were he to see the Greatness of his Lord *the Most High* with his inner sight, he will not consider himself great at all.

Allah Glorified is He says:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَنْهَمْنُنُ ابْنِي صِرَاحًا لَعَلِّي أَبْلُغُ الْأَسْبَابَ ﴿٣٦﴾ أَسْبَابَ السَّمَوَاتِ
فَأُطَّلِعَ إِلَى إِلَهِ مُوسَى وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّهُ كَذِبًا وَكَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِفِرْعَوْنَ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ
وَصُدَّ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا كَيْدُ فِرْعَوْنَ إِلَّا فِي تَبَابٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

Pharaoh said, ‘Haman, build me a tall tower so that I may reach the ropes that lead [36] To the heavens to look for this God of Moses. I am convinced that he is lying.’ In this way the evil of Pharaoh’s deed was made alluring to him and he was barred from the right path – his scheming led only to ruin [37] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 36 - 37)

Pharaoh is commanding his minister and helper Haman to build a tall building for him to go up it and perhaps see the God to Whom Musa calls in his worship. Clearly, he seems to think that this tower will help him to see Allah, but by Allah, the god whom one can see from a tower is no god at all. Then Allah says: ‘...And thus was made alluring in Pharaoh’s eyes the evil of his own deeds, and so he was barred from the path [of Truth]: and Pharaoh’s guile did not lead to aught but ruin’ (*Ghafir*: 37), referring to misguidance and loss. He did not remain as he was, but continued to raise himself up until Allah *the Most High* laid bare his case on the day he was drowned.

وَقَالَ الَّذِي ءَامَرَ يَتَقَوَّمُ أَتَّبِعُونَ أَهْدِكُمْ سَبِيلَ الرَّشَادِ (٣٨)
يَتَقَوَّمُ إِنَّمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَوةُ الدُّنْيَا مَتَّعُ وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ هِيَ دَارُ الْفَكَارِ (٣٩)

The believer said, ‘My people, follow me! I will guide you to the right path [38] My people, the life of this world is only a brief enjoyment; it is the Hereafter that is the lasting home [39] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 38 - 39)

This is the speech of the believer from among the people of Pharaoh. He is preaching his people as if he were a prophet. What kept him silent regarding Pharaoh until, in his misguidance, Pharaoh reached the point of claiming divinity? This falls under the rubric of the saying, ‘The Truth is victorious, yet there is a time appropriate for it’. The Lord *the Most High* has quoted the words of this believer, so it is as if the Lord *the Most High* Himself is speaking. That is why no one objected, because no one objects to the inspiration of the Most Merciful; only the speech of men can be challenged.

This is why, when the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And so, [when he was born] We inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses), ‘Suckle him [for a time] and then, when you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river and have no fear and do not grieve...’ (*al-Qasas*: 7), she did not oppose this idea. Who could say to a woman that if she fears for her child she ⁽¹⁾ should cast him into the river? By Allah, if someone other than the Lord *Glorified is He* were to say this, she will refuse, but she accepted and did not decline. This is because the inspiration of the Most Merciful is not to be refused and not to be challenged. Had this not been the case, she will have said, ‘Should I save him from a probable death to have a certain death?’

Similarly, it is no wonder that this believer should say this speech openly within ear of Pharaoh, and yet despite this the believer was not opposed.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues to relate what the believer said: ‘O my people! This worldly life is but a brief enjoyment, whereas, behold, the life to come is the home abiding’ (*Ghafir*: 39). This verse directs us to the fact that every man must have a purpose. The condition of this purpose is not to

(1) She is Musa’s mother.

be followed by another purpose; if it has another purpose after it, then it is not a true purpose—rather, it is a stage on the way to the ultimate goal. An example of this is a child whom one teaches for him to go to preparatory school. Is preparatory school his ultimate goal? No, it is just a stage to take him to the next level which is secondary school. Similarly, secondary school is a stage taking one on to what follows it. Therefore, as long as there is something after one objective, this objective is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is that which is not followed by anything else. This is why the believer is saying to them, ‘Verily, this world and all that is in it is a provision, a mere provision. It is not the ultimate goal—the real goal is the Afterlife’.

If one reflects, he will see that man has an expected life span in this world, but his end is not known; Allah *the Most High* has kept it obscure. But this uncertainty in this reality results in it being very clear because by hiding the time and place of death, Allah *the Most High* has forced us to always be wary of it, waiting for it at any moment and in any place. For this reason, one of the scholars ⁽¹⁾ said, ‘Death is an arrow that has been thrown; it is on its way to you, and your life is only as long as its [i.e. the arrow’s] journey to you’.

When you reflect upon the creation around you, you find that the Creator has made a harmonious world to serve you: the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, the water, the plants, etc. Look, O you for whom all these things were created, how you disappear and they remain. You die but the sun stays as it is; the moon, the stars, the air, the water, nothing changes. Even the water that one imagines to be used up, it is as it was since Allah *Glorified is He* created the world, it neither increases nor decreases.

The water that you take from creation during your life span passes out of you once again as sweat and excretions. Even that which remains in us after death will be sucked out by the earth. The same is true of a rose, for example, and all other things. This means the world is a changing yet united phenomenon.

Still, is it reasonable that the life of the servant is longer than that of the one it is serving? That I die and that the sun that was created for my sake

(1) This is one of the sayings of `Abdullah ibn Al-Mu`tazz. It was ascribed to him by Al-Husari Al-Qayrawani in his book *Zahr Al-Adab wa Thamr Al-Albab*, and Abu Mansur Ath-Tha`alabi in *Al-I`jaz wa Al-Ijaz*. Its wording is, ‘Death is an arrow flying towards you. Your life is as long as its [i. e. the arrow’s] journey towards you’.

and is there for my service remains? Yes, in order for you to realise that your servant has a longer life than you do in this world, even though you are ennobled and served. Hence, there must be some other life for me that is appropriate to this ennoblement, a life that continues after these creations have faded away; when the sun, moon and stars are all gone, yet I remain. And this can only be the Afterlife: ‘...on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens, and when [all men] shall appear before Allah, The One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists’ (*Ibrahim*: 48).

The believer, however, must acknowledge this day and believe in it for him to be actually ennobled and be the one that lives longer. Even death will die and you will remain in the Afterlife, everlasting. No blessing will pass you by, and death will never come to you again.

This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to look to this goal, he does not want us to look under our feet and live only for the moment we are in now. The ultimate goal for every believer is the Afterlife. This is because there is nothing that comes after it: ‘Behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life (*al-hayawan*): if they but knew this!’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 64) The word ‘*al-hayawan*’ is an emphatic form of the word ‘*hayah*’ meaning life; that is, it is the true life.

In this verse, the believer says: ‘My people, the life of this world is only a brief enjoyment; it is the Hereafter that is the lasting home’ (*Ghafir*: 39). It is the residence from which one will not be turned out, and therefore we should be prepared for it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

مَنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئَةً فَلَا يُجْزَى إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنثَرَ
 وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ يُرْزَقُونَ فِيهَا بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

**Whoever does evil will be repaid with its like; whoever does
 good and believes, be it a man or a woman, will enter
 Paradise and be provided for without measure[40]
 (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 40)**

As long as the Afterlife is the place of permanent residence, the return must be to Allah for each one to be rewarded according to his deeds. He is

not a tyrant, rather, He is merciful; He rewards an evil deed with its like or forgives it, and He multiplies the reward of good deeds many times.

We should reflect on Allah's saying: '...and believes...' (*Ghafir*: 40). This condition does not prevent a non-Muslim from doing good deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this matter in His saying: 'Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter—We increase for him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world—We give him thereof, but he has no share in the Hereafter' (*ash-Shura*: 20).

When the disbeliever does a good deed, he takes his reward for it in this world and he has no reward for it in the Hereafter. In this worldly life, he gains repute, renown, and prestige among men, and gains his reward in the form of respect and honour, as statues of them are made to perpetuate their memory.

They receive their reward in this worldly life, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But those who disbelieved—their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing; but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due. And Allah is swift in taking account' (*an-Nur*: 39).

Reflect on Allah's saying: '...finds Allah before Him...' (*an-Nur*: 39). He is surprised because it did not occur to him in this worldly life, and he did nothing for his Lord at all. It is well known that a person takes his pay from the one for whom he works.

We were asked about this point in San Francisco, 'Does the disbeliever lose the reward for any good he does in this world?' I asked in return, 'Did he do this good for Allah or for humanity and its progress?' They said, 'He did it to serve humanity and better it'. Hence, I replied, 'Then let him take his reward from people, as he gains fame, renown and the perpetuation of his name'. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust, dispersed' (*al-Furqan*: 23).

We benefit from the work of the disbelievers who have strove to improve the society with their works, discoveries, and inventions. In fact, we harness them in serving faith and calling people to Allah. For example, the microphone and recorder are the fruits of their work, but they will not receive any share from their reward. They will not receive rewards in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to people like this, saying: ‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons...’ (*Fussilat*: 53). They live a difficult and ascetic life that makes them dedicate themselves to research and study in order to discover Allah’s Secrets and Signs in the universe. At the end, people benefit from their works, but they are deprived of their rewards.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘...will enter Paradise and be provided for (*yurzaqoon*) without measure’ (*Ghafir*: 40). The word ‘*rizq*’ (provision, which comes from ‘*yurzaqoon*’) refers to everything that a man benefits from. It is not just wealth as some people think; health, safety, knowledge, and forbearance are types of provision. Everything that one benefits from is part of his provision. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...without measure (*min ghayri hisab*)’ (*Ghafir*: 40). The word ‘*hisab*’ (measure) means that one is credited with things according to their worth. In the Afterlife, however, provision is without measure because the Provider is Allah. When Allah *Glorified is He* gives provision to you, He does not give you in strict accordance with your deeds, but He gives you according to His own measure.

When good comes to a person unexpectedly, he says to himself that he has not prepared himself (*ghayri hisab*) for this. Allah’s saying: ‘...without measure (*min ghayri hisab*)’ (*Ghafir*: 40) refers to the fact that Allah gives without limit, and that He gives to people without measure and without the people deserving it. Thus, this giving includes many different aspects of open-handedness.

Scholars say that in paradise you eat without defecating⁽¹⁾ because you will eat from the food of Allah. Allah, the Creator, will give you nutrition in accordance with the needs of your body, without excess. Consequently, how will there be any excrement?! But why do some people deny this or find it hard to understand when it happens in this worldly life despite our limited possibilities?

(1) It was related that Zayd ibn Arqam said, ‘A man from the people of the Book came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, “O Abu Al-Qasim, do you claim that the people of Paradise eat and drink?” “Yes”, he said, “By the One in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, any one of them will be given the strength of a hundred men in terms of food, drink, intercourse and passions”. “But the one who eats and drinks will have a need to fulfil, but there can be no filth in Paradise.” “Their excretions will be perspiration that will come out of their skin like the diffusion of musk, and with it their bodies will lose weight”’. It was related by Ahmad in his *Musnad* and An-Nasa’i in his *Sunnan* with a sound chain of narrators according to the conditions of Al-Bukhari (See: Hadi Al-Arwah by Ibn Al-Qayyim, pg. 177).

For example, the soldiers in war are given special pills that act as their nutrition, giving them the necessary energy without any excess and leaving nothing in the body to excrete. But if the created being can do this, what do you think of the Creator?

One may eat in paradise without any need for food, only for the pleasure of eating. In fact, one may not need any food at all. Therefore, the scholars said that the highest level of paradise with regard to bounties is *'Illyyin*. This is because it does not contain anything of the worldly pleasures, as one sees his Lord *the Most High* which is a sufficient bounty. In His Presence, one does not need these other bounties.

Ash-Sha'bi went to the Emperor of Rome, who asked him, 'You claim that you eat in paradise but do not defecate. How can it be?' He replied, 'What is strange about that? Do you not see that the child in his mother's womb is fed and grows? Does he defecate in her womb? He does not; if he were to do that, then the placenta will be damaged. Similarly, the believer in paradise will not defecate'. Then the king said to him, 'You claim that you eat in paradise, yet the food does not decrease. Anything that is taken from must decrease'. He replied, 'Indeed, it does decrease if there is no supply to replace what has been taken. Please bring me a candle'. Therefore, a candle was brought to him. He lit it and said to those present at the gathering, 'Let everyone get a candle and light it from this one'. They did this, and then he said to them, 'Has the light of my candle been lessened at all? Similarly, Allah's Bounties to the people of paradise do not run out or decrease'.

Among the wonders of paradise is that it contains rivers: a river of milk, a river of honey, a river of wine and a river of water. These rivers have no banks or barriers as they are intertwined, but they do not mix. We should believe that, and should not be surprised because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* informed us about that, 'In paradise, [there is what] no eye [has ever] seen, no ear has [ever] heard and no human heart has ever perceived'.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, why should anybody be surprised?

(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2824), Ahmad in his Musnad (2/366), and Abu Na'im in Hilyat Al-Awliya' [2/262] from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra*

However, when Allah *the Most High* describes paradise, He informs us that He is not describing paradise itself, but He only gives us parables. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The example of paradise, which the righteous have been promised...’ (*Muhammad*: 15).

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us this parable in order to make it easier for us to understand, and He negates some of the defects that we have in this worldly life. He says: ‘...is the description of paradise which the righteous are promised, wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey...’ (*Muhammad*: 15).

The water of paradise is not prone to stagnation; it never changes, unlike the water of this worldly life. Wine in the Hereafter brings one pleasure, but it does not intoxicate, while wine in this worldly life intoxicates. Honey in the Hereafter is purified of all blemishes unlike the honey of this worldly life.

The believer from the people of Pharaoh goes on to say:

وَيَقُولُ مَا لِيَ أَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى النِّجْوَةِ وَتَدْعُونَنِي إِلَى النَّارِ ﴿٤١﴾
تَدْعُونَنِي لِأَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَأُشْرِكَ بِهِ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِهِ عِلْمٌ
وَأَنَا أَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى الْعَزِيزِ الْغَفَّارِ ﴿٤٢﴾

**My people, why do I call you to salvation when you call me
to the Fire? [41] You call me to disbelieve in God and to
associate with Him things of which I have no knowledge;
I call you to the Mighty, the Forgiving One [42]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 41- 42)**

This is what the believer from the people of Pharaoh said, yet it looks like the speech of prophets. Until now, I cannot find a convincing reason why Pharaoh did not react severely to what the believer said. This shows that Allah *the Most High* is capable of bringing together things that contradict each other; the believer openly talks of matters of faith, yet Allah lets Pharaoh hear the believer’s speech as something else. If this was not the case, Pharaoh will not have kept quiet and permitted him to speak in such a way that refutes

the divinity he claimed. Or perhaps, as we said earlier, it is because the inspiration of the Most Merciful cannot be disputed.

Allah's saying: '...how is it for me to...' (*Ghafir*: 41) includes a question—how strange is it for me to call you to salvation and you call me to the fire? The scholars say that what seems good is not really good unless you love it for other people. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'None among you (truly) believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.'⁽¹⁾

Then the Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies the meaning of the verse: '...how is it for me to call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire?...' (*Ghafir*: 41) saying: 'You call me to disbelieve in Allah and to associate with Him things of which I have no knowledge' (*Ghafir*: 42). You encourage me to disbelieve in Allah *the Most High* and attribute partners to Him, while I encourage you to believe in him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّمَا تَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَعْوَةٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ
وَأَن مَّرَدَّنَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ هُمْ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ﴿٤٣﴾

There is no doubt that what you call me to serve is not fit to be invoked either in this world or the Hereafter: our return is to God alone, and it will be the rebels who will inhabit the Fire [43] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 43)

The phrase starting with '*la jarama*' (there is no doubt) means that the one that you call me to worship instead of Allah cannot answer supplications because it cannot hear prayers, and even if it could, it will not answer them. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '...our return is to Allah alone...' (*Ghafir*: 43); our final return is: '...to Allah and it will be the transgressors (*al-musrifeen*) who will inhabit the Fire' (*Ghafir*: 43). Those who deserve it are those who dwell in it.

(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon. It is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (13), Muslim in his Sahih (45) in the Book on Faith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik with the wording, 'None among you (truly) believes until he loves for his brother—or he said "for his neighbour"—that which he loves for himself'.*

The word '*al-musrifteen*' (transgressors) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to those who have transgressed and surpassed the limits with regard to oppression and disbelief. The worst of them is he who has transgressed against his own self and has exceeded the bounds when he should have stopped at the limits. Such bounds and limits could be either commandments or prohibitions.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this matter in His saying: 'These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them...' (*al-Baqara*: 229). This is regarding commandments. As for prohibitions, He says: '...These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them...' (*al-Baqara*: 187).

When it comes to commandments, one must take care not to transgress them. As for prohibitions, the Lord *Glorified is He* does not enjoin us to just not do them; rather, He instructs us not to approach them or the means that lead to them. It is just like if someone grazes (his animals) around [the edge of] a sanctuary, he will soon wind up inside it⁽¹⁾. The believer must respect this caution on the part of his Lord, for He is his Creator, and He knows him better than himself.

When the believer from the people of Pharaoh ended his warning to his people with the words: '...and it will be the transgressors who will inhabit the Fire' (*Ghafir*: 43), he was confronting Pharaoh, who had reached the pinnacle of transgressing against himself. Transgression in religion means turning away from the Call of Allah, ignoring His commandments and opposing His prohibitions. It may also include rejecting belief in Allah completely. But Pharaoh's transgression was greater than all of these forms of transgression, as he claimed to be a god, saying to his people: 'And [Pharaoh] said, "I am your most exalted lord"' (*an-Nazi'at*: 24).

This is the greatest form of transgression.

(1) This is part of a Hadith narrated by An-Nu'man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him. The full Hadith is, 'The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between them are matters that are doubtful (not clear); many of the people do not know whether they are lawful or unlawful. So whoever leaves them to protect his religion and his honour, he will be safe, and whoever falls into something from them, he will soon fall into the unlawful. Just like if someone grazes (his animals) around a sanctuary, he will soon wind up inside it. Indeed, for every king is a sanctuary (pasture), and indeed, Allah's Sanctuary is what He made unlawful' (related by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [2051] and Muslim in his *Sahih* [1599]).

فَسَتَذْكُرُونَ مَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ وَأُفَوِّضُ أُمُورِي
إِلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِصِيرٍ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٤٤﴾

[One Day] you will remember what I am saying to you now, so I commit my case to God: God is well aware of His servants [44] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 44)

Allah *the Most High* continues to relate what the believer said: '[One Day] you will remember what I am saying to you now...' (*Ghafir*: 44). This part of the verse means if they chose to deny him when he was admonishing them, when he wanted to stop them from worshipping Pharaoh, they will remember his advice later, either in this worldly life or in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '...so I commit my case to Allah...' (*Ghafir*: 44). This means that he will resort to Allah *the Most High* Who will protect him. This indicates that his speech will make Pharaoh angry, and will cause Pharaoh to take revenge from him, but without any direct confrontation in order not to stir the people against him (Pharaoh). Thus, the believer said what is mentioned in this verse. The verse also means that if he experienced any trouble because of his explanation of Allah's Religion and defending his Prophet Musa (Moses), he hoped that Allah will reward him for his deeds with that which will benefit him in the Hereafter. The verse ends with: '...Allah is well aware of His slaves' (*Ghafir*: 44).

The result of committing himself to Allah was:

فَوَقَّعَهُ اللَّهُ سِجَّاتٍ مَّا مَكُرُوا وَحَاقَ بِآلِ فِرْعَوْنَ سُوءُ الْعَذَابِ
النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ
فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٥﴾

So God saved him from the harm they planned. A terrible punishment engulfed Pharaoh's people [45] They will be brought before the Fire morning and evening. On the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, 'Throw Pharaoh's people into the worst torment' [46] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 45 - 46)

The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Ghafir*: 45). This means that he was safe, which is a matter that

makes one amazed because this man had actually confronted Pharaoh. However, no ill consequences happened to him and Pharaoh's attempts to take revenge did him no harm. This is because Allah *the Most High* protected him: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Ghafir*: 45). This is because an action should be considered in relation to the one who performed it, as it should be judged, whether good or bad, according to the one who performs it.

Imagine that your child came in with blood dripping from his face. The first question you will ask him is: 'Who did this to you?' You will not be as worried about the blood as you will be about the one who caused this to happen to him. If he said to you, 'Uncle so-and-so hit me', you will say to him, 'You must have done something that deserves punishment, and that is why he hit you'. However, if he said, 'So-and-so's son hit me', you may say, 'Indeed, he dislikes us...etc.' and cause a great commotion.

Therefore, every action is judged in accordance with who does it, and your reaction depends on your knowledge of the one who did it. This understanding clears up an issue relevant to the Night Journey and Ascension to Heaven and explains Allah's saying: 'Exalted is He Who took His slave by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* to *Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*, whose surroundings We have blessed...' (*al-Isra*': 1). As long as the one who took His slave on the Night Journey was Allah, there is nothing strange about this, because the deed is appropriate to the one who performs it. The Lord *Glorified is He* is far above time, place, and any similarity to the created beings. If Allah had said, 'Muhammad journeyed' there will have been much debate about this matter. But as Allah *the Most High* took him on the night journey, there is nothing amazing about this. If one said, 'I climbed to the top of the Himalaya with my baby son', will someone ask you, 'How did your son climb to the top of the Himalaya?'

If a person is protected by the Lord, then no tyrant or oppressor can harm him. This protection came as an answer and response to his committing his case to Allah. The believer said: '...so I commit my case to Allah...' (*Ghafir*: 44), and the response came immediately: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Ghafir*: 45).

Imam Ja`far As-Sadiq⁽¹⁾ derived some subtle points and wisdoms from this verse. He said: 'I wonder at the one who becomes afraid yet does not resort to Allah's saying: '...so I commit my case to Allah...' (*Al-Imran*: 173), as Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says after it: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Al-Imran*: 174)'. 'I wonder at the one who seeks worldly pleasures and does not resort to Allah's saying: '...What Allah willed [has occurred]; there is no power except in Allah...' (*al-Kahf*: 39), as Allah *Glorified is He* says after it: 'Then may be my Lord will give me [something] better than your garden...' (*al-Kahf*: 40).

'I wonder at the one who becomes grieved and does not resort to what Yunus (Jonah) said, which Allah relates: '...There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I was one of those who did wrong' (*al-Anbiya*: 87) as Allah *the Most High* says after it: 'So We responded to him and saved him from the distress. And thus do We save the believers' (*al-Anbiya*: 88) which means this was not limited to Yunus (Jonah) alone'.

These are some of the subtle points of the Book of Allah. Whoever reads it habitually will not be afflicted by any harm, and Allah will save and protect him from fear, conspiracies, poverty, and sorrow.

Allah *Glorified is He* responded to this believer by not just protecting him from his enemy, but by reversing the roles for the troubles to afflict the believer's enemy. Reflect on Allah's saying: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned. But a terrible punishment engulfed Pharaoh's people' (*Ghafir*: 45), that is, they were afflicted with torment during the worldly life before being punished in the Hereafter. Man has three stages in his life: the worldly life that we are living right now, the life after death until we are resurrected on the Day of Judgement, and life after the Resurrection.

Allah the Glorified and Exalted says: '...A terrible punishment engulfed Pharaoh's people' (*Ghafir*: 45). The punishment will be inflicted on them in

(1) He was Ja'far ibn Muhammad Al-Baqir ibn `Ali Zayn Al-`Abidin ibn Al-Hasan ibn bint Rasul Allah Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi, Abu `Abdullah, known as As-Sadiq. He was one of the greatest *Tabi'un* (Followers, the generation after the Companions of the Prophet). He was born in 80 AH and passed away in Medina in 148 AH. Both Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik learnt knowledge from him. He was very courageous in the face of the Abbasid caliphs (*Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli 2/126).

this worldly life, before the Afterlife and the Judgement. Allah's saying: 'They will be brought before the Fire morning and evening' (*Ghafir*: 46). Bringing people before the hellfire is before the Judgement because Allah *the Most High* says after it: '...And on the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, "Throw Pharaoh's people into the worst torment"' (*Ghafir*: 46).

Are people brought before the hellfire in the worldly life or in the life after death? Given that they do not see the hellfire during this worldly life, what is referred to here is seeing it in the life after death, which is called the 'punishment of the grave'. Then, they are put into the hellfire after the Resurrection and Judgement.

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* has combined for the transgressors punishment in this worldly life with punishment in the life after death, and a more severe and grievous punishment in the Hereafter.

Allah's saying: '...terrible punishment...' (*Ghafir*: 46) also refers to the punishment of the grave, as it contains severe suffering, yet the suffering of the Hellfire is more severe; Allah protect us all from this suffering.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَإِذْ يَتَحَاوَرُونَ فِي النَّارِ فَيَقُولُ الضَّعِيفُ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُغْنُونَ عَنَّا نَصِيبًا مِنَ النَّارِ ۖ قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُلٌّ فِيهَا إِنَّكَ اللَّهُ قَدْ حَكَمَ بَيْنَ الْعِبَادِ ۖ

In the Fire they will quarrel with one another: the weak will say to the haughty, 'We were your followers, so can you now relieve us from some share of the Fire?' [47] But they will say, 'We are all in this together. God has judged between His creatures' [48] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 47 - 48)

The Arabic word '*yatahajoon*' means that they will quarrel with one another, each trying to cast the responsibility on the other. The weak will tell their leaders that they imitated and followed their footsteps, so: '...can you now relieve us from some share of the Fire?' (*Ghafir*: 47) which means will you not defend us, protect us from the punishment of the hellfire, or bear the burden of our sins?

The Quran gives us many examples of the contentions and arguments that will take place on the Day of Judgement; arguments between the believers and the disbelievers and between the strong leaders and their weak followers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Here they are—those who [you] argue on their behalf in [this] worldly life. But who will argue with Allah for them on the Day of Resurrection, or who will [then] represent them?' (*an-Nisa'*: 109)

Those who were followed will then reply: '...Those who had been arrogant will say, "Indeed, all [of us] are in it. Indeed, Allah has judged between the slaves"' (*Ghafir*: 48). As Allah *the Most High* has judged between his creatures, then the matter is settled and no one can repel His Judgement.

How could they possibly defend them when they were admitted into the hellfire first? The Lord *Glorified is He* said in another verse: 'Then, We will surely extract from every sect those of them who were worst against the Most Merciful in insolence' (*Maryam*: 69). Allah *Glorified is He* said about Pharaoh: 'He will precede his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the Fire; and wretched is the place to which they are led' (*Hud*: 98).

Allah's saying: 'He will precede his people...' (*Hud*: 98) means that he precedes them to the hellfire in order to destroy any hope of salvation they may have. If they were admitted to the hellfire first, they will believe that their leader will come and save them from this punishment. However, as their leaders preceded them to the hellfire, they will despair. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ فِي النَّارِ لِخَزَنَةِ جَهَنَّمَ ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ يُخَفِّفْ عَنَّا يَوْمًا
مِّنَ الْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٩﴾ قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ تَأْتِيَكُم رُّسُلُكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ
قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَالُوا فَادْعُوهُمْ لَدُعْتُوهُمْ أَلْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

Those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, 'Ask your Lord to lessen our suffering for one day' [49] But they will say, 'Did your messengers not come to you with clear evidence of the truth?' They will say, 'Yes they did,' and the keeper will say, 'You can plead, then, but the pleas of disbelievers will always be in vain' [50] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 49 - 50)

We understand from Allah's saying concerning the disbelievers: '...Ask your Lord to lessen our suffering for one day' (*Ghafir*: 49) that they understood

that they are not worthy to supplicate Allah or call on Him directly. Hence, they call the angels, who replied: ‘Did your Messengers not come to you with clear evidence of the Truth?...’ (*Ghafir*: 50) This means that Messengers came to them with proofs that confirmed their truthfulness. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘They will say, “Yes”...’ (*Ghafir*: 50). This means that they will confirm that Messengers came to them with proofs. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...You can plead, then, but the pleas of disbelievers will always be in vain’ (*Ghafir*: 50). Their pleas are useless and will not benefit them. This verse contains rebuke and ridicule of the disbelievers.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ نَكُ تَأْتِيكُمْ رَسُولُكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَالُوا فَادْعُوا وَمَا دَعَا
الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ ﴿٥٠﴾ إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ
يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ ﴿٥١﴾ يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ الظَّالِمِينَ مَعَذَرَتُهُمْ وَلَهُمُ اللَّعْنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ ﴿٥٢﴾

**We support Our messengers and the believers, in the present
life and on the Day when witnesses arise [51] On the Day
when excuses will not profit the evildoers, their fate will be
rejection and they will have the worst of homes [52]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 51-52)**

This is Allah’s Promise to support His Messengers and the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Our Word has already preceded for Our slaves, the Messengers. [That] indeed, they will be those who are given victory, And [that] indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome’ (*as-Saffat*: 171-173). This is why we say that if you see that some Muslims are defeated, you should know that they have not fulfilled the conditions for victory. Consequently, they should suffer from the results of their action in the worldly life because Allah’s Way of dealing with His slaves never changes.

Allah’s saying: ‘We support Our Messengers and the believers, in the present life and on the Day when witnesses arise’ (*Ghafir*: 51) comes after the believer from the people of Pharaoh defended Musa (Moses), calling the people to believe in Allah, and after he spoke the Truth openly in front of Pharaoh. The meaning of this verse is that Allah *the Most High* did not send a Messenger with a new revelation to guide the deluded people and then forsake him.

Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* may leave the call to Truth to be resisted and opposed by some people at its beginnings in order to test those who call to His Path, for only the strong and the brave people stand firm. This is because they will undertake this mission in order to call others towards Allah throughout the whole world, and for this reason it is not strange that they should be tested and that their faith and perseverance upon the principles of religion should be tested.

This meaning applies to the earlier believers who carried the banner of Islam with Prophet Muhammad; they emigrated to Ethiopia and then to Medina. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried (*yoftanoon*)?' (*al-'Ankabut*: 2) The Arabic word '*fitnah*', from which '*yoftanoon*' comes from, means exposing people to troubles and tribulations which can only be borne by people with strong belief who put their trust in Allah and are sure that the Truth will overcome and gain victory. The true believer is the one who sees that reward and punishment in the Afterlife is something obvious, with no doubt. This is because even if a man may cheat others, he will never cheat himself.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* asked Hudhayfa⁽¹⁾, 'How are you this morning, Hudhayfa', he replied, 'I woke up a true believer in Allah'. (The word 'true' here is of great import, as Prophet Muhammad asked him about it). The Prophet asked, 'And what is true about your faith?' He said, 'My soul has renounced this world, and now gold and earth have become equal to me. It is as if I am looking at the people of paradise rejoicing and the people of the hellfire suffering'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* replied, 'You have realised the Truth, so adhere to it'.⁽²⁾

Allah's saying: '...in the present life...' (*Ghafir*: 51) means that He will give the believers victory in the present life by making the Truth victorious

(1) *He was Hudhayfa ibn Hasl Al-Yaman ibn Jabir Al-'Absi, a Companion who was a courageous and victorious governor. He knew Prophet Muhammad's opinion about the hypocrites. He passed away in Al-Mada'in 36 AH. He related 225 Hadiths which are mentioned in the books of Hadith (Al-A'lam by Az-Zirikli 2/171).*

(2) *Al-Haythami mentioned it in Majma' Az-Zawa'id (1/57) and he ascribes it to At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir on the authority of Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari, not Hudhayfa. Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani attributed it to Ibn Al-Mubarak in Az-Zuhd (see: Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba [1/343]).*

over the falsehood of their enemies. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned’ (*Ghafir*: 77).

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there will be numerous witnesses against man in the Hereafter: ‘...when witnesses (*ash-had*) arise’ (*Ghafir*: 51). The word ‘*ash-had*’ is the plural of ‘*shuhud*’ (which is already plural in Arabic). This means there will be a great number of witnesses on that Day.

The prophets and Messengers will bear witness: ‘[Be warned of] the Day when Allah will assemble the Messengers and say, "What was the response you received?" They will say, "We have no knowledge. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen”’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 109). The believers will bear witness that they delivered the Message to those who came after them: ‘...in this [revelation], that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people....’ (*al-Hajj*: 78). In addition, man’s limbs will bear witness against him.

Similarly, each man’s guardian angels will bear witness against him. The martyrs who fought until they were killed will bear witness. This is because if life has deceived man, he keeps working for a comfortable life and does not want to die. But a martyr wants death to take him to what is better than what he will leave behind; for this reason, the Lord *the Most High* rewards him.

If a man volunteers to fight in the cause of Allah, knowing that he will die, Allah *the Most High* will reward him by letting him be alive with Him because he has died in His cause. Hence, we said regarding the philosophy of martyrdom when we spoke of Hamza ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib⁽¹⁾ that martyrdom protects one from death, as when anyone gives precedence to death over life and becomes a martyr, they will be alive with Allah. Your worldly life will be joined with your life with Allah and then your life after the Resurrection. This indicates that the martyr never really dies.

(1) He was Hamza ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, Prophet Muhammad’s uncle. He was born 54 years before the Hijra and was martyred at the Battle of Uhud in 3 AH at the age of 57. He immigrated to Medina and fought at the Battles of Badr and Uhud (*Al-A’lam* 2/278).

O Hamza, uncle of the elected Messenger, you are the master,

Of all martyrs on earth, all without exception,

It is enough that martyrdom protects you,

From death, by linking the two lives with the other life after Resurrection

Thus, it seems that whoever sacrifices his life for Allah has presented it as a gift to Allah and in order to boost His Religion. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* will reward him by protecting him from death due to his martyrdom.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the Day when excuses will not profit the evildoers...' (*Ghafir*: 52). This means that if they apologise, their apologies will not be accepted from them. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Nor will it be permitted for them to make an excuse' (*al-Mursalat*: 36). It seems that there are different situations; in one verse they apologise saying: '...O our Lord! Take us out; we will do good deeds other than those which we used to do...' (*Fatir*: 37). In another verse, they are not permitted to apologise: '...their fate will be rejection and they will have the worst of homes' (*Ghafir*: 52).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the progression of Musa's (Moses) Message:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْهُدَى وَأَوْرَثْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ الْكِتَابَ
هُدًى وَذِكْرَى لِأُولَى الْأَلْبَابِ

**We gave Moses guidance and passed down the Scripture to
the Children of Israel [53] as a guide and a reminder to
people of understanding [54] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 53 - 54)**

The word '*al-huda*' (guide) means showing someone the path that leads to a beneficial goal, as Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful...' (*al-Baqara*: 5). The goal of religion is not to put burdens upon you or to make things difficult for you. Rather, it has come as a mercy and guidance that benefits you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...We caused the children of Israel to inherit the Scripture (*al-kitab*)' (*Ghafir*: 53). The word '*al-kitab*' (Scripture) refers to the Torah, the Psalms and the Injil (Bible).

All of these Scriptures are: ‘...a guide and a reminder (*dhikra*) to people of understanding’ (*Ghafir*: 54). The word ‘*dhikra*’ means a reminder to a person because if he sticks to his innate nature without any corrupting influences affecting him, the protection he gained from the old covenant⁽¹⁾: ‘Am I not your Lord?...’ (*al-A’raf*: 172) will persist. However, he has forgotten the covenant and deviated from the straight path, as man is forgetful by nature. Thus, the objective behind sending Messengers is to remind people of the primordial covenant. The word ‘*al-albab*’ (people of understanding) refers to reflective intellects.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذُنُوبِكِ
وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَرِ

So be patient, Prophet, for what God has promised is sure to come. Ask forgiveness for your sins; praise your Lord morning and evening [55] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 55)

The phrase: ‘So be patient...’ (*Ghafir*: 55) indicates that Allah addressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* with this phrase during hard times, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and were shaken until [even their] Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of Allah?" Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near’ (*al-Baqara*: 214).

Allah *the Most High* then says: ‘...the promise (*wa’d*) of Allah is sure to happen...’ (*Ghafir*: 55). The word ‘*wa’d*’ (promise) means promising something good before it takes place; and Allah’s Promise is true and sure to happen. If you promise somebody, you give them glad tidings of happiness, blessings, and good, but are you able to guarantee that you will

(1) This is the first covenant which Allah took from the children of Adam. He *Glorified is He* says about it: ‘And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness against themselves [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified". [This] lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware"' (*al-A’raf*: 172). Allah *the Most High* made them bear witness against themselves that Allah is their Lord and there is no god except Him, a fact which they should be convinced of innately.

fulfil your promise? No, perhaps you will die before you fulfil your promise, or perhaps your ability to fulfil it will be weakened and you will find yourself unable to fulfil your promise. But if the promise comes from Allah, the Self-Subsisting and the Everlasting, it is a true promise that will certainly come true.

For this reason, Allah *the Most High* teaches us not to confirm promises decisively because our circumstances change just as that of all created beings change. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow", except [when adding], "If Allah wills"' (*al-Kahf*: 24).

Making your fulfilment of the promise conditional upon His Will frees you from being accused of lying if you do not fulfil your promise. If you promise decisively to do something, are you sure that you will be able to fulfil your promise? Do you control time or the ability to fulfil your promise? You cannot guarantee the continued existence of any of the means. Therefore say, 'If Allah wills', to free yourself from being accused of lying if you cannot fulfil your promise.

Allah's saying: '...Ask forgiveness for your sins...' (*Ghafir*: 55) means seek pardon from Allah. Does the phrase, '...for your sins...' (*Ghafir*: 55) mean that Prophet Muhammad has committed some sins? Scholars said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was a human being who received Revelation. As a human being, he gave opinions regarding matters about which he had received no Revelation from Allah. Even if his opinion was correct, Allah's saying is more correct.

Thus, Allah corrects him, saying: '...Ask forgiveness for your sins...' (*Ghafir*: 55). From what was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* commanded to seek forgiveness? He was commanded to seek forgiveness from finding Allah slow, which is referred to in Allah's saying: '...until [even their] Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the Help of Allah?..."' (*al-Baqara*: 214) The help was coming, and that is why they should not have been in a hurry.

Some verses in the Quran affirm that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did things for which he was blamed, and Allah corrected what he did. How was Prophet Muhammad blamed? Ponder on Allah's saying: 'May

Allah pardon you, [O Muhammad]; why did you give them permission [to remain behind]?...' (at-Tawba: 43) The Lord *the Most High* says He has pardoned Prophet Muhammad before He talked about blaming him⁽¹⁾.

Why did Prophet Muhammad give permission to those people? Scholars said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* thought that if the person seeking permission was truthful, then there is no problem with pardoning him as he was excused; but if this person was untruthful regarding his excuses, then his absence is better than his presence with the Muslims. Allah says: 'Had they gone forth with you, they will not have increased you except in confusion, and they will have been active among you...' (at-Tawba: 47).

We know that Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in the following verse: 'Why did you give them permission [to remain behind]?...' (at-Tawba: 43) from Prophet Muhammad himself. Had the Prophet not informed us, we will not have known of it. He found no problem with being blamed by Allah or his choice being corrected by Allah.

We have clarified this point when discussing the issue of the adoption of a child that took place when Prophet Muhammad adopted Zayd ibn Haritha. When Allah willed to abolish the custom of the adoption of children, He took Prophet Muhammad's adoption of Zayd ibn Haritha as an example for this new ruling.

Zayd was Khadija's slave whom she gave to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Zayd's family found out that he was in Mecca with Prophet Muhammad, they came to seek Prophet Muhammad's permission to take him. At that time, the Prophet told Zayd to choose between staying

(1) Ibn Abu Hatim related this with his chain of narration from Mis'ar from 'Awn who said, 'Have you heard blame more gentle than this? It entails pardoning before blaming.' Muwarraq Al-'Ajali and others mentioned the same meaning (Tafsir Ibn Kathir 2/360). Mujahid said, 'This verse was revealed concerning some people who sought permission from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to stay behind and not go to perform Jihad (striving for the cause of Allah). They held the view in their minds that whether Prophet Muhammad gave them permission or not, they will stay behind'. This means that they will not join them in Jihad (striving in the Cause of Allah) in any case. Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for giving them permission, as he should have waited until the truthful one became distinct from the liar.

with him or going with his family, but Zayd chose to stay with him. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad wanted to honour Zayd for standing by him and preferring to stay in his company, and this is why he adopted him. Since that day, Zayd was known as Zayd ibn Muhammad.

However, Allah wanted to abolish this practice and prohibit the adoption of children, and for this reason He revealed: 'Call them by [the names of] their fathers; it is more just in the sight of Allah. But if you do not know their fathers, then they are [still] your brothers in religion and those entrusted to you...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5).

His saying: '...more just in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab*: 5) means that what the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did was just, but Allah's Judgement is more just. Did this correction anger Prophet Muhammad? No, it did not. The proof is that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is the one who informed us of this situation. Had Prophet Muhammad hidden it, we will never have known about it.

Another example when Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is His saying about the captives taken after the Battle of Badr: 'It is not for a prophet to have captives [of war] until he inflicts a massacre [upon Allah's enemies] in the land...' (*al-Anfal*: 67), when they differed⁽¹⁾ about taking ransoms for the captives. Allah blamed His Messenger [Muhammad] with this verse, but did the ruling change after it? No, it remained the same. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'If not for a previous decree

(1) *This happened on the Day of Badr. Ibn Mas'ud said that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'What is your opinion about these captives?' Abu Bakr said, 'O Messenger of Allah, they are your people and your family, keep them alive and ask them to repent, perhaps Allah will forgive them'. Umar said, 'O Messenger of Allah, they belied you and caused you to leave Mecca; let me cut their heads off'. Ibn Rawaha said, 'O Messenger of Allah, you are in a valley that contains much firewood. Therefore, set it on fire and throw them into it'. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him remained silent and did not reply at all. He went into his room and then came out to them and said, 'Allah may soften men's hearts until they become softer than milk, and He may harden men's hearts until they become harder than rocks...'. Then he said, 'You are needy, so not one of them will be freed without a ransom, or their heads will be cut off'. Then Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse reproaching Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for accepting ransoms.*

from Allah, you will have been touched for what you took by a great punishment' (*al-Anfal*: 68).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* could have denied this matter, especially when the ruling did not change. However, we know that Allah reproached Prophet Mohammad only through the Prophet himself. The one who reflects on how Allah reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* will find that either He does this for Prophet Muhammad's interest or because the Prophet's judgment was not correct, which is the case of the above-mentioned verse.

An example of blaming Prophet Muhammad for his own interest is Allah's saying: 'O Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you, seeking the approval of your wives?' (*at-Tahrim*: 1) An example from life with the same meaning is when a father blames his son for studying too much or over-exerting himself. In this verse, Allah blames His Messenger [Muhammad] because he has put himself into difficulties and oppressed himself in order to please his wives.

Allah also blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* regarding the blind man⁽¹⁾, as Allah says: 'The Prophet frowned and turned away, Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting]. But what will make you perceive [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified. Or be reminded and the remembrance will benefit him? As for he who thinks himself without need, to him you give attention, Though there is upon you [no blame] if he will not be purified. But as for he who came to you striving [for knowledge], While he fears [Allah]; From him you are distracted' (*'Abasa*: 1-10).

The blame in these verses is because he has hurt himself by leaving a blind man and turning away from him because he was a believer, going instead to the leaders of the disbelievers to call them to Allah, for he felt that calling them to Allah should be given precedence.

(1) He was 'Amr ibn Al-Qays ibn Za'idah ibn Al-Asam (known as Ibn Umm Maktum), a blind yet courageous Companion. He embraced Islam in Mecca and emigrated to Medina after the Battle of Badr. He used to announce the call to prayer in Medina along with Bilal. He attended the Battle of Qadisiyya, in which he carried a black flag and fought, despite being blind. Afterwards, he returned to Medina and died there shortly before the death of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab in 22 AH (*Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli 5/83).

Some scholars⁽¹⁾ have taken Allah's saying: '...Ask forgiveness for your sins...' (*Ghafir*: 55) as a proof that the prophets are not infallible. Others said that the good deeds of the righteous are the bad deeds of the elect. It was related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said in his supplications, 'O Allah, I seek refuge in You from every deed I did for Your sake but was mixed with something that was not for Your sake'.⁽²⁾

Some scholars have another view concerning the following verse: '...Ask forgiveness for your sins...' (*Ghafir*: 55). They said that it does not necessarily mean that Prophet Muhammad actually sinned, but it means: 'If you sin, then seek forgiveness'. This meaning is indicated by the Lord's saying: 'O Prophet, fear Allah...' (*al-Ahzab*: 1). Does this mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did not fear Allah? No, it is a command for him to persist in fearing Allah. It does not mean that he deviated from the instructions of Allah and this is why Allah ordered him to fear Him. It is not like advising a deviant person to fear Allah, and stop deviating from Allah's Religious Instructions and in this way protect himself from Allah's Wrath.

It has become clear that the command in Allah's saying: '...Ask forgiveness for your sins...' (*Ghafir*: 55) is a command pertaining to acts of worship, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Our Lord, and grant us what You promised us through Your Messengers...' (*Al-Imran*: 194). This is a commandment requiring unqualified obedience because we say, 'Grant us' even though He *Glorified is He* has promised His Messengers this. That is, it is going to happen anyway.

(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned in his Exegesis several meanings regarding Allah's saying, '...Ask forgiveness for your sins...' (Ghafir: 55):*

- *Seek forgiveness for the sins of your people—the 'mudaf' (people) was elided and the 'mudaf ilaih' (sins) was put in its place.*
- *Seek forgiveness for your own sins—according to those who consider it possible for Prophets to commit minor sins.*
- *Those who do not consider it possible for Prophets to commit even minor sins say that this is a command involving worshipping Allah by supplicating Him.*
- *Seek forgiveness for any sins that you committed before prophethood.*

(2) *This was mentioned by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his book 'Jami' Al-'Ulum wal Hikam' (pg. 27) as the supplication of Mufaf ibn 'Abdullah. He said, 'O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for what I have repented from but then returned to. I seek Your forgiveness from that which I took upon myself for Your sake but then have not fulfilled, and I seek forgiveness from that which I claimed that it is for Your sake but my heart (intention) became mixed with what You know'.*

We will ask those who maintain that the Messengers may sin, ‘Did Allah strip them of their Prophecy because they fell into sin, or did he keep them as Messengers? Of course, He kept them as Messengers. Moreover, what about the fact that the Messenger did not act differently from the Message he brought?’

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Praise your Lord evening (*al-‘ashiy*) and morning (*‘al-ibkar*)’ (*Ghafir*: 55). The word *‘al-‘ashiy*’ (evening), which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to the time between noon and the end of the day, whereas *‘al-ibkar*’ (morning) refers to the time between the dawn and mid-morning. Thus, it means that Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to praise his Lord *the Most High* on an ongoing basis. While this command is for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and the believers who are with him in the morning and afternoon, it is also a command for all people, in all times and places because of the all-encompassing nature of his Message.

Thus, morning and afternoon here spread through all times and places. Morning and afternoon is appropriate to each one’s time and place. Clearly, if we take into account the differences in time from one place to another, we will find that Allah will be glorified during all times and places, continuously.

Allah’s saying: ‘...praise your Lord evening and morning...’ (*Ghafir*: 55) means glorification and praise together. Glorification involves regarding Allah to be too great and exalted to have any errors; and as Allah is too exalted to have any errors, you should praise the One you believe in for being the Lord Who is free from any faults.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ أَنَّهُمْ إِن فِي صُدُورِهِمْ إِلَّا
كِبْرٌ مَّا هُمْ بِيَلْبِغِيهِ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿٥٦﴾

As for those who, with no authority to do so, dispute God’s messages, there is nothing in their hearts but a thirst for a greatness they will never attain. Seek refuge in God, for He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing [56] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 56)

The word *‘al-jadal’* means argument, discussion, and refutation. This meaning is derived from the phrase *‘jadr al-habal’* meaning to twist a rope

or to twist threads together for them to intertwine with each other to make a rope. Thus, the word '*al-jadl*' involves strengthening one opinion with another.

There are different types of arguments: constructive arguments that aim at reaching the Truth, and negative arguments that have no benefit. Constructive arguments use authoritative proofs and evidences, while negative arguments are based on falsehood, without any authoritative proof. Authority can involve physical strength that forces somebody to do something or it can involve proofs and persuasion. Subjugation involves forcing people to do something unwillingly, whereas authoritative proofs make one do things willingly.

Thus, the enemy of Allah, Satan, will say: '...when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves..." (*Ibrahim*: 22). This means that Satan had no coercive authority to force people to disobey Allah, and had no persuasive proof either to persuade them to disobey.

In fact, we notice that in the verse relevant to the prostration to Adam, Allah asks: '...what prevented you from prostrating...' (*Sad*: 75), but in another verse, Allah *the Most High* asks Satan: '...What has kept you from not prostrating...' (*al-A'raf*: 12)? One verse is in the positive and the other in the negative. It means, 'Did you intend to prostrate but some external power prevented you from prostrating, or did someone convince you not to prostrate, and hence you did not prostrate out of conviction?'

To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...the signs of Allah...' (*Ghafir*: 56). We said before that the signs of Allah are divided into three types:

First: the signs that prove the existence and marvellous creation of Allah, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, air, water, etc.

Second: the miracles that Allah *the Most High* grants to His Messengers to prove their truthfulness in conveying Messages from Allah.

Third: the verses of the Gracious Quran that bear Allah's Rulings and Religious Instructions for man.

About which of these types are they arguing? The scholars said that these people argued about Allah's Miracles and Rulings, but that there is no scope for arguing about Allah's signs in creation.

Next, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...with no authority to do so...' (*Ghafir*: 56). Does it mean that there are arguments against Allah's signs based on evidence? Scholars said that this is not the case, but the meaning is that there can be no arguing about Allah's signs. The issue is that: '...there is nothing in their hearts but a thirst for greatness...' (*Ghafir*: 56). This is the cause and source of their arguing over Allah's signs. Their arrogance prevents them from accepting the Truth and from following a man from amongst them who was inferior to them, as they thought.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies in some verses that they believed in the Quran, but their opposition was to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as an individual conveying Allah's Message. This is because he was one of the common folk, not one of the leaders or the wealthy people. Allah mentions the disbelievers saying: '... "Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) In another verse, they deny everything: 'And [remember] when they said, "O Allah , if this should be the Truth from You, then rain down on us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment"' (*al-Anfal*: 32). The sound logic dictates that they should say, 'Then guide us to it'. Their saying indicates that they hated the religion as a whole because their hearts were busy with an opposing matter: ascribing divinity to others beside Allah and worshipping idols, the worship which they inherited and were accustomed to. If a person is preoccupied with falsehood, he cannot be guided to the Truth until the falsehood is extricated from his heart.

For this reason, Allah *the Most High* clarifies that matters of belief should not be discussed in public; rather, one should reflect upon them on his own. If participation is necessary, then one may discuss them with only one person because when you sit on your own or with one person the discussion can be fruitful and the disagreement does not become severe. Accordingly, you are more likely to arrive at the Truth. If one is defeated, he is not defeated in front of a crowd and as a result he will not be stubborn or arrogant, and he will come back to the Truth without trouble.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "I only advise you of one [thing]—that you stand for Allah, [seeking Truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought; there is no madness in your companion...' (*Saba'*: 46). This means: do not discuss matters of belief collectively because there is hardly any control over discussions among a group of people, and collective thinking leads to chaos and confusion. In fact, a person should think about matters of belief on his own, not to be affected by passions.

Allah's saying: 'There is nothing in their hearts but conceit...' (*Ghafir*: 56) means that their hearts are arrogant towards the Truth that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* brought. It prevented them from listening to Prophet Muhammad, and led them to consider themselves superior to him. This is because they were the leaders of their society, and if they listened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and obeyed him, it will make them his followers.

It is well known that Quraysh was the dominant tribe amongst the Arabs, and it was this position that made them able to travel every summer and winter for trade without being opposed by anyone. This is because all the Arab tribes came to Quraysh in Mecca during the pilgrimage season and they were all under their protection as their guests. It was the Sacred House and pilgrimage that gave Quraysh their special standing and status. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For the accustomed security of the Quraysh. Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer, Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them [saving them] from hunger and made them safe [saving them] from fear' (*Quraysh*: 1-4). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Have they not seen that We made [Mecca] a safe sanctuary, while people are being taken away all around them?...' (*al-Qasas*: 67)

The proof is that when they saw that their idols gave them no commandments and charged them with no responsibilities, they were satisfied with them and worshipped them instead of Allah. When they wanted a place to honour these idols, they found nowhere better than around the *Ka'ba*. As a result, they considered the *Ka'ba* as sacred despite their disbelief in Allah.

This thirst for greatness which prevented them from accepting the Truth is the very thirst which Allah *Glorified is He* assures: '...they will never attain' (*Ghafir*: 56). This means that they do not have the prerequisites to claim

greatness. Their greatness is not authentic, since authentic greatness means having some subjectively inherent characteristics, rather than ephemeral ones that come and go. Hence, it is a false façade, just as the one who sees himself great because of his health, wealth, or power.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Seek refuge in Allah...’ (*Ghafir*: 56) because when you seek refuge in Allah when you confront something beyond your material power, you do not confront it with empty hands; rather, you turn to your Lord *the Most High* and say to Him that this issue has overwhelmed you and surpassed your abilities, and you ask Him to lift it off your shoulders. That is why Allah *the Most High* tells us He is the One: ‘Who responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him’ (*an-Naml*: 62).

Therefore, when your power runs down you should turn to the Ultimate Causer: ‘...for He is the All Hearing, the All-Seeing’ (*Ghafir*: 56). Hearing and seeing are two Perfect Attributes of Allah. Every movement, every limb of man performs deeds; the tongue, the hands and the feet. These deeds are divided into two types: actions and words. Our words, which are an act of the tongue, constitute part of any deed, while the deeds of the rest of the limbs are called actions.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do’ (*as-Saff*: 2) mentioning both words and actions, which together form our deeds. Hearing is applicable for what words are said and seeing is applicable for what action is done. The Lord *the Most High* clarifies the need to seek refuge: ‘Seek refuge in Allah...’ (*Ghafir*: 56) to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because Allah’s Hearing covers everything spoken, and His Seeing covers everything done.

لَخَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ
النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

**The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by
far than the creation of mankind, though most
people do not know it [57] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 57)**

The letter ‘*lam*’ (indeed) in this verse is indicative of an oath which is being sworn. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* says that by His Might

and Power: Indeed, the creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind' (*Ghafir*: 57). How is this so? The scholars say that in this world people have lives of different lengths, one lives for a moment, another for an hour, and yet another for a hundred years, or even as long as Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*.

But, how does our short life compare to the lifetime of the sun even though it was created for us? Can the life of the servant be longer than the one it serves? Thus, we must have another life that lasts even longer than that of the sun and Allah's other creations that serve us, and this can only be in the Afterlife. Scholars say that one's life has a length which is known only to Allah, and it has a width which may outdistance its length. Similarly, it has a size and a depth, yet its width can extend to be the largest dimension. This means that we can broaden the circle of our actions to benefit the society and ourselves; leaving a legacy after our death. That way, we will be adding lives and lives to our short life!

That is also why it is said that people's worlds are bound by their aspirations. For one man his world is his own self—he wants everything for himself and he helps no one and this is selfishness. For another man his world may be his family, for another his tribe, his country, or yet the whole world. The greater the aspiration, the greater the scope of the world and the more our lot increases.

When we say that the sun lives longer than we do, we also take note of the fact that man is a living, eating, drinking being; the sun however is inanimate, it neither eats nor drinks. We need maintenance and are vulnerable to sickness and other things because we undergo constant change; the sun, on the other hand, has none of these attributes. It needs no maintenance and it is not vulnerable to the things that we are. It has been this way since Allah created it; it works without stopping, without maintenance and without fault. Any instrument that has these qualities shows you the Power and Greatness of its Creator.

This is why we say that if we look at the creation of the heavens and the earth we will indeed find them to be greater than the creation of man: '...though most people do not know' (*Ghafir*: 57). But what does 'do not

know' mean? The creation is right in front of us, we see it with our eyes. And upon seeing this creation and its wonders, we should reflect on it, on its magnitude, the precision of its laws and its perfection and its faultlessness.

Are we not able to predict the time of an eclipse to the precise second? It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* has enlisted even the non-Muslims to manifest the truth of His signs in creation and how they are so precise and well organised that no one can disrupt them. This is why we say, if you see something wrong in the world you can be sure that it was the hand of man, through his choices, interfering with it. What we leave alone without disrupting will never go wrong.

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ وَلَا الْمُسِيءَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

**The blind and the sighted are not equal, just as
those who believe and do good works and those
who do evil are not equal: how seldom you
reflect! [58] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 58)**

Indeed, those who neglect Allah's signs and fail to reflect upon them are not equal to those who delve deeply into them and are guided by them. Thus, the one who does not reflect upon these signs is like a blind man because he does not see the signs that are greater than the creation of man himself. How can one miss a sign greater than the creation of man except if he were blind? From these signs it is possible to find proof of the Necessarily Existent *the Most High* and of His Absolute Power and Marvellous Creativity.

Just as the blind and the seeing are not equal in Allah's sight, similarly neither are those who believe and do righteous acts equal to those who do bad deeds. This is a manifestation of His Justice. Allah *the Most High* says: '...little [of you and little] do you reflect!' (*Ghafir*: 58), which means how few of you keep this in mind!

إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَآتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

The Final Hour is sure to come, without doubt, but most people do not believe[59] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 59)

The Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of this reality which is very often absent from our minds, yet it is something we should not be heedless of. This does not just refer to realising the truth of the hour using our minds, but to being ready for what will transpire at that time. Allah *the Most High* continues: ‘The Last Hour is sure to come...’ (*Ghafir*: 59), that is, the Judgement Day: ‘...without doubt...’ (*Ghafir*: 59), and as long as this is the case, we must prepare for it. Had you been created and left free by Allah, you could have done what you liked. But since you are returning to your Creator and Lord and will be held accountable for what you do, what should you do? There is no way out but to take heed for your Afterlife, for it is the ultimate goal after which there is no other.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but most people do not believe’ (*Ghafir*: 59) which means they do not know of these realities or they are heedless of them. This is despite the fact that by only viewing matters rationally will surely guide one to believe in the existence of a final hour, judgement, and recompense. Why? This is because when you look at the creation, you see that the one who abides by the ‘dos and do nots’ and acts in accordance with them is respectful of the creation around him and does not spread corruption or transgression. On the other hand, the carefree and unrestrained ones are a source of trouble and corruption in the world around them. Tell me, are these two equal? Are the righteous and the wicked equal? One of them harms Allah’s creation and troubles the whole world, while the other sets things straight, helps people and makes them happy. Are the two equal?

Furthermore, in the process of teaching, do we not give our students examinations at the end of the year and we see that some succeed, while others fail? Do we not in this world have rules for punishment and reward, to repay the doers of good and punish the doers of evil?

But why do some people deny accountability on the Judgement Day, the day when all will be repaid for what they did? Even those who do not

believe in the Judgement Day believe in the principles of reward and punishment. They have punishments for crimes against the society, to discipline those who defy the law. They criminalize certain deeds and make them worthy of punishment, to keep their daily lives in order. But why do they deny the same principle when it comes to Allah and the Afterlife? Is it comprehensible that all the people in this life from the start to the end should be left without accountability or without rewards for the good and punishments for the bad?

By Allah, if the matter was as they claim, the criminals, and deviants will have succeeded and the outlaws of society and religion will have profited by doing what they do and oppressing others! They will have gotten away with their crimes, but the believers and the upright who kept adhering to a spiritual path, in vain, will have lost everything.

Yet, Allah's saying: '...but most people do not believe' (*Ghafir*: 59) shows that this matter does not depend on rational thinking; rather, it depends on our faith. If it was left to rational thinking alone, we will say what we just said above, but the whole issue is talking about belief and faith. The one who does not want faith and wants to escape its tethers, and does not want his life to be bound by a methodology of 'dos and do nots', wants to be free to live his life according to his desires.

This is why we say that those who worship trees and rocks do this because their deities have no methodology and give them no responsibilities. Such worship is by definition false because worship means obeying the deity being worshipped. What have these so-called deities commanded them to do? From what have they forbidden them? What have they prepared for those who worship them? And what have they prepared for those who reject them?

Clearly, they only chose these deities in order for them to live life without restrictions or responsibility, with no methodology and nothing to restrain their passions.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ
عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

**Your Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you;
those who are too proud to serve Me will enter Hell
humiliated’ [60] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 60)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Your Lord...’ (*Ghafir*: 60). In Arabic, the word ‘*Rabukum*’ (your Lord) is derived from ‘*tarbiyya*’ which means upbringing. Your Lord brings you out of non-existence and keeps you from annihilation. As long as He is my Lord, I am His charge; He guarantees my provision and sustenance, and before that He gave me limbs with which to work and live. He is my Lord and my Creator, Who brought me into the world and provided me with the means of life.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* created the systems of the world, He created them to be inter-dependable and integrative. He made one thing strong and the other weak, one healthy and the other sick.

The strong one lives his life to the full, having more than his needs. He should give what is above his needs to the weak one who is not able to do that much. The Creator could make all people strong, but He wants His creation to be connected in their daily affairs through need, and not through favours. Being connected will not have been possible if each one had all his needs because relying only favours can never connect people together as they will not really need each other.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...Call on Me and I will answer you...’ (*Ghafir*: 60), that is, regarding those things in which you lack the means, you are unable to achieve, or do not find anyone around you to help you. When you find no option but to turn and supplicate Me, I will answer you, for it is Me (Allah): ‘Who responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him and relieves the suffering’ (*an-Naml*: 62). He is our Lord and Creator; He brought us into existence and provided us with limbs and means and He established us upon earth, and we have no refuge beside Him to go to if the means become too difficult for us.

If the means are there before you and each person is fulfilling his role, do not ignore the means and call Allah to help you; you must use the means at your disposal first. Use them first and, if you have no success, then go to the Ultimate Cause.

We notice here that Allah *the Exalted* has commanded us to supplicate Him and has promised us that He will answer us. Yet despite this there are those among us who supplicate Allah and are not answered; how can this be? The scholars say it is because the person calling is not in real distress; if he was in a state of real distress, he will be answered.

Imagine someone living in a nice house asking Allah for a villa or a palace. When Allah *the Most High* gives him a palace, he then says that he needs another house for him to rent out to pay for the upkeep of the palace! This is a supplication for luxury, not out of distress. Being answered is conditional upon being truly in need.

Concerning our relationship between each other, the Lord *Glorified is He* does not excuse His slaves from the responsibility of bringing benefit to His creatures. The scholars say that the one who has plenty should spend, and the one who does not have plenty should give sincere advice to the one who does. If the advice does not bear fruit, this is not the end and there is still more left for us to do. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘There is no blame on the weak, or the sick, or those who have no means to spend [for the sake of Allah], as long as they provide sincere advice for the sake of Allah and His Messenger. And there is no reason to reproach those who do good. Allah is Most Forgiving, Most merciful’ (*at-Tawba*: 91).

When do we do this? The scholars say that if you have no wealth then you must: ‘...provide sincere advice for the sake of Allah and His Messenger’ (*at-Tawba*: 91). If you do give advice but the person does not respond, the scholars say you should look at yourself and your reaction. Why is this? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that there is no blame attached to those who came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* seeking mounts and he said to them, ‘I cannot find a mount for you’, and as a result: ‘They turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief since they had nothing they could contribute’ (*at-Tawba*: 92).

Clearly, no one is excused! You either spend from your wealth or give good advice, and if you are not able to do either you should feel grieved because you had nothing to contribute. Feeling bad is not sufficient here; rather, one should feel emotional pain accompanied by weeping–weeping because one did not find anything to spend in the way of Allah.

Thus, the main point is to bring benefit to Allah's creatures. If everyone were to do this, nobody will be left needy. After this we may ask, 'Is this person poor because he is incapable or is he pretending? If he is just pretending and using begging as a profession, no attention is to be paid to him. But if he is poor because he is incapable for some reason, he can sit in his house in dignity and honour as in this case the rich man comes to him and gives him his portion. In this way the capable are at the service of the incapable.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...those who are too proud to serve Me will enter Hell humiliated' (*Ghafir*: 60). His saying: '...those who are too proud to serve Me...' (*Ghafir*: 60) means those who are too proud to humble themselves to Allah and supplicate Him, and too proud to confess their neediness for Allah. This is why the people of true knowledge say, 'Do not let the target of your supplication be to have it answered, rather, let it be the humility of the needy before the One Who has plenty'. This is the true essence of worship.

This is why our Lord *Glorified is He* corrects the mistakes we do when calling Him, for man often supplicates for bad things thinking he is supplicating for something good. Allah *Glorified is He* says this is because: 'Man is prone to be hasty' (*al-Isra*': 11).

One may ask for evil things for himself thinking they are good, and part of Allah's Mercy towards us is that He does not answer us. This is why we say in praise of Allah, 'Glory be to the One Who corrects the errors of the supplicants by not answering them'. By this He protects us from harm, for how often does a man supplicate for evil thinking it to be good!

We said previously that a woman may sometimes chide her naughty son by saying things like, 'May Allah punish you and let me see it!', but it is due to Allah's Mercy towards her that he does not answer her. In such a case, His depriving her is a gift.

But why will they: ‘...enter Hell humiliated’ (*Ghafir*: 60)? Why will they be so shamed and disgraced? Because when we call Allah *the Most High* we intend to obey Him, since supplication and worship are correlated. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘Every matter that does not start with the Name of Allah is maimed’,⁽¹⁾ that is, there is no blessing in it.

We know that we should say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate’, and that we should start any action with the Name of Allah in order to recall His Blessings in that action. But why do we invoke, ‘The Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate’? The scholars say that perhaps we might commit an act of disobedience, and for this reason we invoke Allah by His Attributes of Mercy, for He never abandons His slave even if he has been disobedient.

To sum up, those mentioned in this verse will enter the fire abased and humiliated because they disdained to call upon Allah and were too proud to worship Him. The fire is the reward for arrogance.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّكَ اللَّهُ
لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

It is God who has given you the night in which to rest and the day in which to see. God is truly bountiful to people, but most people do not give thanks [61] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 61)

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here two of His signs in creation: night and day. We know what night is: the time between sunset and sunrise. Similarly, we know that the day is the time between sunrise and sunset. These are two periods of time, which mean they contain events. And given that periods of time contain events, every event must happen at a particular time.

(1) This was narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (2/359) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him: Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Any speech or matter of any significance that does not start with the remembrance of Allah is maimed (abtar)—or he said (‘aqta’--cut off)’.

Events that require work take up a specified time. When you work in the daytime you tire out your limbs and need a time for rest. The Creator has given you the night for rest and the day for work. You rest at night to replenish your strength and energy for the work of the coming day.

If circumstances prevent you from getting your rest at night, how will you be during the day? You will be tired and too drained to do anything. Thus, it seems that Allah *the Most High* wishes to teach us that the creation contains dualities. But it is part of man's heedlessness to assume that these dualities are at odds, rather than being in harmony.

In one of the chapters of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* swears: 'By the enshrouding night, by the radiant day, by His creation of male and female, truly [the ends] you strive towards are diverse' (*al-Layl*: 1-4). This means that the night has a role, the day has a role, the male has a role and the female has a role. Do not think that the night and the day are at odds with each other, or that the male and the female are at odds with each other. Each one compliments the other. They are paired together, not opposed, as some people think.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in one of the verses of the Quran: 'Say, "Ponder and think; if Allah were to cast perpetual (*sarmada*) night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Him could bring us light? Will you not then listen?" Say, "Ponder and think; if Allah were to cast perpetual (*sarmada*) day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Him could give you night in which to rest? Will you not then see?"' (*al-Qasas*: 71-72)

In the above verses, one question ends with urging us to 'listen', while the second ends with urging us to 'see', because during the night the faculty of the sense of sight is greatly reduced, while the sense of hearing is very effective for it is what is used to alert us at night. As for the day, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Will you not then see' (*al-Qasas*: 72) because sight is very effective during the daytime.

Regarding the word '*sarmada*' (perpetual), some of the exegetes said the night is not perpetual, and similarly the day, in that they are not continuous

and never-ending. Yet, if we look at the motion of the earth and the perpetuality of night and day, we find that they are without break—because when the night leaves us it goes on to others.

Thus, they are both perpetual and without any break, but the perpetuality is invalid pertaining to every single place. This means they are perpetual in and of themselves but not pertaining to each place since their existence in one place is limited as they keep moving to another place.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘It is He who causes the night and the day to succeed one another (*khilfa*), for those who wish to be mindful or to show [their] gratitude’ (*al-Furqan*: 62). The word ‘*khilfa*’ (to succeed one another) means each one follows the other. The night follows the day and the day follows the night. This is clear for us nowadays, as a sign in creation.

What about the beginning of creation, though? Which came first? The scholars say that Allah *the Most High* created both of them at the same time because the sun was created facing the earth and thus the part of the earth which was facing the sun was in daytime and that which was hidden from it was in nighttime. Then, as the earth rotated in its orbit, the night and the day followed each other. This is a proof of the spherical nature of the world, even though it appears flat.

It is amazing that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and the day in which to see (*mubsira*)...’ (*Ghafir*: 61) which means things become visible during it. In the past, they used to think that rays came out of the eye and fell on the object we are looking at. This was the case until the Muslim scholar Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham⁽¹⁾ came along and proved that the opposite was the case. He proved that light rays come from the object to the eye and thus we can see it.

(1) *Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham*’s full name was *Mohammad ibn Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham Abu `Ali*. He was an engineer from *Basra* and was dubbed ‘Ptolemy the Second’. He authored several works on engineering and news of his good work reached the *Fatimid* ruler of the time. He sent a message to the ruler, saying that, ‘If I was in Egypt I will build on the Nile something that will bring benefit in both its times of excess and recess’. Consequently, the ruler called him to Egypt and he went to the south of Aswan, where he wanted to build a dam, but he was unable to complete it. He wrote many books, in excess of seventy, one of which is *Al-Manazir*. He was born in 354 AH and died around 430 AH (*Al-A`lam* by *Az-Zirikli* 6/83).

The proof to this is that we cannot see anything in the dark, while we can see what is in the light because the rays are reflected by the object we are looking at. According to this interpretation, the day itself makes you see (*mubsir*).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Allah is truly bountiful to people...' (*Ghafir*: 61). Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is most generous to all of mankind because He gives to them although they have no rights they can demand from Him. He is generous to them as He created them from nothing. He is generous to them as He keeps them from annihilation, and He is generous to them as He has given them responsibilities. Yes indeed, even in giving them responsibilities, He is generous. How is this?

The scholars say this is because when He made you responsible, He laid down responsibilities concerning things that benefit you greatly. He Himself does not benefit from them in any way, and yet He rewards you for them. Hence, Allah is doubly generous to you by giving you responsibilities.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'But most people do not give thanks' (*Ghafir*: 61). This means that a small portion of mankind is grateful. Gratitude can be known through a resulting increase in blessings since gratitude and blessings are concurrent. The Lord *the Most High* has promised that: 'If you are grateful, I will most certainly give you more and more' (*Ibrahim*: 7).

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ خَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَآَن تُوْفَكُوْنَ ﴿٦٢﴾
كَذَٰلِكَ يُؤْفِكُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Such is God your Lord, the Creator of all things: there is no God but Him. How can you be so deluded? [62] This is how deluded those who deny God's messages are [63]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 62 - 63)

The word, 'Such...' (*Ghafir*: 62) refers to Allah *Glorified is He* meaning the One Who has done these things for you and been generous to you is Allah, your Lord: 'The Creator of all things...' (*Ghafir*: 62), and this is something that no one has denied and no-one has claimed for himself.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘There is no god but Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 62). This is how the Lord *Glorified is He* has judged Himself, that there is nothing worthy of worship but Him. This means you have faith in Allah and Allah *Glorified is He* has faith in Himself and bears witness to Himself. He bore witness Himself that there is nothing worthy of worship save Himself before anybody else bore witness to this. This is why He uses the word ‘Be!’ He knows that this word is effective because it is His Word, which has no rival. There is no other god to stop, divert, or protest against Him.

Allah *the Exalted* tells us: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no deity but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no deity but Him *the Almighty* the All-Wise’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 18). The scholars say that Allah *Glorified is He* bore witness to Himself. He bears witness to Himself by Himself, while the angels bear witness according to what they see, and the people of knowledge bear witness based on their deductions.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Creator of all things...’ (*Ghafir*: 62), this phrase is both general and specific. Such a phrase could be either true or—Allah forbid—otherwise. If it is true then the evidence holds, but if it is otherwise then *where is* the creator of everything? Where is the creator of the universe if Allah is not its creator? Who is it? Why has he kept quiet and not revealed himself? If he does not know about the existence of Allah *the Most High* then he is a heedless and a sleepy deity, unfit for Divinity, and if he knows about Allah giving us this information and he has not opposed it, then he is weak, and an object of worship should never be weak. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, emphasising the soundness of this we are discussing: ‘Say, “If there were other deities along with Him, as they say there are, they will have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne”’ (*al-Isra*: 42), which means each will have gone to the True Deity to dispute with Him over why He took their creations and claimed them for Himself. But this has not happened.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘How can you be so deluded?’ (*Ghafir*: 62), that is, how do you deviate from the Truth to which reason bears witness, which is established by evidence and proofs and the world we see before us? The Truth of this matter is clear. This claim has been made openly and

absolutely, yet no-one has stood up to oppose it and no-one has claimed this for himself—and it is well known that a claim is to be judged in favour of the one who makes it as long as no-one stands to oppose it.

We have previously clarified this matter when we mentioned the following scenario: imagine a group of people sitting in a place and when they leave the owner of the place finds a wallet. He tells his servant, 'Go and find the owner of this wallet', and his servant goes and rings each of them, one by one. But none of them says that the wallet is his. After that, one of them knocks on the door and says, 'By Allah, I left my wallet here'. Whose will it be then? It will be for the one who claimed it until another claimant appears!

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'This is how deluded (*yu'fak*) those who deny Allah's Messages are' (*Ghafir*: 63) which means this is how they deviate from the clear manifest Truth. The phrase: 'Those who deny Allah's Messages' means they deny them out of obstinacy and arrogance. They do not deny them based on proof or logic; rather, they deny them because they are Allah's signs and they do not want Allah or His Path.

They fear this path that will discipline their actions in life and restrain their caprices. They just want to continue oppressing people in life with the viciousness of their power and unrestrained caprices. Their denial of the signs is the cause of their deviation from the Truth; as if it is something unnatural for them.

This is why we see that the disbelievers of Quraysh were too proud to accept the Truth and were stubborn in the face of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They never bore witness that 'there is no deity worthy of worship besides Allah'; they did not even say the phrase. Why? Because they knew full well what these words meant and what they implied. If they thought they were mere words to be spoken, they will have said them; but they were Arabs and this was their language, and they knew what the phrase 'there is no deity except Allah' meant: That there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah, there is no leadership and no opinion except that of Allah, there is no judgement but Allah's and there is no submission except to Allah. How were they to accept this when they had gotten used to their leadership over the Arab tribes?

The word ‘*yu’fak*’ (deluded) is derived from the word ‘*ifk*’ which means lying and inverting realities. To lie is to make a statement that does not accord with reality; as though one is inverting reality upside down. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And He [Allah] brought down the overthrown (*al-mu’tafika*) cities’ (*an-Najm*: 53). The word used in this case to describe the overthrown cities is ‘*al-mu’tafika*’ which is derived from the word ‘*yu’fak*’ and literally means the towns⁽¹⁾ that Allah turned upside down. This is what lying does to reality, it denies what exists and affirms what does not.

Next, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘How can you be so deluded?’ (*Ghafir*: 62), meaning, how are you turned away from the clear Truth? Man can realise Allah just by his innate nature, and it is not for man to oppose this matter because it is evident and clear. All the teachings of religion are intrinsic to man’s innate nature, more than anything; it is only the caprices of the baser-self, the heedlessness, and vicissitudes of time, that cloud this disposition.

All the teachings of the creed and its evidences can be deduced and reached by the pure innate nature of man. The proof to this is that there are people who did not believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* but still thought about these matters, reflected upon the signs of creation and concluded that the Creator exists.

The philosophers who did not like the idea of having Messengers said, ‘We are guided by our natures. We have no need for Messengers’. This is what Socrates⁽²⁾ said, but his student Aristotle⁽¹⁾ debated with him and presented him with signs and questions, exactly as religion does.

(1) The word ‘*al-mu’tafika*’ (overthrown) refers to the towns of the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* that Allah turned upside down and bombarded with stones of hardened clay (*sijjil mandud*). This is why Allah said: ‘And then covered them from sight forever’ (*an-Najm*: 54), that is, with stones that He rained down upon them (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir* 4/259). *Ibn Manzhur* said in *Lisan Al-‘Arab* under ‘*afaka*’, ‘The word ‘*al-i’tifak*’, as understood by the scholars of the Arabic language, means ‘inversion’, as in the towns of the people of Lut which, along with their people, were turned upside down’.

(2) Socrates was a Greek philosopher and teacher. He was born in 469 BC and lived in Athens. He was known to have been humble in his clothes, food and drink, and he used to teach the people in the streets, markets and stadiums by asking questions to his listeners. He was accused of corrupting the youth against the rulers and was sentenced to death by being forced to drink poison. He died in 399 BC at the age of 71 (Wikipedia).

He said to him, 'Look at yourself and your formation. Reflect upon your abilities. I am not telling you to look at the signs in the universe around you, rather look to yourself and your abilities. Do you not have senses?' 'Of course', he replied. 'Identify them', he said. 'I have eyes to see, ears to hear, a tongue to speak, a hand to touch etc.' 'Why have you been created with two eyes, two ears and one tongue?' he asked, 'Is there not some wisdom behind this? Reflect upon the wisdom of being created in this manner. You have been given two eyes for you to see things from over here and over there, and two ears for you to hear things from over here and over there'.

'As for the tongue, one is sufficient to fulfil its role of speaking and articulating. With it, you can also taste food. Despite its small size, the tongue can differentiate between hot, cold, sweet and sour. If you like what you taste, you swallow it, and if not, you spit it out. It is as though it is a guardian over what you eat. Moreover, the sense of taste encourages us to eat, and in this way it keeps us alive and strong in order to be able to fulfil what our Deity seeks from us'.

'In addition to this, do you not see the wisdom in placing the entrance for food near the nose which smells and the eye which sees? The Creator has created them in this outstanding manner for you to be able to see and smell your food before eating it. As for the exit, where is it? It is far away from the eyes and far away from the nose in order not to be harmed by your excretions'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Can you not see the signs within yourselves?' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 21). Reflect upon the eye. It has an eyelid that opens and closes at one's behest. Above the eye is the eyebrow that prevents sweat from dripping into the eye. Under that come the eyelashes that defend the eye against harmful things like dirt and dust, and if something manages to

(1) Aristotle is more commonly known as Plato (a name derived from his large body) and he is the most famous of the Greek philosophers. He was born in Athens to an aristocratic family and lived between the years 427 and 347 BC. He joined his teacher Socrates at the age of twenty and was deeply affected by the unjust execution of his teacher. His philosophy was based upon how the politics of the state should be conducted in accordance with philosophy. He wrote his book 'The Republic of Plato' (See *Qamus Natan Al-Falsafi* by Jirar Duruzawi and *Andrverse Rasil*, translated into Arabic by Akram Antaki).

escape into the eye, the tears wash it out and clean it, like the windshield wiper in a car.

Then there is the nose with which we smell the pleasant scents of nature and by which we can distinguish things. These days they employ the dogs' sense of smell to uncover crimes and criminals.

These are all concepts that a man with a pure heart will reach by his natural disposition, arriving at the Truth with the minimum of reflection.

As for Allah's saying: 'How can you be so deluded?' (*Ghafir*: 62), it carries the meaning of amazement at people's deviation from the Truth, since it is something that should not happen. People of intellect should not stray from the Truth when it is so clear.

Allah *Glorified is He* wonders in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah!' (*al-Baqara*: 28). This is an exclamatory question which means, 'Tell us how on earth can you disbelieve when all these clear signs indicating the Power of Allah *the Exalted* are present in front of you?'

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً
وَصَوَّرَكُمُ فَأَحْسَنَ صُورَكُمْ وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ
رَبُّكُمْ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

**It is God who has given you the earth for a dwelling place
and the heavens for a canopy. He shaped you, formed you
well, and provided you with good things. Such is God your
Lord, so glory be to Him, the Lord of the Worlds [64]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 64)**

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'It is Allah who has made the earth a dwelling place (*qarar*) for you...' (*Ghafir*: 64). This means it is a place for you to settle and live. The words 'for you' mean 'for all Allah's slaves'; this is explained in Allah's saying in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures' (*ar-Rahman*: 10). But which land and which living beings are meant here? He does not specify.

Therefore, all the earth is for all the creatures. But is this really the case in our world? No, it is not. And the corruption that has taken hold of the world, the crises that have befallen people and the constraints on their livelihoods have only come about because this principle has not been applied.

In the world these days, there are lands without people, while in other places there are people without land. The cause of this is the presence of barriers that men have placed to come between the slaves of Allah and the land.

Allah *the Most High* tells us: ‘When the angels take the souls of those who have wronged themselves, they ask them, “What circumstances were you in?” They reply, “We were oppressed in this land”, and the angels say, “But was Allah's earth not spacious enough for you to migrate to, away [from evil]? (*an-Nisa'*: 97) But O Lord, how are we to emigrate when they have set up borders, placed barriers on the gates, and enacted laws for entry for which Allah has given no authority?’

Look at a map and see the borders of the different countries, you will find them to be complex and entangled! In some regions you will find the borders to be unclear or disputed, while in others you find them to be the cause of international conflicts.

If this shows anything, it is that the earth is just one and that it is for everyone. When man came to it, he divided it up and placed borders. Allah *the Exalted* created it as one wide and open area because if your sustenance becomes constrained in one place you can go to another. If this Divine Principle is not applied, the problems will not be solved and crises will continue to take a heavy toll on the people.

Being settled (*al-istiqrar*) on earth takes two forms: being settled in one's daily life and work and being settled by finding rest and tranquillity. One takes place in the house in which we live and take shelter. It is man's place of stay, rest, and sleep (*mabeet*). This is why it is called in Arabic ‘*al-bayt*’ (house).

A man will also have a place where he works and seeks his provision. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* mentions Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as saying: ‘O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a

valley in which there is no arable land, close to Allah's sanctified House' (*Ibrahim*: 37), and he asked Allah: 'My Lord, make this city secure' (*al-Baqara*: 126). The first verse relates to a place of sleep and rest, while the second relates to a place of work and toil.

You will notice that the place of sleep and rest is for you alone whereas the place of work is shared with others. Also, the earth is not just a resting place for you in your life in this world, it is also your resting place after you die because Allah *the Most High* says: 'From it (this earth), did We create you, and into it We shall return you' (*Ta Ha*: 55).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'And the heavens a canopy (*bina'a*)...' (*Ghafir*: 64), that is, it is built perfectly with no faults in it. It is well known that a building (*al-bina'*) stands upon a supporting structure that bears its weight. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: 'Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any supports that you can see' (*ar-Ra'd*: 2); this means either there are no supports at all or there are invisible supports which our senses cannot perceive. This means the sky is supported by Allah's Power! Certainly, the earth upon which we live is but a sphere floating in space! But why does it not fall despite its weight? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving' (*Fatir*: 41) meaning, that no one can hold them if Allah let them go.

The Lord *the Most High* gives us a palpable example to help us understand His Power in holding the heavens and earth. He tells us to ponder on the physical things and to extract evidence for that which is hidden from us. He tells us: 'Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading and closing their wings? None can uphold them except the Lord of Mercy' (*al-Mulk*: 19). Yes indeed, we see the birds up in the air hovering without moving their wings, yet despite that they do not fall. So, who is holding them? Their Lord *Glorified is He* is the One holding them with His Power, and similarly He holds the heavens and the earth with His Power.

Then He says: 'He shaped you, formed you well...' (*Ghafir*: 64). Having spoken of the things in the universe that are outside ourselves: the night and day and the heavens and earth, Allah speaks of something within in ourselves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Soon We shall show them Our signs in the [furthest] regions [of the earth] and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth' (*Fussilat*: 53).

Consequently, He says: 'He shaped you...' (*Ghafir*: 64) which means he has given you different forms by which each one can be distinguished from others. After that, He has given you different names to differentiate between the individuals in order for people to be known properly; in order for no one to do something and pretend to be someone else. Hence, the differences between people are important to attribute the actions to their rightful doers.

Next, Allah *the Most High* says: 'Formed you well...' (*Ghafir*: 64) meaning that He has given us the best form among all His creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* could have formed man in any shape He wished. He could have made him walk on four legs for example like an animal; but he honoured us, gave us an excellent form, and made us walk straight and upright.

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'O man, what has lured you away from your Generous Lord Who created you, shaped you, and proportioned you in whatever form He chose!' (*al-Infitar*: 6-8) This means He made us in the best, most well-proportioned and most beautiful form.

After that He says: 'And provided you with good things...' (*Ghafir*: 64). These things provide nutrition to maintain our life, yet here Allah did not mention procreation, which maintains our kind. He says one thing and leaves the other for another time to have no place in His Book free of the miracles of His creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '...Such is Allah your Lord, so glory be to Him, the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir*: 64) meaning, He is transcendent and sanctified.

All blessings, bounties, and sustenance come from Him. The word '*tabarak*' (glory be to Him) takes up its fair share in the Book of Allah. We find it used in connection with material things and we find it used in connection with spiritual things and the path that Allah has laid down for the uprightness of our daily lives. Allah *the Exalted* has given you a material body and he has given you a soul by means of which your body thrives.

هُوَ الْحَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

He is the Living One and there is no God but Him, so call on Him, and dedicate your religion entirely to Him. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds [65] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 65)

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘He is the Ever-Living...’ (*Ghafir*: 65). It is as though the basis for all the attributes of perfection is the presence of life, for power cannot be present without life, hearing cannot be present without life, and sight cannot be present without life. The attribute ‘the Ever-Living’ means that Allah is not from those things that change. We have existence and a life which is bound to that existence. The Lord, however, is Ever Living in His Essence (*dhat*). ‘The Ever-Living’ (*Al-Hayy*) is an attribute of His Essence, while ‘the One Who grants life’ (*Al-Muhyiyy*) is a description of His Actions. Given that ‘the Ever-Living’ is an attribute of His Essence, He can never perish. It means that He does not die, yet His attribute of being ‘the One Who grants life’ has an opposite, which is ‘the One Who grants death’ (*Al-Mumit*). He grants one life while He grants another death.

Scholars say that the Divine Attribute that has an opposite describes one of His Actions, while the attribute that has no opposite is an attribute of His Essence. Hence, when you call upon Him, saying, ‘O Ever-Living’, this is an attribute of His Essence, while when you say, ‘O You Who grants life’, this describes His Actions. That which concerns His Essence persists unchanged, and that which concerns His Actions results in Him giving or taking (life etc.).

Clearly, as long as Allah is the Ever-Living and there is nothing worthy of worship but Him: ‘So call on Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 65), with the condition that you, ‘Dedicate your religion entirely to Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 65), that is, when you call on Him let nothing else be on your mind, for if there is nothing else on your mind when you call Him, He will be with you and will answer you. Yes indeed: ‘So call on Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 65), for He is the One Who supports all. He tells you to sleep and rest because He, your Lord, is: ‘The One Who supports all; slumber does not overtake Him or sleep’ (*al-Baqara*: 255). It is as though He is coddling the faithful. Allah tells us: ‘So call on Him, and dedicate your religion entirely to Him...’ (*Ghafir*: 65). Beware of saying, ‘I

have put my trust in Allah and you', or 'I have put my trust in Allah and then you' because this is false. Suffice yourself with Allah alone; and sufficient is He as a guardian.

When you call on Him and are sincere in your faith to Him, you have put your affair into the Hand of the One Lord, and it is He Who is capable of doing what you ask Him. You are not left to the pity of one who is incapable. But notice that your supplication was answered by Allah *Glorified is He* and your request was granted before you even supplicated, before you even knew how to supplicate; in fact, before you even existed. In fact, all He wants from you is for you to manifest the humility of slavery to the Majesty of His Lordship.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says: '...Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir*: 65) which means praise Allah Who has been so gracious to you with all these blessings, from the very beginning of your creation. He created you from nothing and kept you from annihilation until the whole matter will end with you, Allah willing, going to paradise. Then when we enter paradise we will say, as Allah *the Most High* tells us: 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!' (*Yunus*: 10)

Next, Allah *the Most High* says:

قُلْ إِنِّي نُهَيْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَمَّا جَاءَنِي
الْبَيِّنَاتُ مِنْ رَبِّي وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أُسْلِمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Say [Prophet], 'Since clear evidence has come to me from my Lord I am forbidden to serve those you call upon besides God: I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds' [66] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 66)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say', addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...I have been forbidden to serve those you call on besides Allah' (*Ghafir*: 66). Clearly, this is not a command from me, this command is from Allah and it has come to me in a clear and manifest verse. The Lord *the Exalted* then says: '...And I have been commanded to submit to

the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir*: 66). I have been commanded to submit my affairs to the Lord of the Worlds.

Yes indeed, because even in this life when one of us is not good at something and things do not go in his favour, he turns to one who can help him with his needs. An example of this is when we go to a lawyer to look into a case, or to a doctor for a diagnosis, etc., you surely cannot defend yourself in front of a judge or diagnose yourself! When you go to a specialist, you surrender your affair to him and let him do what he thinks is best without arguing with him or rejecting his commands.

Therefore: '...submit to the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir*: 66) is a command for the incapable to submit himself to the One Who is capable. If your Lord *the Most High* orders you to do something, you accept it because of your faith in Him. You should do what you do with the doctor when he prescribes the right medicine for your condition. You do not argue with him or say, 'Why did you write such-and-such and leave out such-and-such?' Even when we are asked about the medicine, we say, 'By Allah, the doctor prescribed it for me'; we put the whole responsibility upon the doctor's shoulders.

Hence, if you surrender yourself to a doctor who is a human like yourself and who can be right or wrong, because you see he has knowledge and wisdom which you lack, how can you not surrender to Allah Who is All Knowing, Wise, and Fully Capable?

When your Lord *Glorified is He* orders you to do something, obey His orders and carry them out without disputing, protesting, or showing discontent against what He has judged for you. The Lord teaches us a lesson in submission to Him in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and how he surrendered himself and his affair to his Lord *Glorified is He* when Allah commanded him to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* whom he was 'granted despite his old age' ⁽¹⁾ and after he had despaired of having a child. This is why he praised Allah, saying: 'Praise be to Allah

(1) *It is mentioned in Genesis in the Old Testament that Ibrahim was 86 years old when Ismail was born (Genesis 16: 16), that there were 14 years between Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), and that Ibrahim was 100 years old at the time he had Ishaq (Genesis 5: 21).*

Who has granted me in old age Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac). Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplications' (*Ibrahim*: 39).

But why did Allah use the word 'ala al-kibar' (lit. 'over old age') and not 'ma' al-kibar⁽¹⁾ (with old age) in this verse. To make this easier to understand, some of the exegetes said that there is a difference between a two-letter word and three-letter word; the Quran does not use a two-letter word and use a three-letter word instead except for a reason dictated by the meaning. The exegetes said that 'ala al-kibar' (despite old age) is an assumption that he is not able to father children, but Allah's Intent and Will will overrule this assumption; Allah's Will is 'over and above old age'.

Similarly, in the story of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'My Lord, how will I have a boy when my wife is barren and I have reached extreme old age?' (*Maryam*: 8) But the angels answered: 'Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, "It is easy for Me ('alaya), for I created you before while you were nothing"' (*Maryam*: 9).

The word 'ala' here, from which 'alaya' is derived, means that old age dictates his inability to father children, yet Allah's Intent is 'over and above old age'. We also understand this meaning from Allah's saying: 'And indeed, your Lord is full of forgiveness for the people despite ('ala) their wrongdoing, and indeed, your Lord is severe in penalty' (*ar-Ra'd*: 6). Some scholars said that the word 'ala' here means 'with' (ma), but this is not correct; rather, it means 'over and above all their evildoing'. The Lord *the Most High* is saying, 'Although evildoings demand punishment, Allah's Forgiveness is transcendent above evildoings and above punishing the evildoer for his evil'.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells him to say: '...I have been forbidden to serve those you call on besides Allah...' (*Ghafir*: 66) prohibiting him because He loves him. That is why He tells him to direct his worship to the One Who is able to do things for him. An advice like this only comes from one who

(1) *Jamalud-Din ibn Hisham Al-Ansari mentioned nine possible meanings for the word 'ala', one of which is 'with', as in Allah's saying: '...who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it ('ala hubbihi, lit. 'with cherishing it')...' (al-Baqara: 177), and another is: 'And indeed, your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite ('ala', lit. 'over and above') their wrongdoing...' (al-Ra'd: 6).*

cares for you. This is just like you advising a friend and showing him what is good; had you not cared for him, you will not have advised him.

Next, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...I have been commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds’ (*Ghafir*: 66) which means I have been commanded to submit my reins to my Lord; I do what he has ordered me to do, and I abstain from what He has prohibited me from. If there is something to which Allah *the Most High* has said neither ‘do’ nor ‘do not’, then I treat it as permissible, even if it is something that a normal person may consider distasteful. Even if Allah *the Exalted* gives you a command in which you see clear hardship for yourself, you should realise that He wants good for you in a way that you may not understand, as we mentioned in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

We know that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was tested by His Lord with many things that contained a great deal of hardship. Allah *the Most High* tells us: ‘Ibrahim (Abraham) was tested by his Lord with certain commandments, which he fulfilled’ (*al-Baqara*: 124), and when he had fulfilled them, Allah *Glorified is He* said to him: ‘I will make you a leader of people’ (*al-Baqara*: 124). As a young man he was tested by being cast into the fire, and at his old age he was tested by being commanded to sacrifice his son at a time when his son was dearer to him than his own self. It was very difficult for him because when a man becomes old and approaches the end of his life and the next life, he wants to be succeeded by his children.

Thus, he was tested at the beginning of his life by the fire and he was tested in his old age by being commanded to kill his son. This latter test was extreme, for were his son to die a normal death this will have been enough of a calamity for him; imagine how difficult it was for him when he was told to slaughter his son with his very own hands! Furthermore, this test did not come by means of a direct command, rather by a vision in his sleep that was open to interpretation. Yet, despite this, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* yielded to a mere vision because he knew that it was from Allah.

But, how did Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* fulfil this command? Did he take his son unawares? No, he preferred to include him in the test in order not to deprive him of the reward of submitting to Allah. He said to him: ‘I have seen in a dream that I should offer you as a sacrifice; see what your view of this

is' (*as-Saffat*: 102). He said it was 'a dream' to give Ismail (Ishmael) an opportunity to say, 'Father, how could you kill me based on a dream?' As in such a case, Ismail needed to submit to Allah in order for him not to refuse. In fact, Ismail replied: 'Father! Do as you are commanded' (*as-Saffat*: 102).

Imagine if Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* had taken his son unawares, throwing him on the ground and holding a knife ready to slaughter him! What will have been the feelings of the son towards the father? He will have hated him and he will have been enraged by his action. This will consequently deny him the reward of the test. Moreover, reflect upon what Ismail *peace be upon him* said to his father: 'Father! Do as you are commanded' (*as-Saffat*: 102). He reminded him that this is a command. That is to say, 'O father, as long as this is an order from above, then do it'. We have said previously that one should not be happy or angry about an action until one knows who did it. If you know that it was your Lord *the Most High* who did it, the matter is closed and no room is left except for submission.

This is how we see that both of them submitted! Allah *Glorified is He* tells us clearly: 'So when the two had both surrendered [to Allah]' (*as-Saffat*: 103); the word 'both' is used in describing the incident: 'And he (Ibrahim) laid his son down on his face' (*as-Saffat*: 103), and he began to actually carry out the command, his Lord *Glorified is He* told him to raise his hand because he had passed the test. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: 'We called out to him, "Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the dream". This is how We reward those who do good; it was a clear test [to prove their true characters], and We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice' (*as-Saffat*: 104-107).

This is how tribulation is lifted. An affliction is not lifted until it is met with acceptance. The ruling of death for Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was lifted and his ransom was revealed. His Lord replaced any disquiet that had afflicted him and gave him glad tidings of another child⁽¹⁾: 'And [in

(1) Allah *Glorified is He* gave Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* glad tidings of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* when Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was 13 years old. Sa'id ibn Al-Musayyib said, 'Allah gave Ibrahim the glad tidings that his son will be a prophet after this affair as a reward for his obedience and patience' (see the chapter of *As-Saffat* in *Zad Al-Masir* by Ibn Al-Jawzi).

time] We gave him the glad tiding of Ishaq (Isaac), [who, too, will be] a prophet and one of the righteous' (*as-Saffat*: 112) meaning that We were going to take Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* but when you showed contentment with our decision regarding him, We decreed for you another son. Furthermore, We made both of them prophets, and of their offspring prophets. Reflect upon what submitting to Allah's Decree and being contented with it will bring you. In your submission to Allah, you do not look just at the deed itself, but at the context of the One Who is commanding you to do it.

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ
طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِيَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِيَكُونُوا شُيُوخًا وَمِنْكُمْ
مَنْ يُوَفِّي مِنْ قَبْلٍ وَلِنَبْلُغُوا أَجَلًا مُّسَمًّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

**It is He who created you from dust, then from a drop of
fluid, then from a tiny, clinging form, then He brought you
forth as infants, then He allowed you to reach maturity, then
He let you grow old – though some of you die sooner – and
reach your appointed term so that you may reflect [67]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 67)**

The Lord *Glorified is He* takes us back once again to the matter of our first creation: 'It is He who creates you out of dust...' (*Ghafir*: 67). It is obvious that we have been created twice, so to speak: once from dust when Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* and the other by means of procreation leading back to them both

Notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...out of dust...' (*Ghafir*: 67), and also: '...out of clay...' (*al-An'am*: 2), and: '...out of dark slime transmuted' (*al-Hijr*: 26), as well as: '...out of dry clay, like pottery' (*ar-Rahman*: 14). These are different stages of one process. When we mix water with dust it becomes clay. If we leave it for a while it putrefies and its odour changes; this is 'dark slime transmuted'. And if we then leave it to dry, it becomes 'dry clay'.

Allah's saying: 'It is He who creates you out of dust...' (*Ghafir*: 67), does not refer to Adam alone *peace be upon him*. Indeed, we are all made from

dust, even those who are the result of marriage and procreation. How is this? The sperm of the man and the ovum of the woman are made only of the food that we eat, and this food comes from either animals or plants, and both of these grow from the earth.

For this reason, we see that when they run a chemical analysis of the components of the human body they find they are the same elements that are found in soil—sixteen well-known elements. That is, there is material evidence known to us nowadays that supports the fact that man is created from dust; it shows we are all created from dust, even though we were produced by procreation. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'You are all from Adam, and Adam was from dust'.⁽¹⁾

Moreover, when the Lord *Glorified is He* spoke of the creation, He said: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves...' (*al-Kahf*: 51) because the heavens and the earth were created before man; man is new to them. And when Adam *peace be upon him* was being created he was not aware in order to know how he was created. Allah *Glorified is He* then says something to incapacitate and silence the stubborn: '...and neither do I ... take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray' (*al-Kahf*: 51) which means, 'I do not seek their help either now or when I made the creation'. The phrase: 'Those that lead men astray' (*al-Kahf*: 51) are those who present falsehood as the Truth, and what is meant here by this specifically are those who mislead men regarding the creation, as we find some of them saying nowadays that man was first a primate and then evolved into a human being, as Darwin⁽²⁾ posited.

(1) *At-Tirmidhi related in his Sunnan that Ibn `Umar peace be upon him and his father, said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him addressed the people on the Day of Victory in Mecca, saying, 'O people, Indeed Allah has ridden you of the disgrace of the pre-Islamic period of ignorance and the arrogance of its forefathers. People are of two types: a righteous, Allah-fearing man, who is valued in the sight of Allah, and a wicked, wretched man, who is of little worth in the sight of Allah. Mankind are the children of Adam, and Allah created Adam from dust' (Sunnan At-Tirmidhi, Hadith 3270).*

(2) Darwin was an English zoologist who became famous because of his theory of the evolution of man. He was born in England on the 12th of February 1809 and died on the 19th of April 1882 at the age of 73. He studied medicine and theology and was the author of the books, 'The Origin of Species', 'The Descent of Man', and 'The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Actions of Worms, with Observations on Their Habits'.

In fact, the Lord *Glorified is He* cuts off their path of misguidance by telling them that they did not witness the creation in order to be able to inform people of it, and that He alone is the Creator and that no one was with Him to know what happened. And for this reason, if you want to know how the creation happened, listen to Him and He will tell you, and indeed He has done this in many verses of his Book.

And if someone were to say that Allah has informed us of this, but we have not actually witnessed it, we will tell them to reflect upon the reality of life around them because it shows the Truth of what Allah has told us. You did not see the creation, but you do see its opposite—death. The destruction of something happens in the opposite way to its construction. When you build a house with four stories, for example, you begin with the first, and if you want to destroy such a building you begin with the fourth.

Death is similar to this. It begins with the soul exiting the body and this relates to the last stage in the creation of man. After the soul leaves the body it becomes stiff and it starts to decay and decompose; this is called a corpse. Then the water evaporates from it and the remains turn into dust. Thus death confirms what is hidden from you of the beginning of creation.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He who creates you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a germ-cell; and then He brings you forth as children; then [He ordains] that you reach maturity, and then, that you grow old’ (*Ghafir*: 67). These are the stages of creation. Allah *the Most High* continues: ‘...And then He brings you forth as children’ (*Ghafir*: 67). The scholars say that one is a child as long as one is growing. Once a person has taken his final form, he has reached the stage of puberty in which he becomes capable of reproduction because his reproductive organs will have reached maturity.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Yet, when the children among you attain puberty, let them ask leave of you [at all times], even as those [who have reached maturity] before them have been enjoined to ask it...’ (*an-Nur*: 59). We see that childhood is the stage of growth and puberty is the stage of becoming strong. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and then [He ordains] that you reach maturity...’ (*Ghafir*: 67), referring to full strength: ‘...and then, that you grow

old...' (*Ghafir*: 67) meaning you decline from strength into old age and a state of weakness once again, and this is when the body becomes emaciated.

Clearly, when the stages of growth and maturation are completed, the stages of weakness and emaciation begin. In the stage of growth you will find that a man consumes more than he excretes, and thus he grows. In the stage of old age, however, he excretes more and therefore he shrinks and becomes emaciated. His strength declines and his muscles weaken until decline reaches the final storehouse of the body, his bones, which become brittle and break easily because of what they are losing. This is why Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: '...O my Lord! Infirm indeed are my bones, and [the hair on] my head glistens with grey hair...' (*Maryam*: 4) mentioning the weakness of the bones in the last stages of old age.

These stages are from the perspective of the material body. As for the memory and intellectual matters, man becomes forgetful, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well...' (*al-Hajj*: 5). His forgetfulness reaches such a level that it is as if he never knew anything. Then we see him moving very slowly, to the extent that he needs to be supported like a child: 'But [let them always remember that] if We lengthen a human being's days, We also cause him to decline in his powers [when he grows old]: will they not, then, use their reason?' (*Ya Sin*: 68)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...though some of you [He causes to] die earlier...' (*Ghafir*: 67), and they do not reach these stages. How many people are there who die in the womb of their mothers, after birth or in childhood? Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...and [all this He ordains] so that you might reach a term set [by Him]...' (*Ghafir*: 67). This means our terms differ and are pre-established by Allah. Some of us live for a moment, some for a few minutes, some for a few hours, some for a few days or months, and there are some who do not live past the first stages of creation, dying as it were in the early stages of embryonic development.

Next the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...and that you might [learn to] use your reason' (*Ghafir*: 67) to understand that when Allah brings you to maturity and you reach the stage of full strength, it is not your essential nature; rather, it is something granted to you, as are all your blessings, and can be taken away from

you at any time. And if you know it is a gift which can be withdrawn at any moment, be well mannered with the One Who bestows these blessings on you.

هُوَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ فَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٦٨﴾

It is He who gives life and death, and when He ordains a thing, He says only ‘Be’ and it is [68] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 68)

We know that man passes through stages in his creation, and that his life is uncertain which means he may die at any one of these stages. How are we, then, to understand Allah’s saying: ‘...‘Be’—and it is’ (*Ghafir*: 68) in regard to the one whose life is only a moment or who dies in the womb of his mother?

The scholars say that the word ‘Be!’ here is addressed to whatever state that person is in at that time, be it an embryo or whatever. It is as though He says to it, ‘Come to life’, and then He takes its life in a way and time appropriate to it which only He knows.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ أَنَّهُمْ يُصِرُّونَ ﴿٦٩﴾
الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِالْكِتَابِ وَبِمَا أَرْسَلْنَا بِهِ رُسُلَنَا فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

[Prophet], do you see how deluded those who dispute God’s messages are [69] those who reject the Scripture and the messages We have sent through Our messengers? They will find out [70] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 69 - 70)

As we said previously, Allah’s signs are of three types: signs of creation, such as the sun and the moon; miracles that accompany the Messengers; and the verses of the Quran that bear Allah’s Rulings. We heard how they disputed the miracles and called them trickery and sorcery, and how they disputed Allah’s Rulings and said that they were inappropriate, but Allah’s signs in creation are not open to question.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... how [far] they ... have lost sight of the Truth?’ (*Ghafir*: 69) meaning, how have they been diverted from it when it is so clear? Where are their intellects?

The Lord *the Most High* says: 'Those who reject this Book and [thus] all [the Messages] which We sent Our Messengers [of old]? But in time they will come to know...' (*Ghafir*: 70). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those who reject...' (*Ghafir*: 70), using the past tense, yet when he talks of the recompense he says: 'But in time they will come to know...' (*Ghafir*: 70) using the future tense. The scholars said that this is because the recompense does not necessarily come at the same time they reject the book or while they are still in the life of this world. There is no problem with it being delayed until the Afterlife.

The word '*sawfa*' (will) in this verse indicates the future, whether it be the near future in this world or the distant future in the next. If the punishment does not come upon them in this world, it is waiting for them in the next, as Allah *the Exalted* says: '...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the Truth], or whether We cause you to die [before that retribution takes place—know that, in the end], it is to Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir*: 77).

The Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to be connected to Him always in such a way that we never think of anything else. A connection such as this prevents you from imagining that things that come to you are by your doing; rather, you see them as gifts granted to you and remember that the One Who gave them may take them back.

This is why He *Glorified is He* alerts us by saying: 'Nay, but man does transgress all bounds, in that he believes himself to be self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq*: 6-7), and then: 'For behold, to your Lord all must return' (*al-'Alaq*: 8), Which means, remember, you will be returned to Him and made to stand before Him.

To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...this Book...' (*Ghafir*: 70) meaning, what Allah has revealed bearing His Path: '...and... all [the Messages] which We sent Our Messengers [of old]...' (*Ghafir*: 70), that is, the things that they said. If someone were to say that it is Allah's Books that are being spoken of here, we will say no; there is a difference. The Book contains the path, but the Messenger bears the path in himself, he delivers it and is a living example of its application. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, in [Muhammad] the Messenger of Allah you have a good example...' (*al-Ahzab*: 21).

إِذِ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ وَالسَّلَاسِلُ يُسْحَبُونَ ﴿٧١﴾
فِي الْحَمِيمِ ثُمَّ فِي النَّارِ يُسْجَرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

**When, with iron collars and chains around their necks,
they are dragged [71] Into scalding water, and then
burned in the Fire[72] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 71-72)**

But: ‘...in time they will come to know’ (*Ghafir*: 70). When? This is on the Day of Judgement: ‘When they shall have to carry the shackles (*aghlal*) and chains (*salasil*) [of their own making] around their necks, and are dragged’ (*Ghafir*: 71). Consider the extent of the humiliation they are in: ‘Into boiling water (*al-hamim*), and in the end they will become fuel for the fire [of hell]’ (*Ghafir*: 72).

The word ‘*aghlal*’ (shackles) is the plural of ‘*ghull*’ and it refers to shackles that bind one’s hands to one’s neck. The word ‘*salasil*’ (chains) refer to iron chains that are used to bind men. See how humiliating it is!

Moreover, the word ‘*al-hamim*’ refers to boiling water, meaning water at its highest temperature. Then after this they are put into the fire to stoke it and be its fuel. Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَتَنَزَّلُكُمْ تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا
بَلْ لَمْ نَكُنْ نَدْعُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ شَيْئًا كَذَلِكَ يَضِلُّ اللَّهُ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

**And asked, ‘Where now are those you called upon [73]
besides God?’ They will say, ‘They have abandoned us:
those we called upon before were really nothing at all.’**

**‘This is how God lets disbelievers go astray [74]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 73 - 74)**

Contemplate the censure of the polytheists in this terrible situation, ‘Where are your gods to whom you attributed divinity besides Allah? Call on them and ask them to protect you from this punishment’. By Allah, if they used to worship people like themselves, they will see them in front of their eyes because they will have arrived to the hellfire before them. And if they worshipped rocks, they will see them in front of them as the fuel of the hellfire.

Hence, it is they who will say: ‘...They have forsaken us...’ (*Ghafir*: 74) which means they do not know where we are or how to get to us. At that

time they will see that the situation is beyond their gods, and consequently they will deny them, saying: ‘...or rather, we did not used to call on anything [real] before!’ (*Ghafir*: 74) Glory be to Allah! They lie even in this situation just as they swore by Allah in another verse that they did not ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah: ‘...By Allah, our Lord, we did not ascribe divinity to anything beside Him’ (*al-An‘am*: 23).

This is why Allah *the Exalted* describes these liars, saying: ‘and [they] will persist in heinous wickedness’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 46). That is, they have become so used to lying that even the Day of Judgement does not discourage them from it. They will say: ‘...we did not used to call on anything before!’ (*Ghafir*: 74) meaning we did not ascribe divinity to other than Allah. It is possible that they could be telling the Truth here if they knew these gods could not benefit or harm them but they rather worshipped them only to quench their desire for a religion, although that religion entailed no path and no responsibility.

Allah *the Most High* continues: ‘This is how Allah lets the deniers of the Truth go astray’ (*Ghafir*: 74). Indeed, Allah does not let anybody go astray except the disbelievers. If someone disbelieves, how will Allah guide him? We previously gave a parable for this—but of course Allah is beyond any comparison. We said: imagine a traffic warden whom you ask for directions. If you refuse his directions, mock them or ignore them, and tell him he does not know the area, he will leave you alone and stop helping you. If, however, you listen to his instructions and thank him for his help, he may say something like, ‘But I swear there is a difficult road or a diversion in front of you after some kilometres. I will come with you until you move past it’. That is, first he guided him to the way, and then, when you thanked him for his guidance, you earned even more help.

Similarly the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘But to those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] Guidance and causes them to grow in piety’ (*Muhammad*: 17). But in the verse we are discussing: ‘This is how Allah lets the deniers of the Truth go astray’ (*Ghafir*: 74) referring to those who do not deserve guidance. This is why we said that whoever craves disbelief, inclines towards it or chooses it for himself, Allah will say to him, ‘I am a Lord Who will give you whatever you want. If you

love disbelief, then I will help you in that. I will seal your heart in order for faith not to enter it and disbelief not to leave it’.

ذَٰلِكُمْ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَفْرَحُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنتُمْ تَمْرَحُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

This is a result of your having arrogantly rejoiced on earth without any [concern for what is] right, and of your being so insolent! [75] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 75)

Allah’s saying: ‘This...’ (*Ghafir*: 75) referring to the punishment, shackles, chains and fire: ‘...is a result of your having arrogantly rejoiced (*tafrahoon*) on earth without any [concern for what is] right, and of your being so insolent!’ (*Ghafir*: 75).

The word ‘*al-farah*’ (rejoicing) which is derived from ‘*tafrahoon*’ (rejoiced), refers to one’s breast being expanded by what makes one happy. But true happiness is to be happy with what will help one towards one’s original goal. This means that a person can rejoice over anything, even disobedience, and a person can rejoice over the Truth, which is rejoicing over what will help a person reach his ultimate goal. As for something that does not help one reach the goal, but rather blocks the path, it is but a fleeting pleasure that will be followed by sadness that will probably far outweigh the pleasure that one gained from it.

Read here an example of rejoicing over the Truth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah’s Cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Lord they have their sustenance, rejoicing over that [martyrdom] which Allah has bestowed on them out of His Bounty...’ (*Al-Imran*: 169-170).

Yes indeed, this is rejoicing over the Truth; and, in fact, it may spill over to others: ‘...And they rejoice in the Bounty provided by Allah: And rejoice for the sake of those [of their brethren] who have been left behind (not yet martyred) and have not yet joined them, that they have no fear and do not [have cause to] grieve’ (*Al-Imran*: 170). This rejoicing which has spread from you to others is true rejoicing because it helps one to realise one’s original goal in this world.

Another example of this is found in Allah's saying: 'Say, "In [this] Bounty of Allah and in His Grace—in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!"' (*Yunus*: 58) This is rejoicing over Allah's Bounty and Mercy, not one's deeds. This is the rejoicing enjoined by the Sacred Law.

Another type of rejoicing ordained by the Sacred Law is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'Hence, they to whom We have given this Revelation rejoice at all that has been bestowed on you [O Prophet Muhammad] from on high...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 36) because it confirmed what they already had and strengthened their understanding of the Truth. They rejoiced at this because it helped them to reach the true goal of their existence.

Allah *the Exalted* also says: '*Alif. Lam. Mim.* The Romans have been defeated, in the lands close-by; but it is they who, after this defeat of theirs, shall soon be victorious, within a few years: [for] the decision of the matter, in the past and in the future, is only with Allah. And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice in the Help of Allah: [for] He gives help to whomever He wills, since He alone is the Almighty, the Most Merciful' (*ar-Rum*: 1-5).

Clearly, there are many types of rejoicing ordained by the Sacred Law. There is the rejoicing of the martyrs at Allah's Bounty and Mercy. There is the rejoicing of those who have been given the Revelation through Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and there is the rejoicing of the believers at the victory of a religion that has its roots in the heavens over one that has its roots in the earth.

However, that rejoicing which is not ordained by the Sacred Law is the rejoicing of the fool. An example of this is found in Allah's saying about the disbelievers: 'Should good fortune alight on you [O Prophet Muhammad], it will grieve them; and should misfortune befall you, they will say [to themselves], "We have already taken our precautions beforehand!" And they turn away rejoicing. Say, "Never can anything befall us save what Allah has decreed!..."' (*at-Tawba*: 50-51), which means, whatever afflicts us from Allah is something that will be accounted in our favour, not against us. And His saying: 'If good fortune comes to you, it grieves them; and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it. But if you are patient in adversity and conscious of Allah, their guile cannot harm you at all: for verily, Allah encompasses [with His Might] all that they

do' (*Al-'Imran*: 120). Allah *Glorified is He* also said regarding the rejoicing of fools: 'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been reminded of, We threw open to them the gates of all [pleasurable] things, until—even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted—We suddenly took them to task...' (*al-An'am*: 44). He *the Exalted* also says: 'Think not that those who rejoice in what they have thus contrived...' (*Al-'Imran*: 188), that is, they rejoice because they have mocked the believers and harmed them: '...and who love to be praised for what they have not done—think not that they will escape suffering: for grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come]' (*Al-'Imran*: 188).

And He says: 'And thus it is: if We let man taste some of Our Grace but then take it away from him—behold, he is in despair and ungrateful [for Our past Favours]. And thus it is: if We let him taste ease and plenty after hardship has visited him, he is sure to say, "Gone is all affliction from me!" For behold, he is given to vain rejoicing and pride' (*Hud*: 9-10). And: 'But they [who claim to follow you] have torn their affair [of unity] into pieces, each group rejoicing in that which they themselves possess [by way of tenets]' (*al-Mu'minun*: 53). As long as there are a number of groups, and each one rejoices in what it has, then this is rejoicing that is false and not approved by the Sacred Law.

Furthermore, the Lord *the Most High* says: '[Now] Behold, Qarun (Korah) was one of the people of Musa (Moses), but he arrogantly exalted himself above them—simply because We had granted him such riches that his treasure-chests alone will surely have been too heavy a burden for a troop of ten strong men or even more. When [they perceived his arrogance], his people said unto him, "Rejoice not [in your wealth], for verily, Allah does not love those who rejoice [in vain things]!"' (*al-Qasas*: 76)

To sum up, we have four instances of rejoicing which is approved by the Sacred Law and nine instances where it is blameworthy and not approved.

Continuing with the verse under discussion, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'This is a result of your having arrogantly rejoiced on earth without any [concern for what is] right...' (*Ghafir*: 75). This is proof that there is rejoicing with and without right: '...And of your being so insolent (*al-marah*)' (*Ghafir*: 75). The word '*al-marah*' (insolent) is an excessive form of the word '*farah*' (rejoicing), and it means to swagger about, boasting and being conceited.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَدْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا فَبِئْسَ مَثْوًى لِّلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

**Enter the gates of Hell, there to remain – an evil home
for the arrogant [76] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 76)**

The word '*mathwa*' (abode) means a place to return to and stay in. The word '*al-mutakabbireen*' (those who are given to false pride) refers to those who assume they are above Allah, the One Who gave them life, and yet despite this they still do not believe in Him. These people assumed they were above Allah and did not believe in Him. They assumed they were above the Messengers and did not believe them. They assumed they were above His Religion and did not practise it. They chose their desires and submitted to their leadership instead of submitting to Allah.

After this, Allah turns to address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* telling him that he will face many troubles that will require patience because this mission is hard, and that he will be harmed in every way possible.

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَكَيْمًا نُّرِيدُكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي
نَعُدُّهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفِّيكَ فَإِلَيْنَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

**So be patient [Prophet], for God's promise is sure:
whether we show you part of what We have promised
them in this life or whether We take your soul back to
Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned [77]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 77)**

Yes: 'Verily, Allah's Promise always comes true ...' (*Ghafir*: 77) referring to Allah's Promise of victory to His Messengers. This is because He *the Exalted* is fully capable of fulfilling His Promises. We have already elucidated the difference between our promises and Allah's Promises. Our promises are not 'true' because we do not possess the means to fulfil promises and cannot guarantee them. However, the Lord *Glorified is He* has all the attributes of perfection, and nothing can prevent Him from fulfilling His Promise.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the Truth]...'

(*Ghafir*: 77), that is, of punishment in this world: ‘...or whether We cause you to die...’ (*Ghafir*: 77) before you see a sign in them: ‘...it is to Us that they will be brought back’ (*Ghafir*: 77) in the next life, where they will be unable to escape the punishment. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘However, before [We condemn them to] that supreme suffering, We shall most certainly let them taste a suffering closer at hand so that they might [repent and] mend their ways’ (*as-Sajda*: 21).

The ‘closer’ suffering is that which befalls them in this world, while the ‘supreme’ suffering is that which befalls them on the Day of Judgement which none of them can escape.

Then He *Glorified is He* clarifies for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* the reality of prophethood. He says to him, ‘Know, O Muhammad, that you are not the first of the Messengers, and you are not the first to be harmed while bearing His Message. All of your brothers in the line of prophethood have been harmed, each to a degree relative to the importance of their Message, and this is why you are suffering the most; this is because you [Muhammad] are the prophet for the end of time, and your Message is general for all people, all times and all places. Consequently, your tribulation will necessarily be more severe than that of those who preceded you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُمْ مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن لَّمْ
نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِثَابِتٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا جَاءَ
أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

We have sent other messengers before you – some We have mentioned to you and some We have not – and no messenger could bring about a sign except with God’s permission. When [the Day] God ordained comes, just judgement will be passed between them: there and then, those who followed falsehood will be lost [78] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 78)

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned the names of some of the Messengers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and there are 25 mentioned in the Quran. A poet said,

In that is our proof, and of them are eight,

Coming after ten. Seven remain and they are:

Idris (Enoch) then Hud (Eber), Shu'aib (Jethro) and Saleh (Shelah),

Dhu Al-Kifl (Ezekiel), Adam, and the Chosen One, their seal.

Nevertheless, the Lord *Glorified is He* states in another verse: 'For there never was any community but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst' (*Fatir*: 24), and this means that the number of Messengers who have not been mentioned is a very large number.

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says: '...And it was not given to any Messenger to produce a miracle save by Allah's Leave...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 38). Why is this verse appropriate here? The scholars say it is because they used to suggest signs to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And so they say, "[O Muhammad], we shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or have a garden of date palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush"' (*al-Isra'*: 90-91), in order for it to be a permanent garden: "'Or cause the skies to fall down on us in fragments, as you have threatened, or [till] you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us, or have a house [made] of gold, or ascend to heaven—but nay, we will not [even] believe in your ascension unless you bring down to us [from heaven] a writing which we [ourselves] can read!"...' (*al-Isra'*: 92-93) But what was Prophet Muhammad's reply: 'Glory to my Lord! Am I nothing but a mortal man, a Messenger?' (*al-Isra'*: 93) meaning I am but a Messenger from Allah, delivering what I am sent with.

The Lord *Glorified is He* by refusing to respond to their demands for signs, has clarified for us that they were not satisfied or content with what they already had. In fact, to seek more signs than they had been given is considered to be an insult to the earlier signs. This is one point. Another point is that there were people before them who asked for signs and Allah granted them, but after that they disbelieved. Therefore, for Allah to keep up with their demand for signs is a waste of time. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'And nothing has prevented Us from sending [this Message, like the

earlier ones] with miraculous signs [in its wake] save [Our knowledge] that the people of old times [only too often] gave the lie to them...' (*al-Isra*': 59) referring to the signs they were demanding.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Yet, when Allah's Command becomes manifest, judgment will [already] have been passed in all truth and justice, and lost, then and there, will be all who stood on falsehoods' (*Ghafir*: 78). He says: '...judgment will [already] have been passed in all truth and justice...' (*Ghafir*: 78), and as long as the judgement is passed in truth, the believers who believe in the Truth will be successful: '...and lost, then and there...' (*Ghafir*: 78) in the Afterlife: '...will be all who stood on falsehoods' (*Ghafir*: 78), referring to the disbelievers and the people of falsehood who disbelieved in the Path of Truth; and this is their natural end, for the reward is appropriate for their deed.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَنْعَامَ لِتَرْكَبُوا مِنْهَا وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا عَلَيْهَا حَاجَةً فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَعَلَيْهَا وَعَلَى الْفُلْكِ تُحْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

It is God who provides livestock for you, some for riding and some for your food [79] You have other benefits in them too.

You can reach any destination you wish on them: they carry you, as ships carry you [on the sea] [80]

(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 79-80)

The word '*al-an`am*' (livestock) refers to camels, cows, sheep and goats. These have roles and they are: '...so that on some of them you may ride...' (*Ghafir*: 79) which means on a camel, for you do not ride sheep, for example: 'And from some derive your food' (*Ghafir*: 79), that is, meat, 'and find benefits in them...' (*Ghafir*: 80) referring to benefits other than riding them or eating them, such as benefitting from their skins, their wool and their fur, for they used to make clothes, blankets, beds, tents and other things from them.

Reflect here upon the greatness of the Quranic linguistic style: For riding, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...so that on some of them you may ride (*li tarkabu minha*)...' (*Ghafir*: 79) with the letter '*lam*' before '*tarkabu*' (you may ride),

while for eating He said: ‘...And from some derive your food (*wa minha ta'kulun*)’ (*Ghafir*: 79) with no ‘*lam*’ in front of ‘*ta'kulun*’ (derive your food). The scholars said this is because eating is something which is just permissible, whereas riding is something which is necessary.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...and that through them you may attain any need in your hearts...’ (*Ghafir*: 80) which means they help you achieve your needs, be it travelling to *Hajj*, for example, travelling for trade or carrying burdens.

The Lord *the Most High* continues: ‘...For on them, as on (*'alayha*) ships, you are carried [through life]’ (*Ghafir*: 80), literally on them, because we ride them and put our burdens on them. As for: ‘...on ships...’ (*Ghafir*: 80) meaning boats, it is obvious that we ride in (*fi*) them, as Allah *the Exalted* says about the Ark of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: ‘We said [to Nuh (Noah)], “Place in this (*fiha*) [ark]...”’ (*Hud*: 40). He did not say ‘*'alayha*’ (on it). Why are the two verses different? The scholars said it is as if the Lord *Glorified is He* is showing us the stages of the development of boats and how they will be used. The Ark of Nuh *peace be upon him* was the first ship and it was built very simply, such that a person used to be actually inside it. This is why ‘*fi*’ (in) is used when talking about the ark of Nuh. But in the verse we are discussing, the Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to teach us that the building of ships will develop, and that they will come to have different levels such that we could ride on top of them.

It was because of this that when we were in San Francisco we asked them when the huge ships they have were first built. They did not know the exact year, but one of them said that he thought it was probably about one century ago. ‘Yes’, I said, ‘And in the Glorious Quran we are given a precise description of them. They are wide at the bottom and become narrower and narrower at each level towards the top, like a mountain. One sees them like giants on the water, just like mountains. The Lord *Glorified is He* says in His Quran when he enumerates His Blessings in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: “And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas” (*ar-Rahman*: 24). But it is well known that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did not sail on the sea, and he did not see these huge

ships. This is why this is a proof of the truthfulness of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in delivering the Message from his Lord'. 'And tell me', I asked, 'When were these elevators and escalators invented?' 'About fifty years ago', they said.

'The Lord *Glorified is He* tells us in the Glorious Quran: "And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people will become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways (*ma`arij*) whereon to ascend" (*az-Zukhruf*: 33). The Arabic word '*ma`arij*' means an escalator, such as the ones you have had for the last fifty years. Allah informed us of them over 14 centuries ago'.

These are all glimpses from the Book of Allah. They are things that the Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned to us in order for them to be a proof of its miraculous nature: 'In time We shall make them fully understand Our Messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves so that it will become clear to them that this [Revelation] is indeed the Truth...' (*Fussilat*: 53).

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

وَيُرِيكُمْ ءَايَاتِهِ فَأَيَّ ءَايَاتِ اللَّهِ تُنْكِرُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

He shows you His signs: which of God's signs do you still ignore? [81] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 81)

There are His signs in His creatures and His signs in the sea when you sail in boats and see other worlds—and its signs are greater than those we see on land. Nowadays, with the technological progression that has come about, we see they have made boats with glass windows under the water's surface. They make transparent boats that allow a person to see into the depths and what they contain of Allah's wondrous creations and signs indicating His Immense Power. The sight makes one say, 'Glory be to Allah! How can the faithless disbelieve after seeing such things?'

Similarly, if one rides a camel over a long distance, one will see many of Allah's signs in His creation. One will see them in the camel one is riding,

in the desert, in the mountains one passes and in everything around the person. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* asks us to travel through the earth. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Go all over the earth and behold (*fanzhuru*)..."' (*an-Naml*: 69), and in another verse: 'Say, "Go all over the earth, and then behold (*thumma unzhuru*)..."' (*al-An'am*: 11). It is well known among grammarians that the letter '*fa*' indicates a sequence which happens after a short period of time, whereas the particle '*thumma*' indicates sequence after a delay. It seems that travelling around is for one of two reasons: to travel to reflect and 'behold', indicated by '*fa unzhuru*' (and behold), or to travel for trade and profit and then reflect, indicated by '*thumma unzhuru*' (and then behold). Allah told us to travel through the earth and seek our provision and profit, but at the same time, we need not deprive ourselves of the pleasure of reflecting on Allah's wonderful creation. He says: 'Say, "Go all over the earth, and then (*thumma*) behold..."' (*al-An'am*: 11)⁽¹⁾.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...then which of the signs of Allah will you still deny?' (*Ghafir*: 81) meaning which of these signs which you can see do you reject, and how can you reject them when they so clearly show the Power of Allah? Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'Then which of your Lord's Blessings will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 13) The Lord *Glorified is He* repeats this verse after each of the blessings he enumerates. This means that these are signs that are not to be dismissed or denied. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said to his Companions *Allah be pleased with them* 'I recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to your brothers among the Jinn and they had a better response to it than you did. When I recited:

(1) In actual fact, the Lord *Glorified is He* uses the letter '*fa*' in three verses referring to traveling through the earth to reflect on the final end of the disbelievers, criminals and those who came earlier: the chapter of *an-Nahl* verse 36, the chapter of *an-Naml* verse 69, and the chapter of *ar-Rum* verse 42. He uses '*thumma*' to express the same meaning in one verse, and that is Allah's saying: 'Go all over the earth and then (*thumma*) behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the Truth' (*al-An'am*: 11). He also used the letter '*fa*' to express the other meaning, that being to reflect upon Allah's wondrous creation, in the verse: '...Say, "Go all over the earth and (*fa*) behold how [wondrously] He has created ... in the first instance..."' (*al-Ankabut*: 20). Allah does not use the word '*thumma*' as the Sheikh, Allah have mercy on him, stated here. The one verse in which '*thumma*' comes specifically to reflect relates to the end of the disbelievers, as we already mentioned.

“Then which of your Lord’s Blessings will you deny?” (*ar-Rahman*: 13), they all replied together, “Not one of your blessings do we deny, Our Lord”⁽¹⁾.

In the verse under study, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word ‘*ayy*’ (which) in the masculine—he did not say ‘*ayyat*’ in the feminine—despite the fact that the word ‘*ayat*’ (signs) is feminine. The scholars said that this is because the word ‘*ayat*’ (signs) does not represent something which is actually feminine, and therefore it is permissible to treat it as masculine. Another example of this is found in Allah’s saying: ‘Then, when he beheld the sun rising, he said, “This (*hadha*) is my Lord...”’ (*al-An‘am*: 78). Allah *Glorified is He* used the word ‘*hadha*’ for ‘this’ in the masculine, when the sun is feminine.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ مِنْهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَا
أَغْنَى عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

**Have they not travelled through the land and seen how those
who lived before them met their end? They were more
numerous than them, stronger than them, and made a more
impressive mark on the land, yet what they achieved was of
no use to them at all [82] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 82)**

This travel is, as we said, for reflection. The reflection here is upon those nations who preceded them. The Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that their predecessors among the nations of the world were more numerous and stronger than they were, and left a greater mark on the earth. The word ‘*athar*’ (the impact which they left) refers to things like the pyramids that the pharaohs left behind and Allah preserved as a witness to their presence.

There are other ruins that we do not see because they are buried, yet Allah has informed us of them, as in His saying: ‘Are you not aware of how

(1) This has been related by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* [7/690] and he ascribed it to At-Tirmidhi, Ibn-Mundhir, Al-Hakim, Ibn-Mardawiyya, Abu Ash-Sheikh in *Al-‘Azhama* and Al-Bayhaqi in *Ad-Dala’il* on the authority of Jabir ibn-‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him.

your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] 'Ad, [the people of] *Iram*, with lofty pillars, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?' (*al-Fajr*: 6-8) And the following refers to ruins that still exist: 'And verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not understand?' (*as-Saffat*: 137-138)

Therefore, where are you, O Arabs, in comparison to these faded civilisations? You should have understood the lesson from those who preceded you in denying and opposing the Messengers; they were more powerful than you yet Allah took them to task and gave victory to His Messengers and His Religion. You are less than these and will not be able to confound Allah; indeed, it will be easier to deal with you.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...but all that they achieved was of no avail to them' (*Ghafir*: 82), referring to these civilisations and their buildings, the secrets of which have still not been fully grasped (although they are not impossible to understand) did not profit their people.

Let us speak of their ruins in Egypt, as an example. We have the ruins of the pharaohs, pyramids, and temples. We see colours on the wall just as they used to be, as if they were painted in recent times. We have found seeds just as they used to be, and scientists say that they could be grown even after these thousands of years since the time of the pharaohs. It is well known that there are many secrets hidden in the building of the pyramids that we still have not unravelled. Despite all this progress on the part of the pharaohs, they were not able to protect themselves or prolong their civilisation. They were not even able to leave behind what can explain their civilisation to us. Had Champollion⁽¹⁾ not deciphered the Rosetta Stone, we will not have been able to understand their history or uncover it.

(1) He was Jean-François Champollion, a French scholar who was born in 1790 CE and died in 1832 at the age of 42. He was a boy of 8 when he came to Egypt with the French campaign in 1798 CE. He spent three years studying oriental and Coptic languages at the hands of some of the greatest scholars of his time. He worked as a teacher and chair of the department of Egyptian Antiquities in the College de France.

فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرِحُوا بِمَا عِنْدَهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ
وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

**When messengers came to them with clear signs, they
revelled in the knowledge they had, and so they were
engulfed by the very punishment they mocked [83]
(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 83)**

Their Messengers brought them clear signs and miracles, but they said, ‘We do not need Messengers’ just as the philosopher Socrates himself had said a long time ago, ‘We are a people who are already guided. We have no need for Messengers’, and yet despite claiming that he was guided and had good manners, they saw he was bad and sentenced him to death. On the other hand, if he was truly guided and their judgement on him was unjust, he was in need of someone to defend him; a neutral party to check what was for and what was against him. That is, in both situations he needed the help of others.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...they kept proudly rejoicing⁽¹⁾ in whatever knowledge they [already] possessed...’ (*Ghafir*: 83). This is a type of rejoicing that we have already discussed, saying that it is not ordained by the Sacred Law and is the rejoicing of fools.

What is intended here is that they rejoiced in that knowledge by means of which they disputed with the Quran, such as their saying: ‘...There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die and we live, and nothing but time destroys us...’ (*al-Jathiya*: 24). This is what the atheists say. And similarly: ‘...Had Allah so willed, we will not have ascribed divinity to anything but Him...’ (*al-An‘am*: 148). Whenever a matter is presented to them that they

(1) *Ibn Al-Jawzi* said regarding this verse in *Zad Al-Masir*, ‘There are two opinions about those who are being spoken of here. The first is that they are the nations who denied their prophets, and this is what the majority said. As to the meaning of what they said, there are also two opinions: One is that they said, ‘We are more knowledgeable than them; we will not be resurrected or held to account’, and this was the opinion of *Mujahid*. The other is that they rejoiced in what they had, believing it to be knowledge. This was the opinion of *As-Suddi*. The second opinion about who is being spoken of here is that they are the Messengers; *Abu Sulaiman*, among many others, believed that Messengers rejoiced at the destruction of the deniers of the Truth because this meant that they themselves and the true believers with them were saved. In addition, they, by the destruction of these disbelievers, became totally assured of the truthfulness of the Divine Knowledge revealed to them.

wanted to refuse, they refute it in a way that satisfies them, even though it may false, and they consider this to be a type of knowledge.

Alternatively, it could mean that they were contented with the knowledge they had of the outward aspects of this world and the civilisations that established it. They said that they had no need for Messengers because what they had of material knowledge was sufficient. We will tell them that they have looked only at the surface of matters and at those things by which they feel they can justify their beliefs. But they also said: ‘...Had Allah so willed, we will not have ascribed divinity to anything but Him...’ (*al-An‘am*: 148), that is, blaming Allah, and this shows that they were just disagreeing with everything that was said.

Some scholars said that: ‘...they kept proudly rejoicing...’ (*Ghafir*: 83) refers to the Messengers rejoicing that Allah had guided them and made them sources of guidance, yet this opinion does not take into account the dictates of the context of this verse and contradicts its latter half where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and [so, in the end] they were overwhelmed by the very thing which they used to deride (*yastahzi‘oon*)’ (*Ghafir*: 83) which means as a result of their derision.

An example of such derision is found in Allah’s saying: ‘He [Pharaoh] said, “If you have come with a sign, produce it—if you are a man of Truth!”’ (*al-A‘raf*: 106), and: ‘...Have you come to us [with the demand] that we worship Allah alone, and give up all that our forefathers used to worship? Bring about, then, that [punishment] with which you have threatened us, if you are a man of Truth!’ (*al-A‘raf*: 70) The word ‘*yastahzi‘oon*’ (they used to deride) is derived from the phrase ‘*huz’ al-batil min al-haqq*’ meaning ‘falsehood sneering at the Truth’. Why does falsehood do this? The scholars say that it is because when falsehood sees the Truth repelling it, it must try to undermine the strength of those who believe in it; this is because if it does not try to undermine those who believe, it will be drawn towards the Truth. This is why we have heard them say: ‘...Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk at random in the middle of its [reading]’⁽¹⁾ so that you might gain the upper hand’ (*Fussilat*: 26).

(1) *As-Samarqandi in Bahr Al-‘Ulum in his Exegesis of this verse said, ‘This verse was revealed about Abu Jahl and his companions. He said, “If Muhammad recites the Quran,=*

By Allah, had they not known the sweetness of the Quran, how it takes hold of its listeners, and overcomes their hearing and their hearts, and had they not feared that the Quran will strip them of their authority, they will not have said these things. They will not have warned people from listening to it had it been normal speech and they will not have taken this stance towards it. Thus they understood that the Quran was true and that those who listened to it will surely be guided by it, and when we say listened to it, we mean listened with his heart.

We have heard much of the story of the conversion⁽¹⁾ of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him*. He was stubborn, tyrannical, and hard-hearted before entering Islam, but what happened to him after he heard the Quran? He first heard it from his sister and flew into a fit of rage, striking her on her face thereby making it bleed. When he saw her bleeding, his feelings for his sister were stirred; and when this happened, his feelings overcame the vehemence of his enmity to Islam and allowed the Quran to penetrate to his heart without impediment, and thus he was affected and entered faith.

In another verse, the Quran has painted a picture for us of the way the people of falsehood mock the people of Truth. Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin used to laugh at the believers; and whenever they pass by them, they used to wink at one another [derisively]; and whenever they return to their own people, they used to return jesting; and whenever they see those [who believe], they used to say, “Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!” But they had not been sent to watch over [the beliefs of] others’ (*al-Mutaffifin*: 29-33).

= raise your voices while reading poetry and speech in front of them in order to confuse them”. This is what Allah Glorified is He spoke of in His saying: “...but rather talk at random in the middle of its [reading]...” (*Fussilat* : 26) meaning, make a lot of noise’.

(1) The conversion of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* happened in Dhul-Hijja, six years after Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him first received the Revelation. According to what Ibn-Sa’d related from Ibn-Musayyib, he was then 26 years old. Abu-Na`im said, ‘He entered Islam three days after Hamza *Allah be pleased with him*’. Ibn-Ishaq said, ‘There were approximately forty Muslim men and women [at this time]’ (See *Subul Al-Huda wa Ar-Rashad*, chapter 17, concerning the conversion of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him*).

The Lord *Glorified is He* then tells us the result of this mockery and who will have the last word in this discussion between the believers and sinners: 'But on the Day [of Judgment], the believers will [be able to] laugh at the deniers of the Truth: [resting in paradise] on couches, they will gaze [at their condition and that of the disbelievers in Hell]' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 34-35). Then our Lord asks us: 'Are these deniers of the Truth being [thus] requited for [anything but] what they used to do?' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 36) which means, are We not able to repay them as they deserve?

Next Allah *the Most High* says:

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدُّهُ، وَكَفَرْنَا بِمَا كُنَّا بِهِ
 مُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾ فَلَمْ يَكْ يَنْفَعُهُمْ إِيمَانُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا سُنَّتَ اللَّهُ
 الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ فِي عِبَادِهِ ۚ وَخَسِرَ هُنَاكَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

When they saw Our punishment, they said, 'We believe in God alone; we reject any partner we ascribed to Him,' [84]

But believing after seeing Our punishment did not benefit them at all – this has always been God's way of dealing with His creatures – there and then the disbelievers were lost [85]

(The Quran, *Ghafir*: 84 - 85)

This verse portrays for us the same situation that happened with Pharaoh when he was about to drown: '...[Pharaoh] exclaimed, "I [now] believe that there is no deity except Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender themselves to Him!"' (*Yunus*: 90) But Allah replied to him, 'Now?—but a little while before this you used to rebel [against us], and used to be among those who spread corruption?' (*Yunus*: 91) This means faith will not benefit you now. This means that there is a time where one cannot turn back from disbelief to faith, and it is the time when death takes its hold. Faith is only accepted when one's options are still open and one can believe or disbelieve. Similarly, Allah says about those in the verse under discussion: '...when they [clearly] beheld Our Punishment...' (*Ghafir*: 84) come down on them in this world: '...they said, 'We [now] believe in Allah, [and] only Him, and we have renounced our belief in those we used to associate [with Him]!' (Ghafir: 84)

But is this a time when faith is going to be accepted? The Lord *Glorified is He* repeats: ‘But believing after they had beheld Our Punishment could not possibly benefit them [at all]...’ (*Ghafir*: 85). Clearly, it does not make sense that their faith should benefit them now, and this is not the Way Allah deals with His creation. How could it be now that they have no strength or tricks to oppose Allah’s Way, they want to believe? It is not at all appropriate that they should benefit from such faith—their imagined faith—it is false, rejected, and devoid of meaning because it has come at the wrong time.

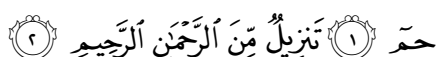
This is: ‘...the Way that Allah has always followed...’ (*Ghafir*: 85); it has always been the way: ‘...with His creatures...’ (*Ghafir*: 85). We can see Allah’s Ways in the annals of history. Just as he took other peoples to task for their sins and rejected their faith at the moment of death or when His punishment came upon them, he will not accept yours. This way will never change, for it is fixed: ‘...and never will you find any change in the Way that Allah follows!’ (*al-Ahzab*: 62) And it will remain in force for all of creation: ‘...And so, then and there, those who had denied the Truth were lost’ (*Ghafir*: 85). This is the normal and expected outcome and ending they deserved.

the chapter of

Fussilat

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

The chapter of *Fussilat*⁽¹⁾:



***Ha Mim* [1] A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [2] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 1-2)**

We say that *Ha Mim* belong to the group of disconnected letters, and scholars have debated endlessly about what these letters mean – all such attempts being made merely to satisfy the intellect’s passion for inquiry. Belief, however, has a different approach. It takes the matter as something given: as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has said it, there the question ends

Therefore, when our master Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was told: ‘Your associate claims that he did such and such,’ he immediately responded, ‘Was it Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad that said it?’ When they replied ‘yes’, he said: ‘So he has spoken the truth’⁽²⁾ – that is, this question is beyond discussion, and there is no space here for applying reason; for it possesses such veracity as to put it beyond discussion

We have already mentioned the gist of the subject of these disjointed letters. These letters are those the names of which Allah has mentioned, for

(1) *The chapter of Fussilat is chapter number 41 according to the order of the Holy Book, revealed after the chapter of Fatir; it consists of 54 verses. In his commentary, Al-Qurtubi states that this chapter Fussilat is Meccan according to all authorities (IX, 6001). Fussilat means clarified or explained, that is, according to Qatada, the permitted is distinguished from the forbidden and obedience is distinguished from rebellion.*

(2) *Al-Qurtubi quotes this in his commentary (V, 4012). It continues with them asking him, ‘You believe him before hearing from him directly?’ To which he replied, ‘Where is your reason? I believe him when he speaks of heaven, so how should I not believe him when he speaks of Jerusalem, since heaven is far above it!’*

each letter has a name and a referent. For example, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet is called '*Alif*' and its *musamma al-harf* (the sound which the name of the letter refers to) is 'a,' 'u,' and 'i.' Now only a teacher uses its name, while an illiterate person knows nothing of the names of the letters, *Alif, Ba' Ta'*, but still uses their sounds when he speaks.

Thus, the illiterate person uses *musamma al-harf* (the sound which the name of the letter refers to) without knowing its name. This is shown by the fact that when we teach children we tell them, 'Spell this word,' to which they respond, 'w', 'r', 'i', 't', 'e'. An illiterate person, on the other hand, simply says 'write' without knowing the letters that compose the word or its spelling. We can all agree on this point.

Recall then, that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, so what made him realise that the (Arabic) letter 'h' is called *Ha'* and the letter 'm' is called *Mim*, given that you read at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow) *Alif, Lam, Mim*, whereas at the beginning of the chapter of *ash-Sharh* (the Opening Forth) you say *Alam nashrah laka sadrak*, that is: 'Did We not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast?' (*ash-Sharh*: 1). Why do you read it one way in the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow), and another way in the chapter of *ash-Sharh* (the Opening Forth)?

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, you read the name of the letters, whereas in the chapter of *ash-Sharh* you read the *musamma* of the letters. Only a literate person can tell the difference. So who taught Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this, since in both cases – in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the chapter of *ash-Sharh* – the letters are identical and in the same order?

There is something else here: the disjointed letters in the Quran represent half of the letters of the alphabet. It is well known that the letters of the alphabet are 28 in number, and the disjointed letters represent only 14 of them, and are distributed in a most mysterious way such that the scholars are all still at a loss to explain their significance.

As for the first nine letters of the alphabet, only two of them occur: *Alif* and *Ha'*. Of the last nine letters of the alphabet, only seven occur, leaving aside two – the mirror image of the first. Of the middle ten letters, only those without diacritical points are used, leaving aside those with diacritical points:

thus, *Sin* is used but not *Shin*, *Sad* but not *Dad*, *Ta* but not *Zha*, *Ayn* but not *Ghayn*. The matter, though not regular, thus shows a fine organisation; these letters are not monotonously arranged, but are arranged according to a higher wisdom, and with intended accuracy, much like the teeth on a key.

Sometimes, the True Lord puts a single letter, at the beginning of a chapter, like '*Sad*' or '*Qaf*', and other times He puts two letters like '*Ha Mim*'; sometimes He puts three letters like '*Alif Lam Mim*'; sometimes he puts four letters like '*Alif Lam Mim Ra*'; sometimes He puts five letters like '*Ha Mim Ayn Sin Qaf*' or '*Kaf Ha Ya Ayn Sad*'. So the matter is intentionally arranged according to a certain wisdom, and for a purpose – a purpose that is based on the difference between these letters and the rest of the words in the chapter; yet, in which way? Scholars said that you are to pronounce the names of the disjointed letters in pausal form, not saying for example '*Alifun Lamun Mimun*', that is, using the connective vowels, but rather, you must say *Alif* – and stop, *Lam* – and stop and *Mim* – and stop. The Quran itself is of course generally based on a reading that includes all connective vowels. Thus, you say, in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* (The Most Gracious): '*Mudhammatani*', '...Both inclining to blackness...' (*ar-Rahman*: 64), that is, with the connective vowel *kasrah* (here: 'i' at the end of the word) so as to connect it with the following words, '*Fa-bi-ayyi ala'i rabbikuma tukadhdhibani*', 'Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman*: 65).

This is the case even with the very last letter of the Quran, in the chapter of *an-Nas* (Mankind). You say, '*Mina l-jinnati wa-n-nasi*', 'From among the jinn and the men' (*an-Nas*: 6) so as to start again at the beginning immediately after, and connect it to '*Bi-sm Allah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim. Al-hamd li-Allah rabb al-'alamin.*', 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Fatiha*: 1-2).

The disjointed letters, however, are based on pausal reading; therefore Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I do not say '*Alif Lam Mim*' is one letter, but *Alif* is a letter, *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter.'⁽¹⁾

(1) This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him who said, 'the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said 'Whoever reads a single letter of Allah's Book, it is accounted to him as a good deed ten=

Thus, the disjointed letters comprise certain wisdom and specific purposes, the least part of which the scholars are still trying to understand, each to the extent Allah *Glorified is He* allows him to penetrate. The disjointed letters themselves are an eternal treasure trove that cannot be exhausted, and the True Lord gives of it to each of us according to our capacity.

They say: the Quran has come to us as an inimitable miracle of stylistic eloquence; the Arab nation was famed as a people of eloquence and rhetorical finesse, yet they were unable to produce anything comparable to the Quran nor imitate it at all; this despite the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* couched it in their own language and used their own writing system and their expressions, thereby challenging them – and they were unable to meet that challenge, being unable to produce even a single verse like it.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to them: ‘You have the same letters and the same words, so why have not you woven from them what I have woven?’ Thus, the aspect of inimitability seen here is due to the fact that He is the Speaker in the Quran. It is He Who created it and speaks through it.

Moreover – and this is the point that should be emphasised in all this – the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed to us certain articles of faith and prescriptive rulings that issue from the very One in Whom you believe, and the Quran, itself, that demonstrates this. These are three: the articles of faith, that is, belief in the Highest Existent, the Necessary Existent, and that He possesses certain qualities which represent His absolute perfection for example, the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward, and so on; for, rational proofs can be brought to bear here.

This marvellous, flawless universe must necessarily have been created by an All-Powerful, All Knowing, All-Wise Creator and so on and so forth. So, reason supports and establishes such articles of belief, but not all articles of belief can be so supported; there are also things that no rational proof can be based on because they deal with the invisible (unseen), as for example when you say that paradise is, looks such and such, describing it in specific terms.

= *times the value of other good deeds. Thus I do not say ‘a’l’ ‘m’ as a single unit, but Alif alone, and Lam alone, and Mim alone’’ At-Tirmidhi, (Sunnan), 2910, identified by him as a sound Hadith.*

Likewise, all descriptions of the punishment in the grave – these pertain to the unseen realm and also admit of no rational proof, although they are guaranteed by those articles of faith that are supported by reason. So, as long as you believe in this Deity, Allah *Glorified is He*, and your reason leads you to Him, take what He has told you without disputing it – simply accept it as you hear it.

This applies also for the prescriptive rulings such as the ritual prayer, the purpose of which is to perpetuate one's devotion to Allah *Glorified is He* the Obligatory Alms, the purpose of which is financial and economic participation in society and the pilgrimage to Allah's inviolable house, and so on. These rulings have both a rational aspect and an audible aspect. Prayer, for example, may be rationally seen as worship of Allah *Glorified is He* and a proof of one's devotion to Him, while the specifics of how to perform it, such as the number of prostrations, is purely a matter of revelation we take as given to us without dispute. This applies for all acts of worship.

The prescriptive rulings comprise an aspect that may be understood rationally and an aspect that must be accepted undisputedly. If you ask, how can we simply keep within limits when it comes to certain issues of religion that cannot be disputed? We say, yes, such keeping within limits when it comes to the unseen realm is an indication of the level of our belief in Allah *Glorified is He*; for, all people are equal when it comes to intellectual matters.

We said before that if, for example, you have some money you fear might be stolen, you hide it underneath a rock in the garden. When the end of the month rolls around and you want to pay your servant his wages from this money, you tell him to lift this rock and take what is under it. He responds that he is not able to lift it alone, so he will wait for someone else to help him lift it. You respond that he should know that under the rock is a purse containing the money from which he is to take his wages – he immediately, heads to the rock and lifts it by himself without any help from anybody!

If however you were to tell another person to lift the rock and he did so without caring for a reason, would you consider both individuals equal in obedience to you? This also applies to the articles of faith – there is a difference between the one who believes in tangible things and the one who believes in unseen matters of which you inform him.

This then is the situation with the articles of faith, the prescriptive rulings, and the Quran – they all comprise an aspect that can be understood rationally and an aspect that must be accepted undisputedly. It is your responsibility to accept the unseen matters based upon your knowledge of the intellectual matters. The Holy Quran – the subject of our discussion here – contains both speech that may be understood rationally, and disjointed letters whose meaning is obscure beyond the basic fact that Allah *Glorified is He* spoke them. So, to sum up our view on the subject we say: Allah *Glorified is He* knows best what He means by them.

As for His saying: ‘Ha Mim. ‘Sending down [of this revelation] from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*Fussilat*: 1-2), we say that it is precisely ‘Ha Mim’ that Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to as ‘[This is] A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*Fussilat*: 2). Given this, these letters represent a revelation from the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. Beware lest you get stuck on this point, asking what they mean or complaining that they are obscure. No, rather stop there and take them as they are with the understanding that Allah *Glorified is He* knows best what He means by them.

Know that He then says: ‘A Scripture whose verses are made distinct...’ (*Fussilat*: 3). There are then two elements in the Quran: those things which must be accepted undisputedly, without exceeding the boundaries, like the case of ‘Ha Mim’. Such things which belong to the world of the unseen represent the arena where belief is tried. Yet, the Quran also provides matters which may be understood rationally – and these the Quran thoroughly expounds.

The word *tanzil*, ‘Sending down [of this revelation]...’ (*Fussilat*: 2) derives from the word *nuzul* (the action of descent). Descent involves movement from a high place to a lower place or a higher rank to a lower rank. This term occurs frequently and refers to the descent of the Quran and the Path from on high, and occurs in all its various derivations: *tanzil*, *nazala*, *nunazzihu*, *nazzalnahu*, *anzalna*. The True Lord says: ‘And with the truth We have sent the Quran down, and with the truth it has descended...’ (*al-Isra*: 105). He also says: ‘The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter’ (*al-Qadr*: 4).

Therefore, the moment you hear the word *tanzil* you know that what has come to you is from a higher station than yours, though it may reside with

you now, or even be under your feet – as He says in the chapter of *al-Hadid* (the Iron): ‘...And We sent down iron, wherein is mighty strength and benefits for the people...’ (*al-Hadid*: 25). It is obvious that iron comes from the ground with respect to its formation, but it comes down from on high with respect to its Creator: The One Who gives it to you.

Thus, all of these derivations from the root *n-z-l* refer to the sublimity of that which is sent down. From whom then is it sent down? ‘...From the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*Fussilat*: 2). It is incumbent upon you to receive that which is sent down to you with absolute submission and acceptance. For this reason, when they told our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* that his associate was claiming to have been taken on a journey, by night, to Jerusalem and then taken up to heaven, he did not dispute the matter from a rational standpoint but simply said to them: ‘If he said it, then he spoke the truth.’

Thus, he made Muhammad’s statement the foundation – if the statement issues from him it must be true since he is truthful – and ever since that day Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* has been called As-Siddiq ‘the absolutely believing’. The fact of Muhammad’s being taken on a night journey, actually, constitutes an earthly sign and has a rational aspect to it since the distance was known to them, as was the nature of the trip to Jerusalem in terms of time and place; yet Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did not dispute it. As for the ascension, it is an unseen matter. It is as though He made believing Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in terms of familiar earthly things a means whereby the people could believe him in heavenly things they knew nothing of.

We also understand from Allah’s words: ‘Sending down [of this revelation] from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy;’ (*Fussilat*: 2) that the imposition of obligations He revealed to you is not for the purpose of burdening you; for He is the One Who is all-merciful towards you, infinite in His mercy – His mercy encompasses all things, believer and disbeliever alike.

Now *Ar-Rahim* means (perpetually merciful), for His mercy extends and lasts even in the Hereafter. If then you see in the revelation an obligation that you think is onerous to you, do not think that it is from one who is harsh towards you – but rather comes from the All-Merciful towards you and the Dispenser of mercy.

He is the All-Merciful towards you, for He directs you to that which will felicitate your earthly existence and your life in the Hereafter. When He imposes upon us certain obligations that might be onerous to a typical soul, it is not that He profits in any way by this; it is all the same to Him whether you believe or disbelieve, pray or do not pray. He exists in His Omnipotence regardless of whether you disbelieve in Him or you do not pray.

Your actions therefore bear no relation to Allah *Glorified is He* with respect to the benefit they may have, but are simply for your own good. It is just as you might say to your child, for example, 'If you do well this year I will buy you such and such'. Then, the True Lord says:

﴿ كُنْتُ فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَاتُهُ، قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

**A Scripture whose verses are made distinct as a
Quran in Arabic for people who understand [3]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 3)**

He calls it: '...a book...' (*Fussilat*: 3) since *kitab* (book) signifies a collection (is plural), just as *katibah* (battalion) is *jam'a* (a collection) of troops. *Kitab*, thus, is a word that *tajma'* (gathers) words together. *Al-Kitab* means that things are gathered within it. In the Quran is collected all the good in this life and the Hereafter. It is also *kitab* (a book) in the sense that it is *maktub* (written) and inscribed such that you can read it.

Therefore, when they wished to codify the Quran, the one responsible for its codification laid down the criterion that they should not accept a verse unless they could find it actually written on a scrap or bone or some other writing surface used at that time; its authenticity then had to be testified to by two reciters. So, it is *kitab* (a book) in that it is written down, and a Quran because it is *maqru'* (recited) and memorised by heart.

According to the late Sheikh Mohammad 'Abdullah Darraz,⁽¹⁾ (using a verse from the Quran as a metaphor) the True Lord intends thereby that '...the second of the two may remind the other...' (*al-Baqara*: 282), that is, the written

(1) Mohammad 'Abdullah Darraz, the learned Egyptian Azharite jurist, among the leading scholars of Azhar. His books include *Ad-Din*, an introductory study of the history of Islam. He died in 1958. (Taken from *Az-Zirikli's Al-A'lam*).

record assisted the recited form in inscribing the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* with great precision admitting no doubt.

This is demonstrated by the following incident: when the codifier of the Quran found a particular written verse and called for two witnesses but could only find one to testify to its authenticity, he refrained from transcribing it. The witness in question was our master Hudhayfa⁽¹⁾ *Allah be pleased with him*. Then there approached the codifier an individual who reminded him of the Hadith of our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning Khuzayma of whom Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘To whomever Khuzayma testifies, his testimony is sufficient.’ Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* made Khuzayma’s testimony worth that of two men. So, the codifier accepted the verse and wrote it down.

There is a story about this: they say that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took a loan from a Jew, then, repaid him without the presence of a witness. Later the Jew came again demanding payment, whereupon the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘I have repaid you.’ The man denied this, but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated: ‘I have repaid you.’ The man said, ‘Bring me a witness,’ whereupon one of the Companions arose and said, ‘Messenger of Allah! I was a witness to that’ – so the Jew desisted, for he was lying. Afterwards the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called the Companion over and asked him, ‘How could you have witnessed our transaction when no one was there with us?’ He replied: ‘Messenger of Allah, how could I believe you when you speak of heaven yet disbelieve you about a few *dirhams*?’

Yes: we call this an excellent example of inference. It is for this reason that he was worthy of such a dignified standing with the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘To whomever Khuzayma testifies, his testimony is sufficient.’

As for His words: ‘*fussilat ayatuhu*’, ‘...whose verses are made distinct...’ (*Fussilat*: 3): they call this form of the verb passive, that is, one for which the

(1) *The testimony of Khuzayma in favour of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him*

subject is not identified. The reason it is so here is because Allah *Glorified is He* first *fassalaha* (made its verses distinct) such that they, accordingly, became *mufassalah* (distinct). When the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* communicated them to the people, they became *mufassilah* (clarifying in detail) with respect to their affairs and the rulings they should abide by.

Furthermore, '...whose verses are made distinct...' (*Fussilat*: 3) signifies that the Quran was partitioned or divided *mufassal* into chapters, each chapter standing alone in its own right, and within the chapters there are verses; each verse again standing alone in its own right. There are both long and short chapters, and likewise there are some verses that are only one word long and others that are several lines long. He also made the words distinct with respect to their subject matter. Moreover He made distinct the *halal* (allowed) and *haram* (forbidden); He made distinct acts of obedience and acts of disobedience. Has He not made distinct His promise and His threat, His reward and His punishment? The Quran, then, made all these issues distinct, or rather, all the *ayat* (signs) in the universe have been made distinct therein as they shall be until the last hour. Therefore, they said: 'Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered a sermon to us most eloquently without failing to mention anything, or failing to mention every single leaf that had fallen until the last hour comes – those who remember will remember and those who forget will forget.'⁽¹⁾

Yes, it is just as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...We have missed nothing out of the Record...' (*al-An'am*: 38), that is, everything that happens in the world is here for you in this Book.

That is why when we were asked,⁽²⁾ on one of our trips to Europe by a certain orientalist: 'You have in the Quran: "It is He who sent His Messenger

(1) Narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him who stated: 'Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* addressed us from afternoon to sunset; those of us remember it who remember it and those of us who have forgotten have forgotten. But – praise be to Allah – he spoke of what shall be until the Day of Resurrection' [*Ahmad, (Musnad), 3/19*].

(2) The story of the orientalist who asked sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi Allah rest his soul about the meaning of the verse 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with [the task of] spreading guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He makes it prevail over all [false] religion...' (*as-Saff*: 9)

with guidance and the religion of truth to show that it is above all [other] religions...” (*as-Saff*: 9). Also: “they wish to put His light out with their mouths. But He will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers hate it” (*as-Saff*: 8). Nevertheless, though fourteen centuries have passed since the appearance of Islam, Jews, Christians, apostates and idolaters still exist without Islam prevailing over them.’

Our answer which Allah *Glorified is He* granted us to respond with was: Islam has in fact prevailed over them despite their continued existence, for what is meant here by prevail is the making of a conclusive argument. So, Islam has prevailed over them with an argument that its enemies cannot counter.

There is a difference between an argument being made by one who believes it, and it being made by one who does not. How? Scholars said: certain situations shall come into the world that are created by mankind and have no solution except through recourse to the dictates of the Quran. Thus, the Quran prevailed over them, over their ideas, norms, and civilisation – otherwise they would not have referred to it.

We then used the example of divorce in Islam, one of the most high-profile issues whose treatment in Islam they used to object to and criticise. Yet, afterwards, the Vatican itself was forced to allow divorce as well. This is part of Islam’s prevailing, not by them converting to Islam, but simply by its arguments prevailing among them and those who do not believe in it still vouch for its efficiency.

He says: ‘...as a discourse in the Arabic tongue...’ (*Fussilat*: 3) that is: in the Arabic language and for an Arabic-speaking nation. Yet, how could that be so when it is a universal message for all mankind, whatever language they speak? Why was not it revealed in every language? They said that this is because there was not yet Esperanto; thus, the Quran was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his Arabic-speaking community, for Allah *Glorified is He* wished to reveal this religion to an illiterate nation by the tongue of an illiterate Messenger – Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* – so that none could say that the Quran is merely a product of civilisation.

The Arabs were a nation that ruled no state of their own, unorganised and without a system of law, being only a group of different tribes each with its

own law and every man for himself. Despite this, a nation of such modest standing was able to unite the entire world and its sophisticated states, from the Persian Empire in the east to the Byzantine Empire in the west.

How could this nation bring such a thing about? They were obliged to understand that the law of heaven came from above – they would never have played this role were it not for the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So there is no way we can say that Islam is a product of civilisation. Thus, when the True Lord wished to advance His religion, He caused Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim it in Mecca. Why Mecca specifically? Because the people of Quraysh were settled there; it was the seat of authority for the entire peninsula, and valiant men were there whom no one dared to face.

It was among these people that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaimed Islam. Yet it was not these chiefs and leaders that succoured the faith, but rather, the slaves and the oppressed of the city. As we have said, there is a reason for this – it was so that no one could say that tribal partisanship in support of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was what created belief in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but rather that belief in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was what inspired partisanship towards him.

So, the Quran is in Arabic, for the Arabs were the standard-bearers for the call to Islam, spreading the faith into all the regions of the world. The Arabs were a nation accustomed to nomadism; they had no houses, they did not live in villas or buildings, but had only their tents which they carried with them wherever they went. Their homeland, therefore, was the whole world, with their homes on the backs of their camels. They were likewise a tribal nation, each person loyal only to his own tribe, and thus were frequently at war with each other; some of these wars even lasted forty years.

These wars trained them to fight and planted in them courage and self-sacrifice for the sake of their principles. Thus, when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wished to prepare an army, he did not have to open a military school, for he found a whole generation of men prepared and ready to fight and well versed in the art of war – men who would rush off to fight whenever they heard of any commotion.

These are the men that would receive the faith from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and would spread his message. Thus, the Quran must necessarily have been given in their language, and the call made in their language, that they might be able to bear it.

For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place: ‘We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people’s language to make things clear for them...’ (*Ibrahim*: 4). Yes, because they were the ones to hear it from him first.

Yet, what about the universality of the faith! They said that when his people heard him they believed in him and then carried his call to mankind not as a body of words but as a path and code of behaviour and a model for emulation. It is well known that such codes of behaviour are the same across languages. Therefore, the Muslims conquered the whole world not with the Quran and its verses directly but rather with the principles and the way of life inculcated by the Quran.

Thus, the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language because the Arabs were ready for this undertaking, capable of seeing it through and taking it all over the world; given their status as a nomadic nation residing in no fixed place, as well as a nation of fighters, and an illiterate nation we cannot possibly accuse them of fabricating such a religion as this, or say that it is simply a product of civilisation.

His words: ‘...for people who understand,’ (*Fussilat*: 3) mean: with knowledge of the ways of the Arabic language, or rather, are absolutely fluent in them and at the peak of eloquence and rhetorical finesse such that you cannot find a nation on earth comparable to the Arabs in their production of literary and verbal excellence, as demonstrated in the markets of 'Ukazh, Al-Marbad, Dhu al-Majaz and Al-Majanna. There, they used to perform and critique their literary productions, and what was deemed most excellent they would honour by placing it on the curtains of the *Ka'ba*.

Thus, ‘...for people who understand,’ (*Fussilat*: 3) refers to the Arabic language in which they excel to the extent that the inimitable Quran was revealed in their language. Inimitability is meaningless with respect to those who do

not excel in the field this inimitability challenges. You may not say to one who is ignorant of a thing, 'I excel you in this thing.' The claim of inimitability is only valid with respect to one who also excels in the skill in which one claims to be superior since the ignorant can always say to you: 'By Allah, had I known such a thing I would have beaten you in it. It is in this sense then that Allah *Glorified is He* challenged the Arabs with the Quran.

Therefore, the True Lord does not reveal a sign through which a messenger's call is proved valid except when it fits the skill in which his people excel. Thus, the miracle of our master *Isa* (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was expressed in terms of medicine: he healed *al-akmah* (the blind) and *al-abras* (the leprosy) by Allah's leave. The miracle of our master *Musa* (Moses) *peace be upon him* was expressed through his staff because his people excelled in magic. Likewise, the miracle of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was expressed in terms of rhetorical finesse and eloquence of expression; challenging his people with the Quran. In this way inimitability is realised.

We hear some say that the Arabs were beaten by the Quran. This is incorrect – the Arabs were not beaten, but rather vindicated by the Quran. How? Because those whom Allah *Glorified is He* challenges in this sense are strong themselves, so Allah's challenge to them is simply proof that they were strong, they had power with respect to eloquence of expression, they had total command of their language.

بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا فَأَعْرَضَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Giving good news and warning. Yet most of them turn away and so do not hear [4] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 4)

He says: 'giving good news and warning...' (*Fussilat*: 4). This is the first element in the process of distinguishing between things; as we said, it distinguishes between truth and falsehood, between permitted and forbidden – here, between *bashiran* (giving good news) and *nadhiran* (giving warning). '...Yet most of them turn away and so do not hear' (*Fussilat*: 4) – this turning away of the majority indicates that it is the minority that believed: the oppressed minority. The majority, however, were people of authority and

power who did not accept the new call that would make them equal with such weaklings and slaves.

Our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* having assumed the caliphate, a group of leaders sought his audience, when a group of the poor who had been the first embracers of Islam were already with him. He delayed meeting with the important men until he had finished with the others. This irritated them, and they found themselves thinking: why has Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* given slaves and weaklings precedence over us? Abu Bakr As-Siddiq said: ‘What is upsetting them? Each one is angry that I have given so-and-so precedence over him. I wonder how they will react when Allah *Glorified is He* gives the others precedence over them in paradise on the Day of Resurrection.’

Then, what is the reason of their turning away, according to His statement: ‘...Yet most of them turn away...’ (*Fussilat*: 4)? Scholars said that the reason of their turning away is their understanding the goal of the new religion. It asks them to say: ‘There is no deity but Allah.’

They understood that authority would now only belong to this phrase, that control would now only belong to this statement, and that all men would be equal before it. How, then, could they bring themselves to say: ‘There is no deity but Allah,’ knowing as they did its import? They did not say it. Had it been merely a word to be uttered, they would have uttered it, but they knew its meaning and accordingly refused.

He says: ‘...and so do not hear’ (*Fussilat*: 4). That is, they cannot hear it in such a way as to profit from it, being aware and accepting its message. Therefore, as He says: ‘...Yet most of them turn away...’ (*Fussilat*: 4) indicating that they hear the call of Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but hear only with their ears and do not profit thereby. Therefore, the True Lord says of them: ‘Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, “What was that he just said?”...’ (*Muhammad*: 16)

Thus, people differ in the way they receive the Quran. One may hear it and be moved, and accordingly prostrates for the majesty of the Quran; another may hear it and says in mockery and derision: ‘What was that he said?’ This is because

he does not hear with the ear of respect and consideration. Why? Because the portals of his heart are locked by his mind in reaction to what the faith wants of him. Being accustomed to authority, then, they turned away the instant they heard that which opposed their temporal authority and power.

We mentioned in recounting the story of Umar's embracing Islam that when he first heard the Quran he opposed it and rebelled against it, for his heart was not ready to properly receive it. Then, when he struck his sister and caused her to bleed, his heart softened and became pliant, and the locks fell away. Then, when he heard the Quran, he was much moved by it and believed.

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا فِيْ أَكِنَّةٍ مِّمَّا نَدْعُوْنَآ إِلَيْهِ وَفِيْ ءَاذَانِنَا وَقْرٌ
وَمِنْ بَيْنِنَا وَبَيْنِكَ حِجَابٌ فَأَعْمَلْ إِنَّا عَمِلُونَا ۚ

They say, 'Our hearts are encased against [the faith] you call us to; our ears are heavy; there is a barrier between us and you. So you do whatever you want, and so shall we' [5]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 5)

The meaning of '*fi akinnah*' is 'encased' that is, under a covering which is the plural of *kinan* (covering). A covering is wrapped around a thing such that light cannot penetrate it. In another verse He says: 'We have put covers over their hearts, so they cannot understand the Quran...' (*al-Kahf*: 57). In one case these covers are put there by Allah *Glorified is He* and in the other case they themselves put them there. Whose action precedes then? Does Allah *Glorified is He* first put covers upon their hearts, upon which they are stricken with heedlessness, or is it their turning away from the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* that puts these covers upon their hearts?

We said that when a man is comfortable in and attached to his disbelief, Allah *Glorified is He* lets it increase in him and puts a seal on his heart such that belief cannot enter it nor can disbelief leave.

Thus, disbelief comes from them initially, after which Allah *Glorified is He* puts a seal on their hearts. It is the same with the issue of these covers – it originates from the disbelievers initially, after which Allah *Glorified is He*

multiplies the covers in them. He puts covers upon their hearts, giving them disease upon their disease.

Thus, what is meant by *al-akinnah* (the coverings) is that they prevent them from understanding and contemplating what they hear and what is recited to them. They said: '*wa fi adhanina waqr*', '...our ears are heavy...' (*Fussilat*: 5). *Waqr* means: a deafness that obstructs hearing. In the chapter of *al-Baqara* Allah says: 'Deaf, dumb (and) blind...' (*al-Baqara*: 18).

It is well known that dumbness originates from deafness, for how can a deaf person speak when he cannot hear? This is because language is a social phenomenon, and it is the product of imitation – what the ear hears the tongue speaks. So, if the ear hears nothing, the tongue can say nothing. Language is not a stand-alone skill, but is subsequent to hearing and imitating. Thus, one can put an English little boy or girl in an Arabic-speaking environment and, after a while, they will speak Arabic.

A deaf person is capable of speaking since he makes various unintelligible sounds similar to those we might hear from a mute person, for example. Even a perfectly healthy and articulate person cannot say a word he does not know from his own language. How does he learn it? He learns by hearing it first.

We have taken from this issue material proofs of the existence of The Most Exalted Creator. We ask someone, how do you know how to speak? He says, I can speak because I heard my parents and everyone around me talking, so I began to speak like them. Thus, language is only established through hearing.

The same was the case with our ancestors. Trace this line back to Adam *peace be upon him and* ask how he was able to speak when there was no one before him whom he could hear? He definitely heard, but whom did he hear? He heard from Allah *Glorified is He* when He taught him all the names.

Thoughts are communicated to us through our ears and are expressed through our tongues. Because these people (mentioned in the verse) were deaf and could not hear, they did not take in any of what was said to them. Thus, they did not produce anything in response. That is why Allah says clarifying what they said: '...“Our hearts are encased”...' (*Fussilat*: 5) that is, covered over and prevented from benefitting, and '...our ears are heavy...' (*Fussilat*: 5). Why is

no mention made here of their tongues? Because they would not speak of faith since they had not heard what was said to them about it. The fact that the True Lord does not refer to speech here indicates that they will not hear and so will not speak. Consider how precise the verse is here, for it is the speech of Him: the Lord.

They said in the verse: ‘...there is a barrier between us and you...’ (*Fussilat*: 5). That is: a thick screen veils you. When you and your companion sit conversing with each other, you hear him and he hears you, you see him and he sees you, sociable and comfortable in each other’s company and so on. By contrast, were there to be a barrier between you two, it would prevent any such interaction.

This barrier may be a spiritual one. We say (in Arabic), for example: ‘there is a disagreement between two people – that is, a small misunderstanding that may be quickly resolved. If we say: ‘there is a disagreement *bayna* (between) so-and-so and *bayna* (between) so-and-so’, that is repeating the word ‘between,’ this indicates that it is a serious disagreement that will not be easily resolved.

They say likewise: ‘*wa min baynina wa baynika hijab*’, ‘...there is a barrier between us and you...’ (*Fussilat*: 5). That is, a thick and heavy barrier that hides everything and prevents communication, filling in the whole space between us. They said: when our master, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to speak to the people and introduce Allah’s religion to them, Abu Jahl would take his robe and put it over his face so as not to see the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, as long as there remains a barrier between us and you, we will never come to agreement, both of us on a separate path; and as long as we are on separate paths: ‘...So you do whatever you want, and so shall we’ (*Fussilat*: 5). The True Lord has clarified this matter in the chapter of *al-Kafirun* (the Disbelievers): ‘Say [Prophet], “Disbelievers: I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship: you have your religion and I have mine”’ (*al-Kafirun*: 1-6). This is the natural result of this barrier between them.

When some people read this chapter they think that it contains repetition. This is not repetition; rather, this chapter speaks about cutting off relations. Such a cutting off of relations is determined by place and time. Consider two countries that have cut off relations with one another, and then the air cleared between them; their relations are restored and even become better than before. Diplomatically, there is a difference between the past and the present.

However, with respect to belief and disbelief it is different, for they are absolutely opposed to each other and cannot ever meet halfway, no matter what happens in the future, and so their relations cannot be restored. That is why He says: ‘...I do not worship what you worship; you do not worship what I worship...’ (*al-Kafirun*: 2-3) – that is, now in the present. ‘...I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship,’ (*al-Kafirun*: 4-5) – that is, in the future. So, do not imagine that relations between us will ever improve, that our relation shall ever be restored – no: we shall never have common ground, not in the present nor in the future.

This is the cutting off of relations: as long as there remains a barrier and a wall between us, we will each go our own way, ‘everyone has their own horse to ride’.

‘...So you do whatever you want, and so shall we’ (*Fussilat*: 5). Do whatever makes you happy and whatever you get from your Allah and your Islam, and we will proceed according to our gods, our religion and our way of worshipping. Work for your Deity Who sent you and we will work for our gods that we worship. Work for your Hereafter and we will work for our present life. In short, what we have here is insistence on the part of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and enmity on their part, until such time as Allah wills and Allah *Glorified is He* will not but bring His light to perfection.

Thus, we see how Islam grew and spread slowly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded his followers to immigrate to Ethiopia and then to Medina, leading them progressively until they became powerful. It began weakly with the weak, then, grew strong such that the powerful joined; it started out confined to Mecca, then, its sphere widened, increasing every day as the lands of Islam grew and those of disbelief shrank.

When Khalid ibn Al-Walid and 'Amr ibn Al-'As *Allah be pleased with them* saw how Islam was spreading in this manner, Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* said to 'Amr *Allah be pleased with him* 'wa Allah, laqad istaqam al-maysam', meaning: 'By Allah, the path has become clear' – that is, this religion is doing well, so let us embrace Islam.⁽¹⁾

Even the leading disbelievers began to re-examine their position and embrace Allah's religion. Among them was 'Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* who led the opposition in the battle for Mecca's conquest, known as the battle of Al-Khan amah;⁽²⁾ he subsequently became Muslim and proved himself brave in the cause of Islam such that he died in one of the battles. Just before he died, he said: 'Will such a death make Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pleased with me?'

Then, the True Lord says:

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- (1) *In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Hisham relates the story of the conversion of 'Amr ibn 'Al-'As Allah be pleased with him and Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him. It begins with An-Najashi convincing him that Muhammad was speaking the truth, saying to him: 'Woe to you, 'Amr! Obey me and go follow him, for by Allah he speaks the truth, and he shall triumph over those who oppose him just as Musa (Moses) peace be upon him triumphed over Pharaoh and his army.' So I ['Amr] said, 'Will you accept in his stead my pledge of allegiance to Islam?' An-Najashi responded that yes, he would, and opened his hand; so I pledged to him my allegiance to Islam, and my companions kept my conversion secret. I then left him to seek out the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to become Muslim [at his hand]. I met Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him coming from Mecca – this was shortly before its conquest – and I asked him, 'Where are you going, Abu Sulaiman?' He said, 'By Allah, the brand has become clear – I am going to the Prophet, by Allah, to become Muslim. How long Will you do so too?' I said, 'By Allah, I also have come for no other purpose.' So we came to the Prophet in Medina. Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him approached him first and pledged his allegiance, after which I drew near and said, 'Messenger of Allah, I pledge allegiance to you on the condition that my previous sins be forgiven, nor do I mention the most recent.' Said the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him 'Make your pledge, 'Amr, for Islam cuts off what went before it, and emigration cuts off what went before it.'*
- (2) *Al-Khandama: a mountain from which Mecca was built [Az-Zamakhshari, (Al-Amkina wa-l-miyah)]. It is one of the mountains around Mecca, rising above Mount Abu Qubays from the east and composed of red rock. On it there is a great white stone that appears to be suspended [Ibn 'Abd Al-Mun'im Al-Himyari, (Ar-Rawd Al-mi'tar fi khabar Al-'atar)].*

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ
 فَاسْتَقِيمُوا إِلَيْهِ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ۗ وَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٦﴾
 الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٧﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘I am only a mortal like you, [but] it has been revealed to me that your God is One. Take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to the idolaters [6] who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe in the world to come!’ [7] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 6 -7)

‘Say...’ – that is, in responding to what they said: ‘...“I am only a mortal like you, [but] it has been revealed to me that your Allah is One Allah”...’ (*Fussilat*: 6) – that is, why are you taking such a hostile position towards me and my call? Why do you put these barriers between us, when I am one of you, an Arab like you, someone whose trustworthiness and history you knew well when I lived among you previously? It is an instance of Allah’s mercy that He has sent me to you as a man like yourselves, rather than sending an angel. ‘Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion’ (*al-An‘am*: 9). That is, you know how he behaved among you before – with honesty, integrity and virtue. So had he come to you as an angel, would you have been able to emulate him in his angelic state? For an angel is not the proper model for human beings.

So learn courtesy and humility from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his saying: ‘...“I am only a mortal like you”...’ (*Fussilat*: 6) that is, without any sense of pride or superiority – He singled me out from among you simply in that ‘...it has been revealed to me...’ (*Fussilat*: 6), and the purport of this revelation is ‘...your Allah is One Allah...’ (*Fussilat*: 6). As long as it is revealed to me I am simply its transmitter, and not guilty of any sin you might blame me for. I am but a human being like you and am one of you. I have no distinction above you except insofar as Allah *Glorified is He* has distinguished me with His revelation.

That is why the True Lord often corrected His Messenger, adjusted his judgments, and even rebuked him – it is Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad

peace and blessings be upon him himself who has told us of this. Such is the proof that he was faithful in conveying from his Lord. The True Lord says: 'if [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us, We would certainly have seized his right hand. And cut off his lifeblood' (*al-Haqqā*: 44-46). He says also: '...Your Allah...' (*Fussilat*: 6). He did not say 'your Lord' because they believe in the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator and All-Sustainer. The problem with them concerns Allah Who is to be worshipped, for that Allah has certain commands and prohibitions that demand obedience. So, they are Muslims with respect to His Lordship, but idolaters with respect to His Divinity. He wished to clarify the matter for them: '...your Allah is One Allah...' (*Fussilat*: 6) not multiple. Sometimes Allah says: '*ilahun wahid*', '...is one Allah...' (*Fussilat*: 6), while in the chapter of *al-Ikhlās* (Sincerity) He says: '*Qul howa Allahu Ahad*', 'Say: He, Allah, is One' (*al-Ikhlās*: 1). *Wahid* means He has no second, and *ahad* means one in His essence, not composed of different parts; His essence admits of no division.

The disbelievers had taken multiple gods in order to satisfy a religious impulse in their souls, and to have an object of worship that placed no demands on them in terms of responsibilities and conduct. For this reason, we say that part of our religion's policy of *wasatiyya* (moderation) is its insistence on believing in one Deity (Allah) since on the one hand some people believe in multiple gods, and on the other some people deny the existence of any deity. Thus, the Islamic religion came and made it clear that Allah *Glorified is He* is one.

Given that He is one Allah, '...Take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness...' (*Fussilat*: 6). *Istaqimu* (take the straight path) means: go directly and uprightly without swerving here and there. Scholars said⁽¹⁾ that there was a man of the Tayyi' tribe; His name was Ibn Baar; He saw a young man taking a circuitous route back to his house rather than going directly: going around by all the village's roads.

Ibn Bandar knew by this that the young man in his roundaboutness intended something suspicious, so he said to him: 'You there – go to your house directly!' – that is, go there by a direct route. Right then the young man

(1) The story of a man from Tayyi' tribe with a youth called Ibn Bandar

knew that the man had seen through him and understood his dishonourable plan, and was thus deterred.

Likewise, His statement, ‘...Take the straight path to Him...’ (*Fussilat*: 6), means make for Him by the path of uprightness, whose path is called the straight path. Science has demonstrated that the shortest route between any two points is a straight line. Furthermore, the straight path may either be narrow, forcing you to walk uprightly, or may be wide, permitting you to swerve to the right or left, like highways.

Yet, even if it is wide, go directly on it anyway so as to shorten the distance of your trip and arrive more quickly; for when you deviate from this the distance increases. That is why He calls it: ‘...the straight path...’ (*al-Baqara*: 108), that is, the middle of the path without deviation, such that what is on your right and left sides is equal. Sometimes He says: ‘Guide us to the straight path’ (*al-Fatiha*: 6), and sometimes ‘...the right path’ (*al-Baqara*: 108).

So His words: ‘...Take the straight path to Him...’ (*Fussilat*: 6) mean: to begin with, and if you are then distracted from the proper path and commit any sin, ‘...seek His forgiveness...’ (*Fussilat*: 6), that is, ask forgiveness from Him.

‘...Woe to the idolaters Who do not pay the prescribed alms...’ (*Fussilat*: 6-7); for seeking forgiveness involves a request that a previous act be effaced. The legal principle here states that preventing corruption takes precedence over acting in the public good. An example of this is a situation in which someone wants to throw you an apple, while someone else wants to throw a stone at you. What should be done first in this case? It is a priority to avoid the stone. Then, He says: ‘...seek His forgiveness...’ (*Fussilat*: 6) that your sins may be effaced and that you may initiate a new relationship with Allah *Glorified is He* based on obedience and uprightness.

The word *wayl* ‘...Woe...’ (*Fussilat*: 6) means perdition ‘...to the idolaters, who do not pay the prescribed alms...’ (*Fussilat*: 6-7). Was the payment of alms prescribed to idolaters? Alms payment was not even prescribed to the believers at that time. Scholars said that what is meant by alms payment here is the purification of one’s income in case it is increasing. The idolaters used to do that in fact, but they did so, on the basis of generosity and to acquire a good reputation, not out of any consideration of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, it was related that Al-Mut'im ibn 'Adi⁽¹⁾ had a pot with which he used to provide food to anyone who needed it such that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I used to take refuge from the sun's blaze in the shade of the pot of Al-Mut'im ibn 'Adi.'⁽²⁾

Other examples include Hatim At-Ta'i⁽³⁾ and his like from among the Arabs, who were famous for their generosity. The True Lord says: 'who do not pay the prescribed alms...' (*Fussilat*: 7); for man typically loves his money. The True Lord says: '...And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul...' (*al-Hashr*: 9), for a man has many needs and demands in this life.

Buying and selling, at that time, was a form of exchange, meaning: you give me a commodity and I give you another commodity in return. When there was yet no money in use, a person would give another person some wheat, for example, and in exchange the latter would give the first some dates. Thus, each thing was a commodity as well as a price: wheat was considered by one a commodity, while dates were considered the price. Thus, every one of us is a buyer and seller.

The True Lord says, speaking of the story of our master Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: 'And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife, "Make his residence comfortable"...' (*Yusuf*: 21). He says, *ishtarrah* meaning: he bought him and took him home. Of the others He says: 'And they sold him

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- (1) *Al-Mut'im ibn 'Adi ibn Nawfal, of the Quraysh, was the chief of the Banu Nawfal tribe in the Jahiliyya (period of ignorance before the Prophet came) and leader in the battle of Fijar in the year 33 BH. It was he who protected the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him after his mistreatment at the hands of the people of At-Ta'if, and he also was among those who did away with the Quraysh's boycott against the Banu Hashim despite his being a disbeliever. He died before the battle of Badr, ninety-some years of age, in 2 AH [Az-Zirikli, (Al-A'lam)].*
 - (2) *What I have found on this subject is that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'I used to seek refuge in the shade of 'Abdullah ibn Jud'an's bowl at midday', also with the phrase 'at 'Umayy's high noon' [that is, in the most intense heat of the day] [Ibn Kathir, (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya), 1/117; As-Suhayli, (Ar-Rawd Al-unuf), 1/244].*
 - (3) *Abu 'Adu Hatim ibn 'Abdullah at-Ta'i Al-Qahtani, of Najd, was a horseman and poet of the Jahiliyya; his generosity is proverbial. He went to Syria and married Mawiya bint Hajar Al-Ghassaniyya. He died in the mountains of the Tayyi' region in the year 46 AH. Much diverse material is related about him in works of literature and history [Az-Zirikli, (Al-A'lam), 2/151].*

for a small price, a few pieces of silver, and they showed no desire for him' (*Yusuf*: 20), that is, they sold him. This, then, is exchange, both individuals acting as buyer and seller at once.

The True Lord says: 'who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe in the world to come!' (*Fussilat*: 7) This might be a general statement, and thus indicates that it is through their idolatry that they fail to apply Allah's ruling concerning almsgiving, and, consequently, their environment and their communities were not improved through them. For Allah *Glorified is He* intends that belief should propagate a servantly (being servants to Allah) attitude among human beings aimed at seeking a better way such that the strong should help the weak, and the healthy the sick, the rich the poor, the learned the ignorant.

The most important aspect of life is its preservation through nourishment. Nourishment requires money, and so when the True Lord speaks about this point concerning *al-mu'alafti qulubuhum* (the new converts to Islam whose hearts and allegiance to the Muslims need to be won over or retained through the provision of material incentives), He clarifies that they are people for whom we wish to cause a softening in their hearts towards the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* and to attract them to it, so they may study it closely and make an informed decision – not that we simply buy them for the religion, as some claim.

Among the ways to achieve this goal is to treat them kindly. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has included them among those who are to receive Obligatory Alms. Being given from Allah's money, their hearts become softened.

When you do good towards another person, what is it you are doing to him? First, you are diffusing any hate he might have, and as long as you are doing so he will not be averse to you or spiteful towards you; he will, at the very least, listen to you. This is what happened in the case of *al-mu'alafti qulubuhum*.

After the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* died, a number of Arabs apostatised from the faith – why? The initial reason for their apostasy was the imposition of paying the Obligatory Alms; this provoked the *Ridda* wars. Thus, we heard about *Sajah*,⁽¹⁾ the imposter prophetess,

(1) She is *Sajah bint Al-Harith ibn Suwayd Al-Tamimiyya* of the *Banu Yarbu'*, known as *Umm Sadir*, the well-known false prophetess. She claimed prophet hood after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and she knew how to write,=

as well as Musaylima. The first issue they mentioned in their calls was: We will abolish the Obligatory Alms. They said this in order to induce acceptance of their assertions of prophethood, seeking to lighten the obligations that are onerous for the soul.

Others – among those who claimed to be prophets – said: We will abolish half of the Prayer. Everything that lightens the rulings of Allah is invalid and harmful because it fell from being among the rulings of Allah's Path to being among the rulings of the method of lightening and making things easy. When Allah *Glorified is He* intends to make things easier He will do so Himself – Allah's Path is not to be, in any way, corrected.

There are many rulings, in Allah's law, that signify just such an easing, like the rulings concerning the fasting of the sick or the traveller, the prayer of the sick or the traveller, and many other such provisions in the law. Allah *Glorified is He* – the One Who legislates for you – is the only One Who may stipulate terms of easement, not you since He knows best the level of hardship which necessitates a legal easement.

We hear of those who say: 'We want to renew Islam.' We say: Glory be to Allah. O people who fear Allah, how can we renew Islam? How can we claim to correct Allah's rulings? We say: renew as much as you want, but Muslims will not don (embrace) whatever new things with which you come up. The reason for this is that the garment of piety comes from The Creator; He does not create just so that one of His creatures renews this garment – so spare yourselves the trouble.

Why has Allah made some people rich and others poor and needy? Why did He not make them all equal, thus obviating the need for Obligatory Alms? Scholars said: it is because Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to spread compassion and loving kindness among His creatures. So, when a rich man comes across a poor man, he is not to tower above him by reason of his wealth, but rather is to approach him and volunteer his services, and give him his due from Allah's

= having learned from the Christians of the *Banu Tahglib*. A number of her clansmen followed her including some of the leading men of the *Banu Tamim*. She camped in the *Yamama* region and *Musaylima* there approached her with a group from his tribe and married her, upon which she departed. She died in 55 AH [*Az-Zirkili, (Al-A'lam)*].

money, upon which the poor man will love the rich man and love the fact that he is rich, without wishing him ill or hoping that he loses his wealth.

Thus, when you give you remove anger and resentment from people's hearts, thereby making your money a site of increase. The True Lord is fully capable of making everybody rich; however, wisdom dictates that there should be rich and poor, and that this situation should be general and persist – though the rich do not always remain so, likewise the poor, for everyone's state is constantly liable to change; so that people may be attached to one another through the bond of love and affection. The bond here is not one of graciousness but rather one of necessity.

Were we all to be college graduates, who would sweep the streets, who would drive the taxis, who would manufacture x and y? You say, perhaps we could agree that each person would do a specific task on a specific day.

We reply: fine – but this would make it a matter of graciousness, and graciousness is compulsory on no one – only necessity is. Allah *Glorified is He* wills to tie human welfare to necessity. Thus, you see a man with a difficult job, possibly even a painful one that you would be incapable of doing, perhaps you consider it wretched work, – so what makes him endure it? Necessity makes him endure it, the demands of life force him to endure it – daily bread and family responsibilities, raising children – otherwise he would not demean himself thus.

By Allah *Glorified is He* I have seen a cobbler living in the same house with his brother, a perfumer: just think how each of them smells all day.

Our teacher Sheikh Musa *Allah be pleased with him* often used to supplicate saying, 'O Allah, impoverish the craftsmen and enrich the scholars'. I used to get upset at this supplication and say to him, Master, what are you saying? How can you say that? He would reply: Were Allah to impoverish the scholars their ability to adjudicate would be compromised, and were Allah to enrich the craftsmen none of us would profit from them at all.

Yes: we have in fact seen a craftsman who refuses to work as long as he has ten pounds in his pocket and will do nothing till he has spent it all. Therefore, necessity must be the motivation to take care of matters of human welfare.


The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made the infusion of money into society the most important matter in Islam, and has therefore included it among the Pillars of the Faith. The True Lord has not exempted anyone from the duty to extend economic support to others: one must give if one has enough money, and if one does not have money one is to find encouraging words to give to those who have.

The True Lord says: ‘but there is no blame attached to the weak, the sick, and those who have no means to spend, provided they give advice in the cause of Allah and His Messenger – there is no reason to reproach those who do good...’ (*at-Tawba*: 91).

If a person has neither money nor words that soften the heart, he may, at least, do so within his own heart: ‘And there is no blame attached to those who came to you [Prophet] for riding animals and to whom you said, “I cannot find a mount for you”: they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute’ (*at-Tawba*: 92).

So if one has money, he should spend out of it in the cause of Allah. If not, let him then encourage those who have it to spend out of it. When a believer can do neither, sorrow brims his heart to the extent that he sheds tears, for there is nothing he can give in the cause of Allah. Islam shows great care regarding monetary matters, for money is one of the main sources of provision in society.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘...and refuse to believe in the world to come’ (*Fussilat*: 7). They disbelieve in the Oneness of Allah by associating partners with Him, and they also deny the Hereafter.


 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ

Those who believe and do good deeds will have a reward that never fails [8] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 8)

One of the stylistic features of the Quran is explaining things through contrast. After mentioning the polytheists, Allah mentions those who believe and do good deeds. He does not present one side without presenting the other for each to be quite clear in the minds of the addressees. Examples of this are

numerous in the Quran, like the following verses: ‘The good will live in bliss and the wicked will burn in the Fire’ (*al-Infitar*: 13-14). Here is another example: ‘Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot...’ (*at-Tawba*: 82). Such comparisons serve a good purpose in adding vividness to the cases and situations being compared, for the mind to absorb them and the heart to feel them.

Now, the verse tells that the reward of those who believe and do good will never be cut off. What does that mean? Some say it simply means that it will be given to them generously, as Allah says in another verse: ‘You will have a never-ending reward’ (*al-Qalam*: 3). Others say it means that their reward for good deeds will still be continuous even when they are prevented by their circumstances from continuing to do them. When someone is prevented from an act of devotion by a force out of his control – like illness or poverty – Allah continues to reward him for what he used to do. His reward continues even after his death and until the Day of Resurrection.

قُلْ أَيُّكُمْ لَنْكَفُرُونَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ
وَيَتَحَدَّوْنَ لَهُ ۚ أَنْدَادًا ذَٰلِكَ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩﴾

Say, ‘How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!’ [9] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 9)

The verse is meant to direct attention to the signs of the universe, for they are the proofs that if we ponder must lead us to faith in Him Who has created everything. The universe is wondrous and incredibly precise in its construction and organisation. It operates according to a system that never breaks down, nor is it susceptible to anything that might affect its precision. All that spells the Majesty of the Creator since man never interfered in the creation of this amazing world. This is why the Quran often addresses people with the signs of creation to attract their attention to the One Who has made them. Numerous verses of the Quran start with: ‘Among His signs are...’

In the verse we are considering, Allah speaks about the origin of creation and the emergence of the earth: ‘How can you disregard the One who created

the earth in two Days? ...' (*Fussilat*: 9). The interrogation here denotes condemnation. Allah reproaches them for their manifest error of denying the Creator Who has made this spectacular universe. They not only deny Him, but also '... set up other gods as His equals...' (*Fussilat*: 9). They dare make such allegations about Allah even though they know well He is the One God and Creator of all things, as Allah exposes them in several verses of the Quran. An example is this verse: 'If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, "Allah," so why are they so deluded?' (*az-Zukhruf*: 87). Allah also says: 'If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, "Allah." Say, "Praise belongs to Allah," but most of them do not understand' (*Luqman*: 25). This is a truth they believe and cannot but acknowledge, but they persist in their stubborn denial.

His saying '...in two days...' (*Fussilat*: 9) refers to the normal day familiar to us, the definite period of time comprising the day and night. Allah speaks to us based on what we know.

Having condemned them for associating partners with the Lord of the worlds – Whom they acknowledge to be the Creator – Allah says afterwards:

وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رُوسًى مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَبَرَكَ فِيهَا وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَا أَقْوَاتَهَا فِي أَرْبَعَةِ أَيَّامٍ سَوَاءً لِّلسَّالِئِلِينَ
ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ

He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them — all in four Days [10]

Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke — He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly' [11] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 10 - 11)

Allah speaks here about the creation of the earth, informing us that He created it in two days. That does not mean creation itself was a process that took Him two days to perform. The case is quite different, and let me illustrate this by an example. What does it take to make yoghurt? It takes the simple process of adding a certain kind of bacteria to some milk then leaving it at a specified temperature for a specified length of time, say a few hours, after which the yoghurt will be ready. Does this mean that the process of

making it took hours? No, only the minutes you spent adding the bacteria and storing it. You may go to a tailor to have a shirt made, and he will tell you to come back in a week to pick it up. Does it take him a week of constant work to make the shirt?

After Allah had created the earth, He placed firm mountains on it to preserve its stability, as He says: ‘Did We not make the earth smooth, and make the mountains to keep it stable?’ (*an-Naba’*: 6-7) Were the earth naturally stable, it would not need mountains, but the earth spins and needs what makes it stable.

The verse then says: ‘... blessed it, measured out its varied provisions...’ (*Fussilat*: 10). Blessing something means increasing it so that it yields more benefit than is reasonably expected. When food that normally suffices only five people is found to be sufficient for ten, we say Allah has blessed that food.

This translation of the verse tells us that Allah here speaks about the earth. The pronouns ‘it’ and ‘its’ refer to the earth. However, the pronouns used in the original Arabic text can refer to either the earth or the mountains, so which of the two is meant as the referent of these pronouns the earth which was mentioned first or the mountains as the more immediate referent? I am of the view that they refer to the mountains.

Science has proved that mountains are the main source of the elements required for fertility of the soil and producing food. Nutritious elements in the soil get depleted and need to be renewed from time to time. Rains fall on mountains and break their top layers. They are then carried by the flow of water and spread over the flat lands around. Fertile soil comes with the stream of the Nile from its springs in mountaintops. The water of the Nile used to be a little thick with the fertile soil it carried and remained like that up to where it emptied into the Mediterranean. The Nile delta was formed through alluvial build-up.

The same applies to the valleys around mountains: the top layers of the mountains are washed down into the valleys, thereby renewing the soil and increasing its fertility. It is indeed as though mountains are the storehouses of the earth’s sustenance. This is why I believe the verse means: ‘...blessed them [the mountains], measured out their varied provisions...’ (*Fussilat*: 10). The ways mountains and valleys are formed are wondrous. It is as if mountains provide

valleys with an increase of elements in the course of time that corresponds to the increase of populations and demand for the requirements of life.

Allah has blessed the earth with resources that renew themselves to cope with the increase in human needs. There is no need to be apprehensive about the future; rest assured, for Allah has guaranteed your daily sustenance. This is why He then says: ‘...measured out their varied provisions...’ (*Fussilat*: 10).

So Allah: ‘...placed solid mountains on it, blessed them, measured out their varied provisions for all who seek them – all in four Days...’ (*Fussilat*: 10). The word *sawa*’ used in the original Arabic text of the verse can be interpreted in several ways. It may mean ‘equal’; that is, these four days were of equal length. The word may also denote ‘completed’. That means the creation of the earth was complete in four days. Now, when we add these four days to the two days mentioned in the previous verse, it gives us six days as the total period for the creation of the heavens and the earth, as Allah says in another verse: ‘... who has created the heavens and the earth in six days...’ (*al-A’raf*: 54).

He then speaks in more detail about the creation of the heavens, saying: ‘Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke – He said to it and the earth, “Come into being, willingly or not,” and they said, “We come willingly”’ (*Fussilat*: 11). The verb *istawa* (here roughly translated as ‘turned to’) has caused a heated debate among scholars. They have counted the instances of its occurrence in the Quran and found that the word has been used twelve times, seven of which are associated with the Throne, and twice with the heavens and earth as in the verse we are considering. ‘Then He *istawa* turned to the sky, which was smoke...’ (*Fussilat*: 11). In a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: ‘It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then *istawa* (turned to) the sky and made the seven heavens...’ (*al-Baqara*: 29).

Besides those nine instances, the verb *estawa* is mentioned in relation to the revelation in the verse where Allah says about Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*: ‘It was taught to him by [an angel] with mighty powers and great strength, who *istawa* (stood on) the highest horizon’ (*an-Najm*: 5-7).

Another instance where the verb *estawa* is used is in the following verse that refers to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘And when he (Musa)

attained his maturity and *estawa* (became full grown), We granted him wisdom and knowledge; and thus do We reward those who do good (to others)' (*al-Qasas*: 14).

The last instance occurs in connection with the depiction of Muslims in the Gospel, in the verse where Allah says: '... their description in the Injeel (Gospel); like a seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and *istawa* (stands firmly) on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them...' (*al-Fath*: 29).

It is worthy of mention that the same verse also states the depiction of Muslims in the Taurat (Torah): '...firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Taurat (Torah)...' (*al-Fath*: 29). All these things are spiritual values that include nothing material, for the Jews had grown extremely immersed in materialism to the point that they dealt with Allah in a materialistic way when they said to Prophet Musa (Moses): '... "Make us see Allah face to face"...' (*an-Nisa*: 153).

As for their parable in the Injeel (Gospel), it is a material image, void of spirituality – why? Christianity entirely focused on spiritual matters and had nothing to do with the necessary laws required to deal with the materiality which is inevitably part of our life on earth. For example, when Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was asked about the issue of inheritance, he replied, 'I was not sent to divide inheritances'. For this reason the parable of the final Prophet's nation in the Injeel (Gospel) was directly material. Allah addressed both the Jews and Christians based on what was lacking among them. The former went to an extreme with regard to materialism and the latter with regard to spirituality, so Islam came to combine both elements into one religion and restore humankind to moderation.

Those are the twelve instances where the verb *istawa* is used in the Quran. As we said, in seven of those instances, the verb is mentioned in relation to Allah's sitting on the Throne. The seven chapters of the Quran where these seven instances occur are mentioned in the following lines:

It is mentioned in *al-A'raf* then in *Yunus*,
ar-Ra'd as well as *Ta Ha* – this is the count; remember it!
 It comes in *al-Furqan*, then *as-Sajda*
 and finally *al-Hadid* – let those who believe reflect!

So the verb *istawa* denotes 'to sit'. It is used to refer to the act of Allah's sitting on the Throne. Some try to describe this Divine act of sitting in terms of the way, for example, creatures sit on chairs. This is anthropomorphism, which is prohibited in Islam. The verb *istawa* is also used in relation to the heavens. It means He turned His purpose and His Attention towards the heavens.

The word 'throne' denotes power and domination. If a ruler faces dissension among his subjects, it means he is not firmly stationed on the throne nor does he possess authority in an orderly fashion. To say that a ruler *istawa* on the throne means all his subjects surrender themselves to him. The Quran speaks about Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba⁽¹⁾: '... and hers is a mighty throne' (*an-Naml*: 23). It means power was firmly in her hands. So the phrase 'He *istawa* (sat down) upon the Throne' indicates that the entire universe is at His service and does His Bidding and none is out of His Control. This is why He says here about the heavens and earth: '... He said to it and the earth, "Come into being, willingly or not," and they said, "We come willingly"' (*Fussilat*: 11).

So scholars have a number of different opinions concerning the meaning of *istawa*, some of which have been summed up in the following lines:

They hold four views on the word *istawa*
 that have been explained for those of acuity:
 To be steadfast; to be elevated; similarly,
 to rise; and to ascend – such are four.

(1) *Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, was discovered by the hoopoe of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon). The Prophet sent the hoopoe with a message exhorting her to embrace monotheism, for Bilqis and her people worshipped the sun. She was of the Banu Ya'far ibn Saksak of Himayr, a Yemenite from Ma'rib; she was buried in Palmyra [Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam 2/73].*

The verse we are reflecting on says: ‘Then He *istawa* (turned to) the sky...’ (*Fussilat*: 11). It means Allah turned His Purpose towards them and directed His Will to them. As for *istawa* on the Throne, it means His Command became established, for everything in existence is subject to His Will and Control.

Allah says to anything, ‘Be!’ and it is, for He knows everything is completely under His Control. Nothing can escape His Will and Decree. He says about the sky: ‘obeying its Lord as it rightly must’ (*al-Inshiqaq*: 2). It has but to hear the summons and it immediately responds. Allah has testified to Himself of this fact that He is the One Lord and everything in under His Control: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 18). Since He is the One God, He says to anything, ‘Be!’ and it is. The angels provide a corroborating testimony, as do those who are endowed with knowledge.

Allah says about the sky: ‘... which was smoke...’ (*Fussilat*: 11). The sky was in the form of smoke that resembled mist. The universe then was in a gaseous state, and the earth and its rocks and mountains were formed from smoke. After the heavens and earth were completed, the Creator commanded them to come into being, and they responded: ‘... “We come willingly”...’ (*Fussilat*: 11). This response spells the complete submission and obedience of the universe to its Creator. It is as if they meant: do we have any choice but to obey? Why should we come unwillingly? They show total deference and obedience to their Creator and have no desire or whim that can mislead them or cause them to stray; Allah says: ‘... and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him...’ (*al-Isra’*: 44).

As for man, however, each person has different desires. This is why Prophet Muhammad said, ‘None of you has attained true faith until his personal desires conform to what [the divine revelation] I have delivered to you.’⁽¹⁾ When we all

(1) This Hadith is cited by Ibn Abu ‘Asem in his *Kitab As-Sunnah* (1/12) on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr. It is also cited by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his *Jami’ Al-‘Ulum wa Al-Hikam* (460) he classified it as *da’if* (literally ‘weak’; a Hadith whose chain of narrations has a certain defect).

comply with what Allah has revealed and ordained, where will conflict and disagreement emerge? However, people will still differ, yet the universe does not follow their desires, as Allah says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 71).

It is worthy of note that the Arabic word used in the original text of the verse to mean 'willingly' is an adjective. Adjectives in Arabic take plural, dual or singular and masculine or feminine forms. Dual adjectives are used when the number of the modified things/people is two. Now, the words for 'sky' and 'earth' are feminine in Arabic. This means the adjective should have been feminine and in the dual form, for the modified things are two: the sky and the earth. However, the adjective comes in the masculine and plural form instead of the feminine and dual form. Why? This is because both nouns can be considered collective nouns in the sense that the word itself is singular and feminine, but it includes many creatures, which makes its adjective plural and masculine. In other words, the adjective includes the sky, the earth, and all that is in them.

Another example of this use of adjectives is found in the following verse: 'Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them...' (*al-Hujurat*: 9). Verbs in Arabic come in the singular, dual or plural forms, too. The subject in the aforementioned verse is the noun phrase 'two groups of believers', which means the verb should be in the dual form, yet the verb here translated as 'fall to fighting' is in the plural form in the original Arabic text of the verse. That is because when two groups fight, they are no longer 'two' distinct groups, but with all engaging in the fight, they become many rather than two. When it comes to making peace, the pronoun in '...make peace between *them*...' (*al-Hujurat*: 9) is in the dual form, for then the two groups are clearly distinct when their leaders sit together with an arbitrator to resolve the conflict and make peace.

Allah says afterwards:

فَقَضَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا وَزِينًا
 السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصْبِيحٍ وَحِفْظًا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ ﴿١٢﴾

And in two Days He formed seven heavens, and assigned an order to each. We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated and secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All Knowing [12] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 12)

Allah has made them seven skies over a period of two days. Some would wonder: adding these two to the days mentioned previously in the aforementioned verses, it means the creation of the heavens and earth took eight days, not six as stated in other verses of the Quran. There is no contradiction. We just need to clarify one point. Allah says He created the earth in two days after which He set within it firm mountains, blessed them and measured out their means of subsistence – all in four days. In other words, the two days mentioned earlier are part of the four days mentioned later. So, all the creation of the earth took four days. If we then add two days for the creation of the sky, the total comes to: ‘... six days...’ (*al-A‘raf*: 54).

After creating the skies, Allah ‘... assigned an order to each...’ (*Fussilat*: 12). This means Allah has decreed the distinct function of each sky, the messenger who shall be in it, and the role it shall have in guiding the motion of life.

Then Allah says: ‘... We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated...’ (*Fussilat*: 12). This refers to the planets and stars that illuminate the sky like lamps, including the sun and the moon. The sun’s light is different from the moon’s light. The former is associated with heat, whereas the moon sends only light, gentle light that involves no heat. Allah says: ‘It is He who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light...’ (*Yunus*: 5). He also says: ‘... a [radiant] lamp and a light-giving moon’ (*al-Furqan*: 61). Allah has thus adorned the nearest sky, the one directly above the earth, which we can see.

Allah is the One Who has created all and knows best what is good for His servants. He has created the night for rest, since He knows we need this to resume the movements and activities of our lives. One is able to do effort when he has had adequate sleep.

Nevertheless, some activities must be done at night, not during the day. For this purpose, He made the moon and the stars to send light amid the stillness of the night. He says about the stars: '... and stars to guide people' (*an-Nahl*: 16). Allah has created Adam and made him and his offspring vicegerents on earth in order to worship Him and work for the earth's prosperity. He has endowed us with the power of the mind and the body and created resources in the earth so we can employ all to accomplish the mission for which we have been created. This is how Allah has secured the wellbeing of the universe and the precision of its system.

The stars have had another purpose of old.

Allah says in the verse that He has made the sky secure, and in another verse He says: 'and have made them secure against every rebellious, satanic force' (*as-Saffat*: 7). The jinn used to eavesdrop on the assembly of angels in heaven and would take some piece of information about the affairs of the world they heard from the angels and reveal it to soothsayers, by which the latter deceived people into believing they knew the unseen. Soothsayers are imposters, and even though they seek such help from the jinn, much of what they tell people is false.⁽¹⁾

That was before the advent of Islam. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a Messenger, Allah made the heavens secure from such eavesdropping; He says: 'We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him' (*al-Jinn*: 9).

Arabs used to have recourse to soothsayers to ask their judgements, and they trusted what they told them. It has been narrated that Hind,⁽²⁾ the wife of

(1) *It is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her 'Some people asked the Messenger of Allah about soothsayers, to which he replied, "What they say is nothing." They said, "Messenger of Allah, sometimes they tell us things which turn out to be true." The Messenger of Allah said, "The jinn throw in their ears a word of truth they have eavesdropped to snatch from heaven then soothsayers mix it with a hundred lies"'. [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, section on soothsaying (kahana)]*

(2) *Hind bint 'Utaba: a Companion from Quraysh, of Banu 'Abd-Shams. She became Muslim in the 8th year AH, following the Conquest of Mecca. She was the wife of Abu Sufyan and the mother of Mu'awiya Allah be pleased with him. She spent the first part of=*

Abu Sufyan, was married to another man previously, Al-Fakeh ibn Al-Mughira,⁽¹⁾ one of the leaders of Quraysh. His home was open to all the tribe and everyone in need of something would go to him. People would say, 'Go to Al-Fakeh', as his home was like the tribe's clubhouse. One day Hind came home to do her household chores when she found a man sleeping in the vestibule, so she withdrew. At that very moment, however, Al-Fakeh went in and saw the man sleeping, so he suspected his wife of misconduct. He told her to go to her father's, 'Utaba ibn Rabi'a, so she did. It became widely known among people that Al-Fakeh accused his wife of such-and-such. Her father 'Utaba said to him, 'O Fakeh, my daughter has been accused, so I see no recourse but that we seek a verdict from a soothsayer to resolve this matter. Assemble whomever of your people you wish, and I will bring my daughter, and let us go to a soothsayer and ask him.' Hind was a sensible woman, so she said 'Father, you are going to consult a mortal who misses his mark as often as he hits it; he may accuse me of something I have not done, and disgrace would remain to me and you.' He replied, 'Do not worry. Your father is not so foolish. I will not present your case to him unless he is first able to tell me what I have hidden for him to detect [as a test].' Before he arrived at the soothsayer, he dismounted from his colt in a deserted place. He whistled to it, opened the colt's water bag and placed inside a single grain of wheat, then rode on to the soothsayer.

He said to him, 'I will not present my case to you until you have told me what I have hidden.' The soothsayer said to him, 'A grain of wheat in the colt's bag.' 'Utaba said, 'Be more specific,' so he said, 'A wheat nut in a belt.' So 'Utaba told him the situation of his daughter who was sitting before them among the women. The soothsayer passed by the women clutching at their heads one after the other until he reached Hind. He stopped by her, said

= *her life conspiring to kill Prophet Muhammad, and it was she that incited Wahshi to murder Hamza, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad. She died in the 14th year AH during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab.*

(1) *Al-Fakeh ibn Al-Mughira: one of the most eloquent men of Quraysh in the pre-Islamic era of ignorance. He was a Companion to 'Awf ibn Abd 'Awf Al-Zuhri ('Abu 'Abd AR-Rahman), the uncle of Khalid ibn Al-Walid. He was listed by Ibn Habib in his Ashraf Al-'Umyan. It was said that he was killed at Al-Ghumaysa'.*

nothing to the other women, and then told her: 'Get up, you are non-ugly, non-adulteress: you will bear a king called Mu'awiya.'⁽¹⁾

Such news proved to be true, but it all originated from the jinn's eavesdropping; they do not prove in any way that a soothsayer possesses knowledge of the unseen. When Hind was cleared of the accusation and was able to hold her head up among the tribe, Al-Fakeh tried to coax her to forgive him and return home. She refused and said, 'Indeed the news of Mu'awiya and his kingdom has tempted you! I will beget him from another man! Get away from me!' Afterwards she married Abu Sufyan and Mu'awiya was born to him.

Allah prevented the jinn from that since the advent of Islam in order not to allow the jinn a chance to eavesdrop and get news of His revelations to His Messenger. This is why Allah says: 'We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him' (*al-Jinn*: 9). Allah thus protected His Message from the caprices of the devils.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '... Such is the design of the Almighty, The All Knowing' (*Fussilat*: 12). Allah is *the Almighty* Lord Who has protected His revelations from the devils so none can eavesdrop and snatch news of the Divine Message, for He is the All Knowing Lord Who knows what is best for His servants.

Allah says in the following verse:

فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَقُلْ أَنْذَرْتُكُمْ صَاعِقَةً مِّثْلَ صَاعِقَةِ عَادٍ وَثَمُودَ ﴿١٣﴾

**If they turn away, say, 'I have warned you about a
blast like the one which struck Ad and Thamud [13]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 13)**

This is a warning to them if they continued to disbelieve after they have been shown all those signs. They themselves have testified that Allah is their

(1) Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isfahani mentions this story in his *Al-Aghani* in the chapter on Musafir ibn Abu 'Amr and his family lineage, there is a section on Hind's divorce from Al-Fakeh. Ibn Hamdun also mentioned it in his *At-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya*, chapter 36 on soothsaying. In his version, the soothsayer says to Hind, 'Rise, you non-base, non-adulteress and give you birth to a king called Mu'awiya.'

Creator and the Creator of the heavens and earth. None claimed that dominion for himself. None claimed to be the creator of the world, and Allah Himself testifies that He is the Lord and Creator, so who can deny that? He says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 18). Allah declared it and none contradicted Him, so how can anyone turn away from this? No one who has understanding would do so.

‘If they turn away...’ (*Fussilat*: 13), after these clear signs, ‘... say, “I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck ‘Ad and Thamud”’ (*Fussilat*: 13). A warning comes before an alarming event to caution people against it. Its purpose is to let people take the appropriate measures to avoid what they are warned against. This is just like the good news that announces a delightful event before it happens that we may be expectant of it.

So Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to say to the disbelievers who deny Allah’s signs: ‘... “I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck ‘Ad and Thamud”’ (*Fussilat*: 13). Allah is *The Almighty* Who cannot be overcome, and when He warns people about something, it will certainly come to pass. Allah mentions ‘Ad and Thamud as proofs. So they should have heeded the warning, for the Quraysh knew the news of those nations and the punishments that were sent down on them and they saw the ruins of their homes.

When ‘Umar, Hamza and Al-‘Abbas converted to Islam, the Quraysh feared that Prophet Muhammad’s call was spreading and his influence was growing. They decided to choose one from among them who was knowledgeable in poetry, soothsaying, and sorcery – an expert in those things of which they were accusing Prophet Muhammad.

At that time, ‘Utaba ibn Rabi’a was one of the leading men of Quraysh, so he said, ‘I am the most experienced of men in all these areas, so let me go to Muhammad.’ When he went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, ‘Muhammad, who is better, you or your forefather Hashim? Who is better, you or your forefather Qusay? Who is better, you or your forefather ‘Abd Al-Muttalib? They did not disgrace us for our religion. Are you better than them that you call us to a new religion different from that of our forefathers? Muhammad, if you want money, we will gather money for

you. If you want power, we will make you ruler and master over us. If you want marriage, we will marry you off to the best of our women. Only stop calling people to this matter and stop cursing our gods.' Prophet Muhammad said to him, 'Will you listen?' He said yes; so the Messenger of Allah started reciting the chapter of *Fussilat* – the one we are reflecting on. He reached the verse: '... say, "I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck 'Ad and Thamud"' (*Fussilat*: 13). At this point, 'Utaba rose and put his hand over the mouth of Allah's Messenger and said, 'I beseech you not to complete your recitation!''⁽¹⁾ He knew that what Prophet Muhammad said must take place, so he feared for his people. Afterwards 'Utaba isolated himself from his tribe such that they suspected that he had forsaken their religion. 'Utaba heard this talk but did not respond. Later he said to his people, 'No, I have not forsaken my religion, but I feared for my tribe that they may be struck with a thunderbolt of punishment like that which struck 'Ad and Thamud, for I know that everything Muhammad says must come to pass. I wanted to save you from this by stopping him from completing that verse.' Still, Prophet Muhammad continued reciting the chapter of *Fussilat* until he reached the verse of the prostration (verse number 38).

When Allah speaks of matters of the unseen, He supports them with actual examples. The Quraysh knew the stories of 'Ad and Thamud. The Arabic word *sa'iqā* (translated in the verse as 'blast') means a power that destroys that upon which it is sent. It may be fierce wind, sometimes accompanied by fire.

Allah says in the following verse:

(1) *Al-Baghawi* cites this Hadith in his exegesis on the authority of *Mohammad ibn Fudayl*. He classifies as *da'if* (literally, weak) part of the narration on the authority of *Adh-Dhayal ibn Harmala* he reported on the authority of *Jabir*. He cites the Hadith as, '... He reached the verse: '... say, "I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck 'Ad and Thamud."' (*Fussilat*: 13). At this point, 'Utaba rose and put his hand over the mouth of Allah's Messenger and said, "I beseech you not to complete your recitation!"' *Al-Qurtubi* cites it in his commentary on the verse, as does *As-Samarqandi* in his *Bahr Al-'Ulum*, chapter 13.

إِذْ جَاءَتْهُمْ الرُّسُلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا
 اللَّهَ قَالُوا لَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّنَا لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً فَإِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

**When their messengers came to them, from all angles,
 saying, “Serve no one but God,” they said, “If our Lord had
 wished, He would have sent down angels. We do not believe
 in the message with which you have been sent” [14]
 (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 14)**

Like adjectives, verbs, pronouns, and nouns also come in the singular, dual, or plural forms in the Arabic language. This verse speaks about the two tribes of ‘Ad and Thamud. The word used in the original Arabic text of the verse for ‘Messengers’ comes in the plural, not the dual form, even though there were two Messengers that were sent to them. Why? Every Messenger was commanded by Allah to call his people to believe in the previous Messengers as well as the news of the Messengers yet to come. Had ‘Ad and Thamud believed in the two Messengers who were sent to them, it would have meant they believed in all the Messengers of Allah. Another interpretation says the word ‘Messengers’ comes in the plural because the two tribes lived in different places and each group received a different Messenger.

‘... “Serve no one but Allah”...’ (*Fussilat*: 14) is the essence of all the calls of the Messengers. The people of ‘Ad and Thamud responded: ‘... If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels...’ (*Fussilat*: 14). They claimed that if Allah had willed to send Messengers, He would have assigned that mission to His angels. Such a claim is itself a striking proof of their foolishness. A Messenger of Allah is assigned two missions: delivering His Message and offering an example for people to follow. Were a Messenger to be an angel, he could not serve as a model to be emulated, nor would he be in a position to command his people to do what he himself does. His people would simply object, ‘How can we act like you? You are an angel and we are only human beings!’ Thus, the Messenger had to be a human being like us. Even if Allah had sent angels, they would come to us in human form, for we cannot see them or receive any messages from them when they are in his angelic form. Thus Allah says: ‘Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger,

We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion' (*al-An'am*: 9). They would have remained doubtful anyway.

The disbelievers of 'Ad and Thamud then said, as the verse quotes them: '... "We do not believe in the message with which you have been sent"' (*Fussilat*: 14). The verse shows that they acknowledge the mission of the Messengers and the fact that 'they have been sent with a Message'. How strange it is that after acknowledging that they were truly Messengers, the disbelievers persisted in denying the Message with which they were sent. Another interpretation says that they did not mean to acknowledge that they were truly the Messengers of Allah, but they were only mocking them by those words that apparently implied an acknowledgement: '... the message with which you have been sent' (*Fussilat*: 14). This is like what the hypocrites said about Prophet Muhammad and the believers: '... Give nothing to those who follow Allah's Messenger...' (*al-Munafiqun*: 7). Did they truly believe he was 'Allah's Messenger'? Pharaoh said the same: '... "This Messenger who has been sent to you is truly possessed"' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 27). Possessed! Indeed Pharaoh was the one who lost his reason! He said Musa (Moses) was a Messenger who was sent to them, yet he insisted on disbelief! Such was the case with the disbelievers: they knew the Truth but stubbornly denied it and defied their Lord and Creator. Such is madness. It is disbelief that is madness itself.

Allah then gives more detail concerning 'Ad and Thamud:

فَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَقَالُوا مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا
 أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُمْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَحْدِثُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

The people of 'Ad behaved arrogantly throughout the land without any right, saying, "Who could be stronger than us?"

Did they not realize that God, who created them, was stronger than them?' They continued to reject Our message[15] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 15)

According to the verse, the people of 'Ad: '... *istakbaru* (behaved arrogantly) throughout the land without any right...' (*Fussilat*: 15). Does this mean that one may behave arrogantly while having the right to? Logically,

this is implausible, for the word ‘arrogant’ has only a negative connotation, so no one can have the right to be arrogant. The problem arises due to the difference in the connotative meaning between the English ‘arrogance’ and the Arabic *istikbar*. The latter literally means ‘arrogance’, yet it can also mean ‘sovereignty’. A person has the right to *istikbar* if he does that to attain the power to establish justice among people. Any group or nation must have a sovereign who exercises control to deter transgressors, restore rights to the oppressed and set things to rights. This is ‘rightful’ *istikbar*, for it is necessary to prevent anyone from overstepping their limits. A poet⁽¹⁾ said:

People do not prosper unless a wise leader rules.

Fools gaining sovereignty bring nations to ruins.⁽²⁾

This is rightful *istikbar*, not arrogance or oppression, but power and control. The wise must attain power to protect the weak and helpless and deter wrongdoers. What is blameworthy is when power is used to oppress others and serve personal interests.

They were so arrogant that they said: ‘... Who could be stronger than us?...’ (*Fussilat*: 15). They were liars in this claim as well, and their ignorance became manifest, for they denied the truth that Allah is stronger than them and all creatures. This is why Allah says in reply to their falsehood: ‘... Did they not realise that Allah, who created them, was stronger than them?...’ (*Fussilat*: 15) Their question is a rhetorical one. They did not wait for an answer. They held it as truth that they were the mightiest on earth and no others were in a position to compel them to obey. Perhaps none among people could defeat them, but they forgot the plain truth that Allah Who created them is the Almighty and All-Powerful. Was that not enough to make them obey

(1) *These lines belong to Abu Al-Aswad Ad-Du’ali, Zalem ibn ‘Amr Ad-Du’ali, a Muslim of the second generation (the one following that of the Companions). He was a grammarian, a man of the nobility, a shrewd poet and knight. He was born in 1 BH and died in 69 AH. In Subh Al-A’sha, it is stated that Abu Al-Aswad founded the branch of Arabic grammar that has to do with vocalisation. Most narrations say that he was the first to write the Quranic text with diacritic marks. He died in Basra [Al-Mawsu’a Ash-Shi’riyya].*

(2) This verse is from a poem by Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du’ali. It is composed based on the simple meter and comprises three verses.

Him? Reason should have therefore called them to submit to those whom Allah sent to them and to follow them in obedience of the One Who sent them. Indeed, it does not befit the strong to submit to and obey the weak one, but here is a question worth asking: who is stronger, they or Allah? They already acknowledged that He created everything, so why did they oppose His Messengers? It is true they had power over part of creation, but they were weak and helpless before Him Who created all of creation.

They persisted in their stubbornness and ‘... continued to reject Our message’ (*Fussilat*: 15). They obstinately denied the Truth for which there were many evidences, as Allah says: ‘They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true...’ (*an-Naml*: 14). They knew the Truth, but they were doomed to stubborn denial of it. What was their punishment for this?

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي أَيَّامٍ نَحْسَاتٍ لِّنُذِيقَهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ
فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَخْزَىٰ وَهُمْ لَا يُصْرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

**So We let a roaring wind loose on them for a few
disastrous days to make them taste the punishment of
shame in this world; more shameful still will be the
punishment of the life to come, and they will not be
helped [16] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 16)**

The Arabic word used to describe the wind in the original text of the verse is *sarsar* which is derived from the same stem as *sirr*, yet the former is made up of two syllables to add more emphasis to the meaning. The word denotes ‘violent’ or ‘severe’. It denotes a powerful, destructive wind that is extremely cold; due to its heavy humidity, one of the effects of this wind is to dry things out to the point of combustion. Farmers know this as a familiar winter phenomenon, when severe cold dries things out till fields catch fire.

In this way, Allah *the Almighty* uses water to afflict the disbelievers from among the people of ‘Ad with the same kind of punishment caused by fire. He has not created the universe to operate statically and mechanically, but rather, He has created it with His Might that can reverse norms and work

miracles. He commanded Prophet Musa (Moses) to strike the water with his staff, and then the water was made into two halves, each like a great mountain. Likewise, when he supplicated to Allah for drinking water, He commanded him to strike the mountain and twelve springs sprang from it. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was thrown in the fire, but Allah suspended its power and made it cool and safe for him.

So *sirr* is a powerful and destructive wind, but it strikes only once. The wind that struck the people of 'Ad was *sarsar*, in the sense that it struck repeatedly, not just once. That wind continued to strike them for '... a few disastrous days...' (*Fussilat*: 16). The wind was decisive. It exterminated them all and left none of them. So pointed was the confrontation between the Messengers and their arrogant opponents.

The word *sirr* reminds me of the Arab poet⁽¹⁾ who said:

Light a good fire, for the night is freezing
and the wind, my boy, is severe and howling (*sirr*)!
Maybe a traveller will notice the fire and come;
if you attract a guest, you get your freedom!⁽²⁾

Allah then says: '... to make them taste the punishment of shame in this world...' (*Fussilat*: 16). Some punishments are painful and some are shameful. Some punishments cause physical torture and some cause humiliation and debase pride. Such was a just punishment for their groundless arrogance. They could have endured pain, so Allah made their punishment of such a kind that humiliated and dishonoured them in order to destroy their arrogance.

That humiliation and debasement was not only in the life of this world, but '... more shameful still will be the punishment of the life to come...'

(1) These lines belong to Abu 'Adi Hatem ibn Abdullah At-Ta'i Al-Qahtani, a poet of the pre-Islamic era of ignorance and a model of chivalry and generosity. His generosity is exemplary. He was from *Najd* and moved to Syria where he married Mawiya bint Hajar Al-Ghassaniyya. He died in 46 BH at *'Awarid* (a mountain in the Tayy region) [*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*].

(2) The lines comprise a poem by Hatem At-Ta'i, based on the *rajaz* meter. In *Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*. The lines are attributed to *Al-Afwah Al-Awdi* by *Ibn Hamdun* in his *At-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya* and *Ath-Tha'alebi* in his *At-Tamthil wa Al-Muhadara*.

(*Fussilat*: 16). Shame and humiliation in this life must come to an end, but in the Hereafter, suffering and disgrace will persist forever, ‘... and they will not be helped’ (*Fussilat*: 16). They will not be saved from suffering in any way. They will have no hope of help or rescue.

On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will gather all people together at once. It will not be like a queue, for example, with everyone waiting their turn, but rather, they will all be gathered together – oppressors and those they oppressed, leaders and their followers. There will be no hope of salvation for the disbelievers. Perhaps they will expect their leaders to save them, but the case will be just as Allah said about Pharaoh, ‘... he shall go before his people...’ (*Hud*: 98). He will lead them to hellfire.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ فَاسْتَحَبُّوا الْعَمَىٰ عَلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَأَخَذَتْهُمْ
صَنِيعَةُ الْعَذَابِ أَهْلُونَ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

As for Thamud, We gave them guidance but they preferred blindness, so they were struck by a blast of humiliating punishment for their misdeeds [17] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 17)

Here is a point that scholars of Islamic theology have reflected on. Allah says: ‘As for Thamud, We gave them guidance...’ (*Fussilat*: 17). Guidance means showing the right way. When you show people the way, some of them will listen to you and follow your directions, and others will not; to those who listen you will give additional guidance to help them more. As for those who pay no attention, you will not care about them. Allah says: ‘and (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil)’ (*Muhammad*: 17). Those who willingly accept the Right Path are given an increase in guidance: Allah provides them with assistance and support; He inspires them to do good and shun evil. Therefore, guidance is of two kinds: showing the Right Path, which is granted to all humankind, and assistance to follow it, which is granted only to those who accept faith. If someone asks you about the way to some place, you guide him there. If he accepts your guidance, you give him further directions and warn

him about any difficulties that may arise. If he does not listen to you from the first, you will give him no further guidance.

Allah points out to everyone the way to goodness. Whoever follows this guidance is worthy of more guidance, and is also worthy of assistance in following that guidance; whoever rejects this guidance is unworthy of any assistance.

Allah gave guidance to Thamud, but ‘...they preferred blindness...’ (*Fussilat*: 17). Why did they prefer blindness to guidance? They wanted to evade responsibility and obligation under Allah’s Law. This is why they worshiped idols even though they knew they were helpless objects they made with their own hands. They worshiped them to have the satisfaction of having a god to worship, but they wanted a ‘god’ that imposed no obligations or way of conduct through commands and prohibitions. Their rejection of Allah’s Message originated from a desire to be free of obligations, and their worship of false idols was only to satisfy an innate need in human beings to believe in a certain deity. This natural need stems from the covenant Allah has made with us while we were still seeds in the loins of our father, Adam: ‘When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, “Am I not your Lord?” and they replied, “Yes, we bear witness”...’ (*al-A’raf*: 172). Thus, religious belief has been instilled into every human since that covenant. What people differ in is their acceptance of obligations and codes of conduct. Some see Allah’s laws as a shackle to their carnal desires, and therefore do not accept it. They resort to fake manmade religions that are free of what they consider to be confinement, just like those in the verse who preferred blindness to guidance. Others accept Divine Guidance and obey their Lord willingly. They know what Allah ordains is not meant to confine them but to set their life to rights, so they eagerly accept His Law and devote themselves to Him.

Something in the Arabic text of the verse is particularly worth commenting on. Allah says: ‘... they *istahabbu* blindness...’ (*Fussilat*: 17). The word *istahabba* (here translated as ‘preferred’) is derived from the same stem as *ahabba* which means ‘loved’. The former has a different connotation from the latter in that it denotes pretence or affectation. *Istahabba* does not denote ‘natural love’ like the derivative *ahabba*. Rather, it means to get oneself, to

persuade oneself, to love something that is not naturally loved or lovable. This is just plausible. Who would naturally love blindness? One must deceive himself into such a preference, for blindness is not something to be loved or preferred to Divine Guidance. Even those who think they love sins are wrong. Would you like to be the victim of any sin? Would you like anyone to rob you, for example? No, which means sins are naturally hateful, but many people follow their own desires and whims.

Another textual aspect is particularly worth highlighting too. Allah says in another verse: 'They are *'ala* (true) guidance from their Lord...' (*al-Baqara*: 5). The preposition *'ala* (usually translated as 'on' or 'upon') denotes the state of being 'above' or 'elevated'. So the verse portrays true guidance as something that elevates those who embrace it. It has not been sent down to cause hardship for people, but rather to elevate them to the status of righteousness and elevation before their Lord. Just as it elevates those who accept it and abide by it, true guidance also debases those who – out of faulty understanding – reject it and consider it a confinement.

When we trace the usage of the preposition *'ala* in the Glorious Quran, we will find that it conveys the meanings of 'superiority', 'elevation', 'power' or 'excellence'. For example, Allah says: 'They give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, *'ala hubbihi*' (*al-Insan*: 8). The word *hubb* means 'love'. Some exegetes⁽¹⁾ say that the prepositional phrase *'ala hubbihi* means 'despite their own love of it [food]', but this is not quite accurate. A person does not love food except when he is hungry, or else he would not care about food. The preposition *'ala* here has a wider meaning than just this. It means they need food themselves, but they transcend this need; they elevate themselves above the love of food and the desire for it and give it to others. Why? They are mindful of the reward that awaits them for their altruism.

(1) *Ibn Kathir* says in his exegesis of the verse [4/454]: 'The words *'ala hubbihi* are said to mean "out of their love of Allah", thus considering that the pronoun in *hubbihi* refers to Allah, which they think is supported by the context. However, it sounds more correct that the pronoun refers to food; that is, they give food while they need it and desire it.' Such is the opinion of Mujahid, Muqatil and Ibn Jarir, who find this verse similar to: '... who give away some of their wealth, *'ala hubbihi* (however much they cherish it)...' (*al-Baqara*: 177).

When one prefers Allah's reward to satiating his own need for food, it means he has triumphed over his need and desire. Allah says in praise of those who do so: '... They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor...' (*al-Hashr*: 9).

Another example of the use of the preposition 'ala is found in this verse quoting Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham): 'Praise be to Allah, Who has given me 'ala old age *Ismail* and *Ishaq*...' (*Ibrahim*: 39). The word 'ala here does not mean – as many would think – 'despite my being old and unable to beget children'. Rather, the meaning here is that Allah's Might was above obstacles, above old age and everything. Even though elderliness is a state of weakness in which reproduction is not possible, Allah's Grace is higher than weakness and elderliness, just as He granted a son to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) – Prophet Yahya (John) – despite his old age.

Here is another example. Allah says: '... your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, 'ala their wrongdoing...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 6). It means that even though wrongdoing makes people deserving of punishment, Allah's Forgiveness is higher and greater than people's sins.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on; Allah concludes it by saying: '... so they were struck by a blast of humiliating punishment for their misdeeds' (*Fussilat*: 17). Shameful suffering and destruction was a just punishment for them as a result of their disbelief. 'Blast' here is a translation of *sa'iqah* which refers to a destructive wind, fire, or sound. They faced that destiny as a just recompense, not through injustice or enmity.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَنَجَّيْنَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ

**We saved those who believed and were
mindful of God [18] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 18)**

Quite often in the Quran things are made clearer through presenting their contrasts. For example, Allah says: 'The good will live in bliss and the wicked will burn in the Fire' (*al-Infitar*: 13-14). Likewise, in the verses we

are reflecting on here, Allah speaks about the recompense of the disbelievers and follows this with a verse about the reward of the believers.

Allah says afterwards:

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُ أَعْدَاءُ اللَّهِ إِلَى النَّارِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿١٩﴾
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَا جَاءُوهَا شَهِدَ عَلَيْهِمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَأَبْصَارُهُمْ وَجُلُودُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

**On the Day when God's enemies are gathered up for the Fire
and driven onward [19] their ears, eyes, and skins will, when
they reach it, testify against them for their misdeeds [20]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 19 - 20)**

On the Day of the Gathering, all creatures will be brought together. People will all be gathered, followers and leaders, those who were misguided and those who misguided them. Allah will bring them together all in the same place, and the disbelievers will be packed together with their leaders. Allah says: 'We shall seize out of each group those who were most disobedient towards the Lord of Mercy' (*Maryam*: 69). Those who mislead people will precede them to the fire. They will be the first to be punished so their followers will know they have no hope of being saved.

On that Day, even beasts will be gathered: 'And when all beasts are gathered together' (*at-Takwir*: 5). Allah has created beasts along with domestic animals to let us understand that were it not for His Might, we would not be able to benefit from any creatures. Allah has subjected them to our powers; otherwise, they would all be wild. He has made the camel – despite its hugeness – surrender to the will of people, whereas a small snake may be out of control. These are manifestations of the Might and Bounty of Allah *the Exalted*. He says: 'Can they not see how, among the things made by Our Hands, We have created livestock they control, and made them obedient so that some can be used for riding, some for food...?' (*Ya Sin*: 71-72)

By Allah, had Allah not subjected these creatures to us we would not have been able to use them at all, and so we say of those creatures that have not been subjected to us that they are wild animals. Consider how the infant or a small child leads the huge camel around, makes it carry loads, kneel down, or

drives it wherever he pleases, yet the tiny flea in your bed prevents you from sleeping. This is a message from The Creator *Glorified is He* that such subjection is done only by Allah. ‘Hence, [warn all men of] the Day when the enemies of Allah shall be gathered together before the fire, and then shall be driven onward’ (*Fussilat*: 19). In the world, wild animals flee from people, and we flee from wild animals; in the Resurrection, however, Allah will gather everyone and everything together in one place. How? Because no one will have the power to move: ‘...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir*: 16) So when sovereignty is Allah’s there will not remain to us any power to assert ourselves.

His saying, ‘...and then shall be driven onward’ (*Fussilat*: 19), that is, they will be driven forward as a group into the fire, from first to last ‘till, when they come close to it, their hearing and their sight and their [very] skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing [on earth]’ (*Fussilat*: 20).

Now hearing is the function of the ear; sight is the function of the eye; smell the function of the nose and touch the function of the hand – each member of the body has its importance in life. Yet the True Lord *Glorified is He* only mentioned three of them here: hearing, sight, and skin, but not mentioning hand and nose. They say that this is because legal responsibility with respect to the nose is extremely limited, as when for example you smell the odour of wine and take refuge in Allah, or smell the scent of a perfumed woman. Thus the smell has a limited role. The hearing, however, is the most important of the senses, for it is through it that you respond to the summons to Allah, and sight is what allows you to see Allah’s signs and marvels in His Creation.

As for skin, it has to do with hearing and sight and indeed all the senses, as though it were the most universal of things to the senses. Thus when they looked into the function of the bodily members to determine the importance of each to a person, they found that the most important one is the skin because it is the means for sensing pain in particular at the surface of the body. Consider for example how when you get a shot with a needle you feel pain when it enters your body, piercing the skin; it causes pain to the extent

it penetrates the skin. The skin being the site of sensation, then, it comprises all the senses.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...[and] every time their skins are burnt off We shall replace them with new skins so that they may taste suffering [in full]...’ (*an-Nisa’*: 56). Thus the skin is the site of tasting suffering – we take refuge with Allah! – And it comprises all the senses.

وَقَالُوا لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ
كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

**They will say to their skins, ‘Why did you testify against us?’
and their skins will reply, ‘God, who gave speech to
everything, has given us speech – it was He who created you
the first time and to Him you have been returned [21]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 21)**

They are amazed at how their own skins – a part of them – testify against them. Now the question here should be as to how this is – how can you testify against us? – Rather than as to the cause. The question however does not come in this form in order to indicate a contradiction in speech. The answer comes: ‘...“Allah...has given speech to us”...’ (*Fussilat*: 21). Now the question is about one thing, but the response is about another. Had they answered the question, ‘Why did you testify against us?’ they would have answered, we testified against you because we are your staunchest guardian at every moment. ‘...“Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us”...’ (*Fussilat*: 21), that is, the matter is not in our own power; we did not testify of our own volition – the True Lord made us speak the truth, and we had no way of avoiding this.

The meaning of ‘...“who gives speech to all things”...’ (*Fussilat*: 21) is that everything in existence has a language peculiar to it by which it speaks and by which it may be understood, as we have seen in the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* when the ant spoke to warn its people, saying: ‘...“Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]!”’ (*an-Naml*: 18)

The ant's speech indicates that the ants have a language they understand among themselves, that they have awareness, and that they have a sense of justice, given that the ant said: '...“without [even] being aware [of you]!”' (*an-Naml*: 18)

Likewise, the speech of the hoopoe in the same story, when it said: '...“I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed [with yours] – for I have come to you from Bilqis (Sheba) with a tiding sure!”' (*an-Naml*: 22). It then proceeded to speak of the central point of the creed: 'And I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah' (*an-Naml*: 24). Thus, the hoopoe does not simply speak a language, but also understands the most important article of faith and Allah's oneness.

Thus, everything has a language, but only one whom Allah has taught it can understand it; this is a grace Allah gives to whomever He chooses. Therefore, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said: '...“We have been taught the speech of birds”...' (*an-Naml*: 16) – had Allah not taught him he would not have been able to understand the hoopoe.

Inanimate objects also have a language, as He says: '[and for this,] behold, We caused the mountains to join him in extolling Our limitless glory at eventide and at sunrise' (*Sad*: 18).

Therefore, He *the Exalted* says in general reference to this point: '...and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...' (*al-Isra*': 44)

It is related that pebbles glorified Allah⁽¹⁾ in the hand of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* though it should be said that this is one of His

(1) *Al-Isbahani* quotes this in his *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* [1/47, (*fasl fi tasbih al-hasa fi yadihi*)]. It is narrated that Abu Dharr, Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman Allah be pleased with them were alone together with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Prophet took seven (or nine) pebbles; they began glorifying Allah such that a buzzing was to be heard like the buzzing of bees. He put them down and they fell silent, then took them up again and placed them in the hand of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him whereupon they began glorifying Allah again with the same buzzing sound. He put them down and they fell silent. [The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*] took them up again and placed them in the hand of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him and the same thing happened, and the process was repeated with 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him. Then he put them down and they fell silent once more.

miracles. We said in clarification of this issue that the pebbles were glorifying Allah in the hand of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* just as they were in the hand of Abu-Jahl, but it is more reflective of the miraculous nature of the event to say that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the pebbles' glorification of Allah while in his hand – we should put it thus.

Some scholars say of this glorification of Allah that it is simply an indication of the pebbles' Creator, not an actual act of glorification in reality. This opinion, however, contradicts the text of the Holy Quran, since if it was simply as you say then you are able to understand it, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...' (*al-Isra'*: 44) Thus the pebbles were glorifying Allah in reality, glorifying Him in a language no one knows but their Creator and those whom Allah has taught it through a special act of grace.

The amazing thing in the story of the hoopoe is that it only mentions one reason that might impel faith in Allah *the Exalted* and His oneness. He says, '[for they have come to believe] that they ought not to adore Allah – [although it is He] who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and on earth, and knows all that you would conceal as well as all that you bring into the open' (*an-Naml*: 25), thus mentioning the action peculiar to Allah, that is His bringing forth the hidden things of the earth. It is of course well known that the hoopoe has a long beak with which it extracts worms from underneath the surface of the soil in order to eat them.

His saying, '...for He [it is who] has created you in the first instance – and unto Him you are [now] brought back' (*Fussilat*: 21) – that is, do not suppose that Allah simply created you to leave you to your own devices, but rather, He created you for a term – you must return to Him, and stand before Him to be judged for even the minutest of your deeds (those as small as the mark on a date pit or its pellicle) as well as the greatest, and He will reward you for your works. You will not be able to escape Him *Glorified is He* but will stand in His presence and He will enumerate His acts of grace towards you, to see who gives Him thanks and who denies.

وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَرُونَ أَنْ يَشْهَدَ عَلَيْكُمْ سَمْعُكُمْ وَلَا أَبْصَرُكُمْ وَلَا
جُلُودُكُمْ وَلَكِنْ ظَنَنْتُمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَعْلَمُ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

**Yet you did not try to hide yourselves from your ears, eyes,
and skin to prevent them from testifying against you. You
thought that God did not know about much of what you
were doing [22] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 22)**

That is, you neglected and were not aware of something important, which is that you used to hide your disobedience from people but forgot that Allah was watching over you and could see your actions, even what you used to hide from yourselves and your bodily members, forgetting that your bodily members will testify against you on the Day of Resurrection.

So the hand with which you did things, the leg with which you walked, your tongue, your ear, your eye, all your members will testify against you on the Day of Resurrection – these same members which Allah commanded to follow your desires in this world and obey you in all that you wished will on that day be freed from this restriction and you will no longer have power over them when they testify against you.

So they obey you in your acts of disobedience in this world, since Allah subjected them to you, but they obey you unwillingly and are innocent of responsibility. But when everything returns to Allah, and all dominion is His – ‘...With Whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir*: 16) – it is no wonder that your members will testify against you, and will be your adversary before their Creator *Glorified is He*.

We previously compared this matter to a captain of a battalion in the army, who commands his troops and they do as they are commanded, carrying out his orders even if they are bad. When the troops come to the general, however, they complain to him of their captain’s arbitrariness and misconduct, saying that he used us for such and such.

Likewise a person’s bodily members, Allah commanded them to obey even in acts of disobedience, and to respond to the person’s desires. Thus your members obey you in everything you wish, whether for good or for ill.

As to His saying, ‘...but you thought that Allah did not know much of what you were doing’ (*Fussilat: 22*), the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘My servants, if you think that I do not see you then your faith is faulty, and if you think that I see you then why do you consider Me the least of your observers?’⁽¹⁾ If you are unable to do something to a man like yourself that he will find bad when he sees it or hears of it, then how can you do so with Allah *the Exalted*?

وَذَلِكُمْ ظَنُّكُمُ الَّذِي ظَنَنْتُمْ بِرَبِّكُمْ أَرَدْتُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

So it was the thoughts you entertained about your Lord that led to your ruin, and you became losers [23]
(The Quran, *Fussilat: 23*)

His saying, ‘and that very thing...’ – that is, the deeds you have committed – ‘... [is the] thing which you thought about your Lord...’ – that is, you have thought that He *Glorified is He* does not know what you do – ‘...has brought you to perdition...’ – that is, this thought has destroyed you, ‘...and so now you find yourselves among the lost’ (*Fussilat: 23*).

فَإِنْ يَصْبرُوا فَالنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَّهُمْ وَإِنْ يَسْتَغِيثُوا فَمَا لَهُمْ مِنَ الْمُعْتَبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

The Fire will still be their home, even if they resign themselves to patience, and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be given permission to do so[24]
(The Quran, *Fussilat: 24*)

That is, if they endure patiently in their former manner and persist in their disbelief and their wrangling with the Messengers, what will happen? ‘...The fire will still be their abode; and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so’ (*Fussilat: 24*). Here there are two options:

(1) Reference to books of Hadith does not turn up any sound version with this wording, but only a phrase from it as found in the works of certain Sufis. In the *Hilyat Al-Awliya* [8/142] it is narrated that a man says to Wuhayb ibn Al-Ward, ‘advise me’, to which he responds, ‘Fear Allah properly lest you consider Him but the least of your observers’. In the book *Jami’ Al-‘Ulum wa Al-Hikam* [1/36] the saying is attributed to a certain Sufi: ‘Fear Allah properly lest you consider Him the least of your observers’.

when a man contravenes his Creator's commands and a messenger comes to him and says do not do that, he will be fine if he desists, but if he persists then the fire will be his abode.

The meaning of '...they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so' (*Fussilat*: 24): to pray to be allowed to make amends is to seek pardon. They say, he rebuked so-and-so, that is, blamed him for failing to do something expected of him. One might say, for example, I fell sick and you did not visit me – this is a rebuke. The other person might respond, please pardon me, I was busy doing such and such. As soon as it becomes apparent that he is truly begging pardon, you pardon him, that is, cease rebuking him. This will not be the case in the Hereafter – when they seek rebuke they will not be rebuked. Thus it is narrated in the Hadith of the Messenger *peace be upon him* that he was returning from At-Ta'if after being driven out by its residents, and He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, confiding in his Lord: 'You have the right to rebuke until You are satisfied' ⁽¹⁾ – that is, if anything that I do makes you angry, I will cease it and acknowledge that I am weak and accept Your rebuke. For this reason a poet ⁽²⁾ said:

As for rebuke, it is more fitting for friends

for love is restored and made sincere through rebuke ⁽³⁾

Therefore you are not rebuked unless you are beloved to the one who is rebuking you, concerned to protect your relationship with him. We say, I was rebuked but he pardoned me, that is, ceased rebuking me. As for those in the Hereafter, Allah will not accept from them their pleas for pardon nor will He remove His censure. (The initial *hamza* in the term *i'tab* (rebuke) is called the *hamza* of removal; such 'removal' may either be through the use of a *hamza* or through the doubling of a consonant: *tamrid* means to remove someone's sickness (*marad*), *taqshir* means to peel a fruit's rind (*qishra*).)

(1) Narrated by Ibn-Hisham in his biography of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* (2/419-20) and Al-Bayhaqi in his *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (2/415).

(2) The poet is Ahmad Shawqi, poet laureate, who was born in Cairo and died there in 1932. He grew up under the care of the royal family in Egypt, and the Khedive Tawfiq sent him to France in 1887. His preferred poetic genres include panegyric, lyric, elegiac and descriptive [*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*].

(3) The verse is by Ahmad Shawqi, from a 12-verse poem of the meter *Al-Kamil*.

وَقَيَّضْنَا لَهُمْ قُرَنَاءَ فَزَيَّنُوا لَهُمْ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَحَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ
فِي أَمْرِ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسِ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا خَسِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

We have appointed, for the disbelievers, companions who make their past and present seem fair and right to them, but the sentence has already been passed on them, along with generations of jinn and men before them: they were losers[25] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 25)

The sense of ‘...We have appointed for them...’ means ‘We enumerated for them and prepared for them’ ‘...comrades...’ as close and constant companions. Now the original sense of the term exchange (*muqayada*) is in the context of buying and selling, where you pay a price and get a commodity, for Allah *the Exalted* desires that His servant travel on the path of good which He has laid down for him; so the path of good is delineated for you by Allah, Who desires by this to confirm your sincerity in your attentiveness toward Him. So He brings you peers who object to your path and attempt to turn you aside from it.

Now if you follow these peers, you will swerve because of them and miss your way that Allah has chosen for you. But if you refuse them, you are saved, and the wiles of Iblis (Satan) fail, those things he has made appear attractive to you, and whether it be human devils or devils of the jinn.

It is as though Iblis (Satan) comes only to test the faith of a believer. He whispers his temptations to everyone, and makes evil appear attractive to everyone, but those who are strong of faith consider these temptations and know their source, and so do not obey him. But the weak of faith are drawn in by him and fall into disobedience. Were it not for Iblis (Satan) everyone’s faith would seem the same without anything to challenge it, but there is a challenger, and despite this those who believe have their faith confirmed by it.

His saying, ‘...made fair seeming to them what is before them and what is behind them...’ (*Fussilat*: 25). ‘What is before them’: an emotional affect prompted by the passions? ‘What is behind them,’ that is, that which awaits them in terms of the Day of Resurrection and Judgement. ‘...And the word proved true against them – among the nations of the jinn and the men that have passed away before them – that they shall surely be losers’ (*Fussilat*: 25).

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَسْمَعُوا لِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَالْغَوَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

The disbelievers say, ‘Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk: you may gain the upper hand’ [26] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 26)

The Arabs of old were characterised by an innately Arab disposition that revels in language and excels at its technical and stylistic arts. This may be seen in the fact that they held congresses and market displays for the spoken word – when the other nations held market displays for promoting their goods, the Arabs had no goods other than speech and eloquence. Thus they had presentations in which the best specimens of their poetry were recited and judged to determine the most superior of all, which were then hung on the curtains of the *Ka’ba*, the noblest place on earth. This did not happen in any other nation.

For this reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* chose the Arab nation to receive His directive. Thus His summons reached His creation, His Quran came down to them for they were the only nation that would understand His language and revel in it.

Thus the Quran came down to a nation with a gift for language and expression to serve as a challenge. Given that they were defeated by the challenge of the Quran, it is obvious that this applies to other nations even more so; for Allah did not give the Arab nation precedence in anything except in language and expression. Thus the key of religion and the miracle of the Prophetic mission would come to be the Quran.

Had this nation been a nation of progress and civilisation in any other field apart from language, they would have said that Islam represented a cultural revolution. But no, it is not a civilised nation but an unlettered nation, and its messengers were also unlettered.

On this basis, then, the illiteracy of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* served to ennoble and distinguish him, but it is not ennobling for us because the illiteracy of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* meant that he did not receive knowledge by way of man – for all knowledge is from Allah. So who cultivated him, who educated him, who taught him? It is Allah *the Almighty*.

So if this nation was unlettered, and its messengers were unlettered, this indicates that everything good about this nation does not come through the agency of man.

This nation was also distinguished by its not having a homeland. The Arab's place of residence is his tent, which he stakes wherever water and grazing may be found, and carries it on the back of his camel somewhere else when the water there dries up or the grazing runs out. He has no homeland or any house dear to him that would prevent him from leaving it, for his house is on the back of his camel. For this reason He *the Exalted* said: '...dwellings out of the skins of animals – easy for you to handle when you travel and when you camp...' (*an-Nahl*: 80).

There is another, more important element to this which is that the Arabs were always in a state of war, with a single war between the tribes sometimes lasting up to forty years. These wars made them all experts in the arts of fighting and battle. Thus when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* needed forces to spread his call, no one had to train for battle – troops were already at the ready. Thus there were no army schools for training in war. So when we consider that the Arabs had no attachment to place and were expert in the art of war, we see that it was easy to raise an army at a moment's notice, and to send groups of people here or there bearing the banner of Islam. And indeed, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sent them to Persia and to Byzantium and to Ethiopia and so on, and it was easy for them.

For this reason the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have a formal army reserved for fighting since he had no need of such an army. Whenever he needed to fight he had only to give the summons 'come to war!' and the Companions would rally around him – the young men among them would especially compete among themselves for the privilege of going out to fight with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* such that The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had to choose among them, saying, 'This one goes and this one stays'. Whoever did not get chosen by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would become upset and perhaps even cry because he would not get to go to war along with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus this nation had a number of characteristics that qualified it to serve as a locus for the Path of Allah and the spreading of His Message. First, they were a nation of eloquence and fine speech. Second, they were a nomadic nation with no settled homeland. Third, they were expert in the art of war and fighting and needed no training in army camps, but were ready to fight at a moment's notice; whenever they heard the call to war they would fly toward it. On this basis, then, they were inherently prepared to carry out this mission.

His saying in relating about the disbelievers of the Quraysh: 'Now those who are bent on denying the truth say [unto one another]: "Do not listen to this Quran"...' (*Fussilat*: 26) – this comes in response to the Arabs' proficiency and discernment with respect to language, and their understanding of its subtleties; had they let the people listen to Muhammad when he was reciting the Quran, they would not have been able to help being affected by it and being attracted to it. So what was the solution?

For them the solution was '..."Do not listen to this Quran"...' (*Fussilat*: 26) since they knew for certain that were they to listen to it, the Quran would take them in with its beauty of style, its grandness of meaning and its forcefulness – had they thought otherwise they would not have forbidden their people from listening to it.

Now, they did not stop simply with forbidding them to listen to it, but encouraged them to try to fluster him when he would recite: '..."but rather talk frivolously about it, so that you might gain the upper hand!"' (*Fussilat*: 26) Thus their strategy for defeating him was to not listen to the Quran, and to disturb him while he was reciting it so as not to give the opportunity for those who were listening to dwell on it properly. Their saying '..."so that you might"...' indicates the possibility that they might win if they carried out this strategy, not that it was certain to work.

The evidence for this is that they believed in the eloquence of the Quran and its inimitability, and in the end when all their stratagems had failed they said of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was possessed. Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them, saying to His Messenger: 'for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life' (*al-Qalam*: 4) – does a crazy person have any kind of proper behaviour, much less sublime behaviour?

They said that while knowing of the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Allah's Messenger *peace be upon him* and his admirable comportment among them – they called him a sorcerer. Now to answer that charge is easy: if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had simply entranced those who believed in him, then why did he not entrance them as he had entranced others and be done with the matter? And they called him a poet, lying in this as well, for they were a nation of rhetoric and expression, and knew very well what constituted poetry; but they had never heard poetry from Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Finally they had to acknowledge the veracity of the Quran and its eloquence and inimitability, but refused to believe that it had actually been revealed to Muhammad himself, saying, 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (az-Zukhruf: 31)

Now the problem was not with the Quran itself since it is obviously what it is said to be, but rather with its revelation to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a poor man among the common people of the tribe, not a leading man of its notables, such men as 'Utba, Shayba and others. In this they confirmed and testified to the Quran, that it was indeed a perfect Book comprising all goodness and perfect morals necessary for one's welfare in this world and in the Afterlife. So their objection was only to the person of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, not to the Quran per se.

However, they did not realise that, from the Prophet's point of view, it was much preferable that they testify to the Quran and confirm its inimitability rather than testifying to him; for those who believe in Allah and believe in His revelation are closer to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* than those who deny Him.

Now the Byzantines did not believe Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but they believed in a Book and in revelation and in messengers; the Persians did not have this belief that the Byzantines had. Thus the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers inclined in their hearts toward the Byzantines, since they were people of the Book and believed in Allah. This is because the partisanship of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* towards his Lord was greater than his partisanship toward himself. Consider how the Muslims were saddened at the defeat of Byzantium and rejoiced at its subsequent victory

فَلَنَذِقَنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَشْوَأَ الَّذِي كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

We shall certainly give the disbelievers a taste of severe punishment. We shall repay them according to their worst deeds [27]

(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 27)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has not reserved the punishment of sins solely for the Hereafter, so as not to let vain people deteriorate further in their vanity – rather, Allah hastens for the vain some part of their punishment in this world before that of the next; and the punishment of the Hereafter is far more severe. Thus He *the Exalted* said, addressing His Messenger: ‘...whether We show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned’ (*Ghafir*: 77).

The True Lord says:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاءُ أَعْدَاءِ اللَّهِ النَّارُ لَهُمْ فِيهَا دَارُ الْخُلْدِ جَزَاءُ بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَمْحَدُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

That is the reward of the enemies of God – the Fire will be their lasting home, a payment for their rejection of Our revelations [28]

(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 28)

‘That’—meaning what was mentioned previously about punishment; ‘knowingly rejected,’ that is, forcefully denied. So when those who disbelieve understand their position relative to Islam, and the untruthfulness of those who called them to error becomes apparent to them, they will then seek vengeance not against the believers but against those disbelievers who led them astray and removed them from belief. On the Day of Resurrection they will search out such people to revenge them, and to trample them under their feet. At that time a battle and controversy will ensue between two parties, followers, and leaders.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا رَبَّنَا أَرْنَا الَّذِينَ ضَلَّوْنَا مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ
 نَجْعَلُهُمْ تَحْتَ أَقْدَامِنَا لِيَكُونُوا مِنَ الْأَسْفَلِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

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

The True Lord *Glorified is He* in more than one place in the Quran describes for us this battle of words which will ensue between those who led others into error and those who are so led, and how representatives of the two groups will cast blame on each other and divest themselves of responsibility.

For this reason, Iblis (Satan) will have the upper hand over those whom he led into error, and will have the more convincing argument. As Allah *the Exalted* says in relating about him: ‘...Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...’ (*Ibrahim*: 22).

That is, not on the basis of an argument that swayed you, nor on the basis of some power to convince you to act. How strange it is that the disbelievers will say on the Day of Resurrection ‘O our Lord, Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray...’ (*Fussilat*: 29) – Now they call Him their Lord and acknowledge His Lordship. And the meaning of ‘...we shall trample them underfoot, so that they shall be the lowest of all’ (*Fussilat*: 29) is, we will ourselves punish them first before You, O Lord, punish them. ‘Underfoot’ – that is, punishment by humiliation, not by inflicting pain. Allah says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَمُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا
 تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

As for those who say, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and take the straight path towards Him, the angels come down to them and say, ‘Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised [30] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 30)

They say Our Lord is Allah; here there are two terms, Lord and Allah. Now each term has a certain semantic range: a Lord is one who raises, trains

and takes it upon himself to show us excellence and good; we say, ‘We took care of him’, meaning that we gave him what he needed. Now Allah is a Lord Who created creatures in need and helped those who were non-existent, and still takes care of us with tender concern until such time as we become strong and our limbs firm, whereupon He gives us certain responsibilities in His capacity as God.

Therefore, the gift that comes from His being Lord is universal and encompasses both believer and disbeliever, obedient and rebellious. Allah is the Lord of all, and His Grace reaches to all His creation. He created you, and created all the basics you would need for your life before He created you, and gave you a mind with which to discern and choose between alternatives. If you use your mind well with respect to what He gave you in the basics of life, then you will be able to reap their fruits, but if you do not use it well, then you will lose. Thus, the gift of the Lord is for all, and the necessities of life are granted to all and given to those who deserve them, even if they are disbelievers.

For this reason you find in the story⁽¹⁾ of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that episode where he said: ‘...“O my Lord! Make this a land secure, and grant its people fruitful sustenance – such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day”...’ (*al-Baqara*: 126), thus making a request for daily sustenance only for those who believe. Allah *Glorified is He* corrected him on the matter, and said, ‘and whoever shall deny the truth...’ (*al-Baqara*: 126), for my sustenance is for all of my creatures, whether or not they believe because they are My creation and of My fashioning. I am The One Who called them into being, and so it is My duty to provide their sustenance and their basics of life – this is the gift of The Lord.

Now someone knocked on Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham) door one night seeking to stay the night with him; he first asked him his religion, and when he learned that he was not a believer he locked the door in his face, and the man went away. Allah *Glorified is He* reprimanded His prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), saying to him, Ibrahim (Abraham), he belongs to My dominion, and I have not withheld from him My sustenance despite his lack of belief in Me – yet you want to change his religion on a night you invite him to be your guest.

(1) *The story of the guest of Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him with his disbelieving guest*

So Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* went running after the man until he had caught up with him, and took him in as a guest. The man was surprised and said, 'I came to you and you rebuffed me!' Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* replied, 'Yes, but my Lord reprimanded me for doing that to you'. The man said, 'Your Lord reprimanded you on my account?' 'Yes', said Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. He said, 'how wonderful a Lord Who reprimands His prophets for the sake of His enemies.' He then said, 'I witness that there is no god but Allah, and that you are the Messenger of Allah.'

Therefore, we often wonder at how Allah's gift encompasses unbelievers, and they possess all the goods of this world and its glories, while the believer is deprived. Yet this is not strange, for this is the gift of the Lord, and those people used their resources wisely and reaped the benefit – were you to similarly use your resources wisely you would achieve the same.

Now read Allah's saying: 'And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways whereon to ascend, [33] and [silver] doors for their houses, and [silver] couches whereon to recline, [34] and gold [beyond count]...[35]' (*az-Zukhruf*: 33-35).

Consider what these ascending stairways might be: they are those escalators which we have only come to know in the twentieth century. The Quran is here informing us about them fourteen centuries before their time, one of the miracles of the Quran which it divulges to us from time to time.

And His saying, '[But] behold, as for those who say "Our Lord is Allah"...' (*Fussilat*: 30) – that is, they acknowledge Him *Glorified is He* that it is His Nature to sustain, and confirm that He *Glorified is He* is The One Who created us and nurtured us and gives us good things. It is amazing that He does not give us responsibilities until we become strong adults, that is, He left me playing in the world and enjoying its good things for fifteen years without requiring anything of me. Why?

Because He does not impose responsibility on you until after your formation is complete and your powers are at their full, for were He to impose such responsibility on you and then you suddenly found yourself changing

and some of your limbs becoming larger, you would say to Him, O my Lord, You imposed this responsibility on me, but then these changes happened to me, and I am no longer able to fulfil that responsibility.

And when do you reach maturity? They say that you are an adult when you become capable of producing another human being like yourself, at which point your nature is complete and your manhood in place. We see the same thing happening with fruits: the ripe fruit gives its seed, and if this is placed in the soil it produces a tree. Take a melon, for example – before it is ripe you find that its pulp is whitish and its taste is watery and bland. Why? Because it is not yet ripe, and if you were to plant its seeds they would not produce anything.

It is as though Allah is protecting the fruit so its seeds can ripen and become capable of producing a new tree. We call this perpetuation of the species, without which it would go extinct. Were a melon to ripen and become sweet before its seeds ripened, we would eat it without paying attention to the seeds and their inability to create a new tree, and the species would die out.

Thus if you ignore the fruit until it has matured on its stalk and do not pick it, it falls for you on the ground of its own accord. It is as though it is saying to you, take me, since it will both give you the pleasure of its taste and will produce a new tree of the same species.

Now creation is of two kinds: original creation, and secondary creation. Original creation is when the fundamental properties of things were created; secondary creation is when everything that derives from these fundamental properties is created. Therefore, when Yusuf (Joseph) the carpenter said to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* after it became apparent that she was pregnant, ‘Maryam (Mary), does a tree emerge without a seed?’ she answered, ‘Yes, that tree which produced the first seed.’ This then is the original creation, like the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* who was first created and then all mankind descended from him.

Therefore, the imposition of responsibility does not occur until after one attains to maturity and manhood, and the One Who so assigns us responsibility is Allah. The Lord creates and provides and nurtures, while Allah assigns

responsibility and commands us to worship – thus Allah is our object of worship, that is, the One Whose commands and interdictions are obeyed. But before His commands and interdictions are obeyed, He gives to you as the Lord. It is as though He first gives you good before He commands you to worship Him; in view of this good it is the least you can do to obey the One Who has nurtured you.

For this reason He assigned a special status to parents, and commanded us to honour them and forbade us from disrespecting them – indeed, He has made disrespect of one's parents one of the major sins. Why? They say that it is because He wanted to teach you to honour those who were the direct cause of your coming into existence. This in turn should lead you to honour the One Who is the indirect cause of your coming into existence, that is, Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus He said, 'And worship Allah [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents...' (*an-Nisa*': 36).

Now when the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded us to honour our parents, He was training us to acknowledge Allah's right. Allah brought the original creation into being, while one's parents were responsible for one's secondary creation. Honouring the latter then becomes a means for honouring the former.

Thus we associate gifting with Allah's status as Lord, and the imposition of responsibility with His status as God. But He first gives you responsibility because you are in the world, and one's lifetime in the world is that part of one's existence in it. You have no say in how long your lifetime will be in the span of history between Adam *peace be upon him* and the Hour of Resurrection, for this whole time period does not concern you. Allah decides how long each person will live: this one lives ten years that one lives fifty years, another one lives a hundred – no one has any say in how long they will live.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* alludes to the rebellious nations which reject their Messengers and the punishment they will receive, He *Glorified is He* proceeds to touch on their counterparts, people who do believe and who tread the Straight Path. He *the Exalted* says: '[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Lord is Allah," and then steadfastly pursue the right way...' (*Fussilat*: 30). Now we say that actions comprise both word and deed: words

are the actions of the tongue and correspond to other deeds, the actions of the rest of the bodily members: the eye sees, the ears hear, the hands touch, the feet walk and so on. So all words and deeds are called actions

But what is the action of the heart? From the physical point of view it is the vessel responsible for the circulation of the blood, pumping life to all the other parts of the body. It is also the vessel of faith and belief; if it is built up through certainty and faith they will spread throughout every cell of the body. For this reason we say that the heart's action is belief. An item of belief is something that is so tied together that it cannot be dissolved, something that is established in the heart such that it cannot be exposed to the intellect's quibbles anymore.

We have said that thought is first presented to the intellect to be evaluated and criticised, and if it finds it to be sound it passes it on to the heart to be established as a firm item of belief. Thus the heart only accepts proven items of belief, and these beliefs serve you as the basis for all the actions of your life.

From this we know the importance and danger of the tongue's role. It is responsible for fully half of one's actions, with the rest being apportioned to the other members of the body. This is because it is what expresses who you are, reveals eloquently what you have inside you. All the members must interact in a positive sense with the universe – the ear hears, the eye sees, the nose smells, the hand touches – and by so doing they give me a basis for thought; through them the believer arrives at the signs of Allah in the universe, through them he recognises what is helpful and what is harmful, taking what is helpful and avoiding what is harmful. The ear hears everything, but it is up to you to focus it on hearing what is good and avoid hearing what is bad: '...and [who], whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity' (*al-Furqan*: 72).

You see with your eye the wondrousness of Allah's handiwork in His creation, and lower your gaze lest you look on what is forbidden. Behold the universe is laid open before you like a book – all that you are to do is to read the signs and miracles that are in it. The heavens and everything in them, sun, moon, stars, celestial bodies, galaxies, they all move according to a minutely

specified order; the earth and everything on it, the various elements and the good things they give rise to.

Now when the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to us about these good things and bestows upon us these bounties, He is reminding us of His Power to abolish and do away with them, and how if He *Glorified is He* wished He could deprive us of them – indeed, He could even replace them with His Wrath, Allah forbid. Thus we pause to consider His statement about farming: ‘is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth?’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 64) Yes, we plough the field and irrigate and tend it, but who causes the growth of plants? He *Glorified is He* then reminds us of His Power to do away with this bounty: ‘[For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you would be left to wonder [and to lament]’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 65).

He then speaks to us of the bounty of water, and how He could do away with it: ‘Have you ever considered the water which you drink? [68] Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds – or are We the cause of its coming down? [69] [It comes down sweet – but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]? [70]’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 69-70)

But when He *Glorified is He* speaks to us about the bounty of fire, He simply mentions it without stating what does away with it: ‘Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle? [71] Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel – or are We the cause of its coming into being? [72]’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 71-72)

Thus it is without any mention of what does away with it, unlike the previous instances – why? They say that it is because it is the type of fire that is beneficial for us and does not cause us harm, the fire we light to use; every other kind of fire is harmful. For this reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say, for example, had We wished We would have made it embers, in order that fire may remain a reminder of the fire of the Hereafter.

Now you should observe the greatness of the Quranic method and the subtlety of its expression. When it speaks of farming it says, ‘[For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff...’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 65), using the

particle of emphasis – why? In order to affirm His Power to destroy it, whatever it is. Now man has a role in this and must intervene – he ploughs and irrigates and tends. It is only when it speaks of man's creation and of water that it does not have this particle of emphasis; this is because man has no role in creation or in the raining down of water from heaven.

Now the signs in Allah's universe are many; scholars have classified them according to three categories:

Signs in the universe: these establish the Power of The Creator *Glorified is He* for example, night and day, sun and moon. *Signs and wonders:* these accompanied the Messengers of Allah in order to confirm their veracity in their message from Allah. Finally, *signs of the law:* these are the signs of the Holy Quran which express Allah's path for mankind. All of these serve to make us certain and believe firmly in Allah.

If a man partakes of the creed of faith he proclaims it joyfully with his tongue. Here may be seen the role of the tongue in expressing what is in the heart, thus leading the other bodily members. For this reason it comes in the Hadith that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Not a day goes by but the members call out to the tongue saying, Fear Allah for our sakes, for we are dependent on you: if you go rightly we do too, and if you swerve from the straight path so do we.'⁽¹⁾

His saying, '[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Lord is Allah"...' (*Fussilat*: 30) makes reference to the saying of believers in whose hearts belief is firmly rooted, their tongues expressing saying that '..."Our Lord is Allah"...' – our Creator, our Nurturer, Who created us from nothing and supplied us in our deprivation, giving to us safety and security, for He is The One Who says [of Himself], '...Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep...' (*al-Baqara*: 255).

Now when a man wishes to guard something he hires a guard, but what use is the guard if he sleeps? As for you, believer, you are in the guardianship

(1) Ahmad, (*Musnad*) [3/96]. In his *Sunnan*, At-Tirmidhi gives the same Hadith as from Abu-Sa'id Al-Khudri, 'When a man wakes in the morning his members take his tongue to task, saying, "Fear Allah for our sakes, for we are dependent on you: if you go rightly we do too, and if you swerve from the straight path so do we"'.

of Allah, so sleep at peace in your heart, for your guard is not overtaken by slumber or by sleep.

Now when a believer takes account of all this bounty, and when he sees everything he needs for his life in easy reach, whether food and drink, safety and peace, air to breathe and earth to give him everything he desires, he delights in the gift of Allah to him and can only say 'Our Lord is Allah' because it is a belief that has become established in his heart.

Given that your Lord is Allah, do not grieve or worry over the matters of this life – Allah will take care of your affairs. Consider how the child does not have a care during the lifetime of his father, and does not think about how expensive things might be, nor of daily sustenance and goods and clothes, and so on, for his father is there. How much more so if Allah is the One Who takes care of you? By Allah, the true believer should be ashamed to worry about daily sustenance, given that he knows that his Lord is Allah.

Given that '..."Our Lord is Allah"...' no harm will befall you. Your Lord will still take care of your affairs, and keep evil away from you, and provide you sufficiency in all that concerns you.

You recall the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with Pharaoh. When Pharaoh followed him with his troops, '...the followers of Musa (Moses) exclaimed: "Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!"' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 61) since this is what seemed to be inevitable: in front of them was the sea and behind them were Pharaoh's troops, with no escape. But what did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* say? He said, '..."Nay indeed!"...' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62), that is, they will not overtake us nor catch any of us. He said this from the point of view of his belief and his trust in his Lord and His protection of him. Allah never sent one of His Messengers and then abandoned him to his enemy.

'He replied: "Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!"' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62) And thus relief came to him from his Lord immediately: 'thereupon We inspired Musa (Moses) thus: "Strike the sea with your staff!" – whereupon it parted, and each part appeared like a mountain vast' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63).

Consider here Allah's protection of His allies, consider this miracle, and consider such sustaining. No sooner had Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said this with sincerity of faith but that he received an answer; Allah took away from the water its liquidity and it became solid on either side, each like a great mountain, and between them an entirely dry path by which Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his troops passed. Once he had reached the opposite shore, he wanted to strike the sea again to make it return to its fluidity, thus closing off the path in the face of Pharaoh. But his Lord guided him and corrected him in this – and Allah's is the ultimate control – for the time was not yet right. Allah *Glorified is He* said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'and leave the sea becalmed [between you and Pharaoh's men]: for, verily, they are a host destined to be drowned!' (*ad-Dukhan*: 24)

After Allah *Glorified is He* had saved Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his tribe and had brought them to the desert, He gave to Musa's (Moses) staff another function: 'And [remember] when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people and We replied, "Strike the rock with your staff!" – whereupon twelve springs gushed forth from it...' (*al-Baqara*: 60). Now the staff was the same staff with which he had struck the water to make it a mountain, and now he struck the mountain and made it water; the effect was in each case different for The Actor was Allah, The fully Capable.

His saying, '..."Our Lord is Allah"...' (*Fussilat*: 30) – This gives us a general idea of the Lord's giving on the plane of the physical and of values. Now your Lord is the One Who supplies all your material needs, so why would he leave you without your spiritual needs? Just as you accept His provision in terms of food and drink and housing, so too accept His provision with respect to religious obligation, for it is through such obligation that He instils values within your spirit.

Here we must contemplate for example His saying: 'O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness, and as a thing of beauty: but the garment of Allah-consciousness is the best of all. Herein lies a message from Allah, so that man might take it to heart' (*al-A'raf*: 26).

Now Allah *the Exalted* has given you what is necessary in terms of clothing, which is what covers your nakedness, and has also given you certain luxuries in your dress – ornamentation and such – on account of which people pride themselves over their neighbours.

Thus we say ‘so-and-so is overly elegant.’ But do not forget that the garment of Allah-consciousness is better. That is superior to the first kind of clothing. Material clothing covers your nakedness in this world, but the garment of God-consciousness covers you both in this world and in the next.

Therefore it represents an eternal and perpetual gift in the Hereafter, and is thus the best clothing for all those who are intelligent and understanding. In His capacity as our Lord, He has given us what elevates our material life and makes happy our time in this world; nor has He *Glorified is He* deprived our hearts of those spiritual elements that will make us happy in the Hereafter.

Now read if you will His saying: ‘Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high mark, and cattle, and lands. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world – but the most beautiful of all goals is with Allah’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 14). Now what exists with Allah in the Hereafter is eternal, whereas all that is material perishes and passes away. This world in its entirety is simply a staging point to prepare for the eternal Hereafter, and Allah gives you the true gift that will remain in perpetuity. Consider how we teach a small child in various stages (elementary, preparatory, high school, college) – why all this work? Because we hope that it will make him a productive member of society. Likewise in this world we work towards a higher goal, the Hereafter, wherein is the eternal good which nothing can spoil.

Now consider this assertion on the part of the believers when they say ‘...“Our Lord is Allah”...’ (*Fussilat*: 30). It is an assertion which combines both an acknowledgement of the gift of the Lord and that of Allah.

Allah is Himself both the God Who gives and the God Who requires of us obedience. Now whoever receives from his Lord the Lord’s gift, accepting His provision as Creator out of nothingness and Supplier of what we lack, it does not befit him, that he then shirks the obligations He lays upon him,

especially as these obligations are for the sake of a person's happiness in this world and in the Hereafter, not to cause him any hardship.

Now the gift of the Lord is present also in what He gives in His capacity as Allah. It is well known that obligation is couched in the form 'Do this, do not do that,' and that it is incumbent upon you to carry out what you are commanded and to refrain from what you are told to avoid. As for anything that the text of revelation does not mention, you are free to do or not do as you like.

He *the Exalted* then relates what happens with those believers who after they say 'Our Lord is Allah' and affirm both Allah's divinity and His Lordship, this creed becoming firmly rooted with them: '...and then steadfastly pursue the right way...' (*Fussilat*: 30) – That is, action follows words.

Consider here the conjunctive particle 'then': in grammar it is used to sequentially order statements. There is a specific reason why He *Glorified is He* did not simply say '...and so they steadfastly pursue the right way...' (*Fussilat*: 30) which is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to give you an opportunity to stop and contemplate this creed so that you might gladly believe in it and act according to it fully convinced, such that you might develop such a love for it that it brings you to the point of passion for uprightness, for the pursuit of the right way.

Now the meaning of uprightness is taking something as it is meant to be taken; it demands that one proceed along a straight line, which Allah has called the Straight Path. Allah wants you, O believer, to use as a means to the goal obedience to the dictates of your obligation, the path from which you will not deviate by even a hair's breadth.

Now when you travel along a very wide road you might go here and there, and indeed this is quite possible on a road like that, but do not forget that this will lengthen the distance of your journey and make it harder. For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* called His path that brings one to His paradise '...the Straight Path...' (*al-Fatiha*: 6), and in another place He calls it '...the right path...' (*al-Baqara*: 108) – that is, right in the middle of the path, without swerving to either side.

Now if the goal is far off, it is necessary to make haste in order to reach your destination. So what about those whose goal is paradise? They will

undoubtedly hurry towards it without sparing any effort on the route that leads in the correct direction.

For this reason we say that a believer does not need to hate death since it is what will bring him to his goal. Rather, he should only hate death if his deeds are not righteous – yes, in that case he will shirk from meeting Allah in such a state. With the result of their efforts in sight, for example, you ardent seekers hurrying towards it – why? Because they find peace and satisfaction there, whereas you see the lazy ambling along slowly and carelessly

Therefore, our Lord *the Exalted* teaches us: ‘and vie with one another to attain to your Lord’s forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 133).

He also says in describing the believers: ‘...these [three] would vie with one another in doing good works...’ (*al-Anbiya*: 90). In other words, beware of allowing this life to preoccupy you – let all your steps be towards the Hereafter, compete with each other in running in that direction, for you do not know how much of the path you will be able to travel before death overtakes you.

It is an example of His justness toward His servant that He keeps for Himself the length of His servant’s life, yet leaves to him two other dimensions, breadth, and depth. How so? They say that with respect to duration, no one but Allah knows how long your life will be, and Allah only controls its end; but He leaves it up to you to expand your life in terms of breadth as you will. Thus you may take advantage of the moment you have and make the most good you can out of it; by so doing the breadth of your life will be greater than its length. For the important thing is not the length of life, but the amount of good you are able to do in it.

Now there are those who accomplish amazing things in a short lifetime, things that someone who lives much longer than them never accomplishes. For this reason, when Allah describes paradise for us He says: ‘and vie with one another to attain to your Lord’s forgiveness and to a paradise as vast’⁽¹⁾

(1) *Al-Bazzaz* related from *Abu-Hurayra* that a man came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘Have you seen His saying, “...a paradise as vast as the heavens and earth...”’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 133) – but where is the hellfire? He replied, have you seen how=

as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious' (*Al-Imran*: 133).

The verse mentions the breadth of paradise. When the breadth is equal to the heavens and the earth, then, how long is its length? Also, Allah mentions another dimension which is the depth or the span. The believer gains more depth and increases his life span, (in terms of the good deeds which determine how much reward a person will be given) after death and when their work in this world comes to an end, by the good effects of their actions that keep running throughout time even after their death.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded us to journey along the straightway, and to hurry to do good, He intended by this that we should proceed along the easiest and most direct of routes that will bring us to the noblest of destinations with the least amount of effort. It is well known to engineers that a straight line is the shortest path between any two points.

Indeed, Allah does not want us to take the long road and walk it in vain. Meanwhile, He commands us to vie with each other in order to maintain the vigour necessary to reach our goal. Therefore, Allah says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Kahf* (the Cave): 'All praise is due to Allah who has bestowed this Divine scripture from on high upon His servant, and has not allowed any deviousness to obscure its meaning: [1] [a Divine scripture] unerringly straight...[2]' (*al-Kahf*: 1-2).

The uprightness that Allah wants of us has certain basic principles that have been elucidated by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

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- = when the night descends it covers all – where then is the day? The man said, "Wherever Allah wills". He replied, so it is with the hellfire – it is wherever Allah wills it to be.' In his commentary [1/404] *Ibn-Kathir* says: 'This can have two meanings. The first: When the day comes and we do not see the night, it does not follow that it does not exist anywhere, even if we do not know where; likewise with hellfire, it exists wherever Allah wills. This is the more straightforward meaning. The second meaning: When the day covers one face of the earth, night covers the other face; likewise with paradise: it exists at the highest level of existence, above the heavens and under the Throne, with its dimensions as described by Allah, while hellfire exists at the lowest level of existence. This setup does not prevent hellfire from existing even though paradise encompasses the heavens and the earth.'

in his Hadith: 'Islam is founded on five (Pillars): the Testimony that there is no Allah but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the prayer, obligatory alms (*zakat*), fasting the month of *Ramadan*, and Pilgrimage to the *Ka 'ba* for those who are able to make the journey.'⁽¹⁾

One should not suppose that the religion consists only of these five things and nothing more; no, these are simply the foundations upon which the edifice of the religion is erected. The comprehensive religion of Islam covers every movement and detail of our life.

This issue is clarified by the noble Hadith: 'Belief consists of some and sixty (or some and seventy) branches, the highest of which is the statement "There is no Allah but Allah," and the least of which is to remove an obstacle from the road; modesty is also a branch of belief.'⁽²⁾

So, these basic Pillars are not the entirety of Islam; rather, they are the bases and foundations of Islam. The two Testimonies affirm Allah's Divinity, obedience to Him *Glorified is He* and believing in His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prayer, which is performed five times a day, is the declaration of a Muslim's constant devotion to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Giving Alms is a moral training for the human soul to get accustomed to giving, cooperation and caring about the poor that is, those who are actually poor because of incapacitation, not those practising the profession of the poor, which is beggary. Moreover, *zakat* (obligatory alms) is a demonstration of solidarity among members of society. Today, you happen to be strong and in a position to give; then you may become weak and incapacitated, in which case you will find someone in society who is stretching out his hand to help you.

As well, *zakat* (obligatory alms) cures the society from social diseases such as resentfulness, envy and jealousy. How can a poor man envy a rich man or

(1) *A sound Hadith related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [8] and Muslim in his Sahih [16], on the authority of a statement by 'Umar's son Allah be pleased with them: The Messenger of God said: 'Islam is founded on five things: the Testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, prayer, obligatory alms, the Pilgrimage, and the fast of Ramadan.'*

(2) *A sound Hadith related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [9] and Muslim in his Sahih [35], on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

be resentful towards him when the latter gives the former part of the fruit of his effort and a share in his wealth? Therefore, *zakat* (obligatory alms) is the best kind of insurance a believing individual can have.

Thus, we have said, regarding the issue of a faith-based society, that an individual does not take pains in work only as much as is necessary to secure their needs; rather, they work as much as they can. This way, a person can satisfy their own needs, and if there is a surplus in their resources, they give it out as charity to the weak and poor ones. Give charity, go directly yourself to the house of a poor man to give to him, since this way you will preserve his dignity, and relieve him of the humiliation of having to ask you; in this way you will gain such a rank.

Then, comes the pilgrimage to add to these aspects another feature of faith: your Lord, Who created you, provided your needs and granted you power and capability, does not He deserve from you that you visit the house He has chosen to be attributed to Himself, if only once in your lifetime?

This visiting does not depend on the will of the visitor, but rather on the invitation of the host. Thus, when you go to the house of your Lord in fulfilling this religious duty, you present yourself for another gift, one without bounds. In the pilgrimage are further benefits pertaining to both this life and the next, as is obvious to the thoughtful people.

As for the fast, it gives you another dimension for obedience; before dawn you may eat and drink, but after dawn you are not permitted to do so. It is a moment that parts between what is permitted and what is forbidden. When you fast, you fast from something that Allah has permitted for you before fasting. So, you are fasting from something completely permissible, rather than from those things like wine for example, which Islam declares totally forbidden.

Praise to Allah, we do not drink wine, nor ever contemplate drinking it, such that this attitude becomes second nature to us. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to dislodge us from the things we are familiar with and instil in His servant a sense of the sweetness of the duties imposed by Allah, with respect to something which is perfectly permissible one moment and forbidden the next. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* replaces our ordinary habits with the honour of worship.

As for that permanent pillar of Islam which always applies to a believer except in the case of madness, it is the ritual *salat* (prayer). It involves five separate prayers per day whose purpose is to make for one's constant presence with Allah; in its constancy and frequency it differs from the other religious duties. The *zakat* (obligatory alms) is dependent on one's annual income, the fast is dependent on a single month in the year (*Ramadan*), and the pilgrimage needs only be done once in a lifetime, based on the ability to afford the requirements.

The fact that the ritual prayer is performed five times a day is a mercy from Allah to His servants. You, the creation of Allah, are summoned by Him to His moral presence five times a day to set right what has gone awry in you; how good would the status be of a product which is examined by its manufacturer five times every day?

An engineer, for example, fixes a machine with replacement wires or parts; likewise your Lord fixes the trouble with you. But whereas the engineer uses material things to fix something material, Allah is immaterial and fixes your immaterial part. Therefore, do not tire yourself attempting to delve into this matter; just leave it to Allah. Your responsibility is only to present yourself to Him in the five prayers at their appointed times, and to perform properly their bowings, prostrations and other requirements.

Certainly, you will observe an improvement in yourself, in your spirit and in your physical being, in your finances and in your family. You will feel that prayer has a distinct effect on your life and eases your body. For this reason, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Bilal *Allah be pleased with him*: 'O, Bilal, put us at ease by it!'⁽¹⁾ Make us comfortable through prayer, not put us at ease away from prayer!

Due to its importance in the life of a Muslim, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called it the very fountainhead of righteousness as well as its banner. Read if you will Allah's words: '...for, behold, prayer restrains [man] from loathsome deeds and from all that runs counter to reason...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 45).

(1) *This Hadith is given by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad [5/364] and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [4985] as referencing one of the Companions.*

And in the Noble Hadith, 'The first thing the servant will be judged for on the Day of Resurrection is his performance of the prayer, for if it be done properly, all his other acts will be good, and if it be done improperly, so too will his other acts.'⁽¹⁾

Prayer, therefore, has a special status. You see that the poor man is not obligated to give alms or perform the pilgrimage, and the sick man is not obligated to fast. On the contrary, prayer is incumbent upon the Muslim both in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, in travel and at home; only the insane are excused from the obligation to perform prayer.

Thus, it is the pillar that is always incumbent upon you. Hence, prayer has a special quality in its status as a religious duty; all the acts of worship are enjoined by revelation, except prayer, which was imparted to our Prophet Muhammad directly during his night journey and ascent. This indicates its exceptional importance among the acts of worship. We previously explained this by comparing it to the behaviour of your boss at work: he may send you a memo or call you on the phone to inform you about some task, but for more important or sensitive tasks, he will call you into his office to tell you directly. This was the case with prayer; it takes its value from the directness with which it was imparted as an obligation.

(1) *This Hadith is given in many different versions and wordings, including:*

- *As related by Abu Hurayra, 'I heard the Messenger of God say: "The first of a servant's acts that he will be judged for on the day of resurrection is his performance of the prayer, for if it be done properly he will have succeeded, and if it be done improperly he will have lost out."' At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [378] states that this is a good but irregular Hadith, as does An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan [461].*
- *Another as related by Abu Hurayra, 'The first thing the servant will be judged for on the day of resurrection is his performance of the prayer, for if it be found to be perfect, his record will be judged as perfect, but if it be lacking in any way, He will say (to angels): "Look to see whether you can find other instances of his obedience that will make up for his lack of obedience in this duty" – so will all his other acts be judged.' Thus, in An-Nasa'i's Sunnan [462, 463], Ibn Majah's Sunnan [1415], and Ahmad in his Musnad [9130].*
- *The wording as it is given by Ash-Sha'rawi is given by At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu'jam Al-awsat, Hadith [1929], related by Anas ibn Malik via Al-Qasim ibn 'Uthman. Al-Bukhari states that he has Hadiths that are not agreed upon. So too Isma'il ibn 'Isa, identified as weak by Al-Azdi. It is a weak method according to Al-Albani, but after enumerating all the Hadith methods, he says that it is a sound Hadith according to all methods.*

Moreover, prayer is a pillar that comprises all the other pillars of Islam. It includes the two Testimonies of Faith; it suffices that these two Testimonies, representing the pinnacle of faith and creed, be said once by a Muslim. However, in prayer it is said several times. It also entails a kind of fasting, one more extensive than the fast of *Ramadan*; in *Ramadan*, you abstain from food, drink and certain natural functions, whereas in prayer you fast from more than this; you fast from movement and from speech.

It also includes a type of pilgrimage; to perform prayer, you must orient your face towards the direction of the holy house of Allah, visualizing it in front of you, as though you were gazing upon it. Prayer also includes almsgiving, since, in prayer, you sacrifice what is more precious than money; you sacrifice time.

Therefore, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified the difference between the believer and the disbeliever as being the act of prayer, saying: 'the covenant that distinguishes between us and them is the *salat* (prayer); whoever abandons it has committed disbelief.'⁽¹⁾ So, if your Lord summons you to prayer and you do not respond, you are in a state of rebellion. What do you think would happen if your boss at work called you into his office and you ignored him?

Part of the greatness of this religious duty is its nature as a meeting with Allah. You, despite being a servant of Allah, have total freedom and possess all the necessary elements to hold this meeting; you set the time and place of meeting, you decide what you will talk about during it, and when to finish it. The case is that you hear the call to prayer, upon which you go and perform the ablution, then raise your hands to heaven saying: *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest). You are then in the presence of your Lord and your Creator; you are with Him via a 'direct line,' and there is no doorman or guard or any other mediator between you and Him. For this reason a pious man said:

I am amazed at myself – I am but a servant

Who is received graciously by my Lord whenever I choose

(1) *Related by Ahmad in his Musnad [5/346], Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [1079] (the section on prayer), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2621] from the Hadith of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari; he states that this Hadith is good and sound but irregular.*

He in His most exalted holiness, yet

He meets me where and when I say

Now, your Lord does not wait for you to come to Him, but calls you to visit Him; He approaches you before you approach Him. Indeed, He said in the Qudsi Hadith: 'Whoever remembers Me inwardly, I remember him inwardly; whoever remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in better assembly. Whoever comes to Me walking, I come to him running; whoever draws near to Me by a foot, I draw near to him by a fathom.'⁽¹⁾ Thus, the control is in your own hands. How wonderful a Lord Who treats His servants in such a way and showers such kindness upon them.

Part of His generosity is His rewarding His servant for every act of good done in his life, for such acts are requirements of belief. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says in the chapter *al-Jumu'a* (The day of congregation): 'O you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 9).

As for after prayer, He says: 'And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah's bounty...' (*al-Jumu'a*: 10). So, He takes you away from work and then restores you to it; work is in itself a form of obedience to Allah; the believer must take part in life in order to have a positive and constructive impact.

Islam is, thus, not limited to these five pillars of faith, but extends to every act one does in life. For example, when you build a house, first you erect it on pillars, and then you divide it into a bedroom, a dining room, a living room, a kitchen and so on.

Islam aims for a healthy equilibrium in life and the absence of tension and conflict; it strives to bolster social life, not set it at odds (with religious obligations). It does not want one person to build and another to demolish; rather, it wants all of us to build and no one to tear down. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given to

(1) Related by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [7405, 7505, 7537], Ahmad in his *Musnad* [2/251, 354, 405], At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [3603] as a Hadith of Abu Hurayra; At-Tirmidhi identifies it as a good and sound Hadith.

us this universe in which we live in good condition, characterised by beauty and harmony, and has commanded us to preserve it and indeed to increase its goodness, or at least to leave it as it is without damaging it.

He taught us that when we try to improve things we should do so with a view to the consequence of our actions, and that we should not involve ourselves in something whose outcome we cannot guess, and that we should not let the appearance of things deceive us. These are the characteristics of rational people who act according to wisdom, who weigh good and bad in order to use what is good and avoid what is bad.

We may cite an example from the present age; that is the cotton worm that destroyed most of Egypt's important cotton crop. It took some time until scientists invented a pesticide called DDT, and everyone rushed to use it, thinking that it would get rid of the worms permanently and solve the problem for good. But after a few years the worms developed a resistance to this pesticide and returned to their full strength. Along with the worms, there remained terrible side effects afflicting water, crops, and the soil. Everything in our life had become polluted; we are still suffering greatly because of these pesticides. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* warns us against thoughtlessness in invention and being misled by apparent benefits without considering the consequences. So, beware lest you become involved in a trouble you will not be able to fix later. Consider Allah's saying when reminding His servants of His graces in the verse: 'And [it is He who creates] horses and mules and asses for you to ride, as well as for [their] beauty: and He will yet create things of which [today] you have no knowledge' (*an-Nahl*: 8).

Indeed, we used not to know any means of transportation besides horses, mules and donkeys, but then man created what he had not known previously such as cars, planes, and rockets. There is no doubt that such means serve mankind and make life easier, but they also have bad and destructive effects that were not anticipated by their creators.

Back when cars first appeared, we used to go to Damietta by car, and the roads were not paved then as they are now. The driver would drive at high speed on the dirt road and raise a large cloud of dust in his wake; this dust

caused harm to the pedestrians and the fields, not to mention the exhaust fumes and the respiratory problems the cars cause.

Then, there began to be many accidents and collisions resulting in the death and injury of people, thus filling society with tragedies. As well, when a car runs out of gas it stops wherever it is and will not move.

So, when you compare this means of transport with the natural means that Allah created, we find that Allah's creation is better and safer. Camels or donkeys get you where you need to go and carry your things without having these destructive effects, and their waste is a fertiliser for the soil, and when they are hungry they do not stop but carry you to your destination. Moreover, have you ever seen two camels get into an accident? Therefore it is our responsibility to consider the consequences of something before we create it, and whether its benefits outweigh its detriments.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, explains what the reward is for those believers who say: '..."Our Sustainer is Allah," and then steadfastly pursue the right way...' (*Fussilat*: 30). What is their reward? '...Upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not..."' (*Fussilat*: 30). The angels of Allah who are in heaven, created from light and have no work but to glorify Allah; they do not disobey Allah whatever the command is and actually do what they are commanded. So, when a believer is afflicted by tribulation or suffers discomfort, these angels descend upon him to strengthen him so that he can keep the patient endurance that he must have in such situations. Such a believer would say, 'There is no worry ever while I am believing in You, my Lord; my Lord is *the Almighty* who will relieve my cares and my distress.'

Such is the state of a believer when afflicted by misfortune: he takes refuge in The Causer *Glorified is He* and there comes to him an inspiration from Allah in the words he reminds himself with: 'Endure it patiently and resign yourself to the disposition of Allah. The affliction may be a test from Allah, or expiation for sins that I committed and for which Allah is punishing me now in order to forgive me in the Hereafter. This is a sign of Allah's love for His servant exposing him to punishment in this world so as to forgive him in the Hereafter.'

For this reason, the disbelievers used to rejoice when the believers were stricken with some affliction. But Allah *Glorified is He* taught His Prophet to say: 'Say: "Never can anything befall us save what Allah has decreed!"...' (*at-Tawba*: 51) So, you (disbelievers) rejoice when we are struck with affliction, and we also rejoice since it is from Allah. Affliction for the believer indicates either that Allah is covering over his errors or that He is raising him up a corresponding measure in rank.

How strange it is to see someone who is afflicted by a calamity or going through something unpleasant not addressing the reasons for it or thinking how to avoid it in the future, but rather, he takes refuge in forgetfulness and goes to drink some intoxicating beverage that will help him forget.

This is a grave error. Forgetting will not solve the problem, only thinking about its causes and how to address them will. Drugs and intoxicants do away with your reason and corrupt it precisely at the moment you need it most. When one of us experiences a problem he needs to think hard. Why would you get rid of your reason at a time when you need it most? Do you not usually seek other people's help and advice to solve your problems when circumstances are difficult?

Therefore, consider what caused your affliction; if you have a part in it and it is simply a result of bad behaviour on your part, in which case you are to blame and must rectify your behaviour and consider its consequences. This is the first step on the path of improvement. This is like the student who goes to find out his grade at the end of the year and is told that he failed; the blow awakens him, and he cries out at the top of his voice with the cry of understanding, 'I am the cause of this, I am lazy, I deserve it!'

But, if the affliction is beyond your control like the student who memorises his lessons and labours hard, yet when the exam time comes he freezes up or forgets and thereby fails. Then, this is simply Allah's decree and is so for a good reason. This is an evil in which good lies hidden. We must be content when suffering comes from Allah, and ascribe to Him wisdom in afflicting us.

So, we always circle around the question seeking out the Divine wisdom behind our circumstances, whether or not we arrive at an answer. Say, perhaps I was conceited and Allah wished to break my conceit, or perhaps, if

I succeeded, I would have become envied, or perhaps I could not get the mark for which I hoped. All of these are examples happening in real life.

An action cannot be dealt with by itself but must be considered in conjunction with the doer; we must ask: who is the doer? For instance, when your child comes to you with a cut bleeding in some part of his body, you are not concerned so much with the blood as with who caused the bleeding. Indeed, you ask first: who did this to you? If he says, for example, that his uncle did it, you will calm down and tell him, you must have done something wrong to deserve it. But if he tells you someone else did it, you will get furious and not let things alone until you get to the bottom of it.

We say, therefore, consider the action in conjunction with the doer of the action. If it is from Allah, be content and look for His reason in doing it; you will certainly find it and will praise Allah accordingly. Be like a molar tooth firmly rooted in its place, which chews without being pained by sweet food or bitter. If the suffering is in yourself, be trained by it, and if it happens to someone else, learn from it. Allah certainly has His reasons.

You have heard the story⁽¹⁾ of the Chinese man who used to contemplate events to see the wisdom behind them. They say that this man loved to raise horses and had a horse farm. One day one of his best horses escaped, a stallion, and was lost in the fields. People came to him to console him for his loss, but he said to them, ‘Do not you understand that perhaps there is a good thing in this, and I find relief that I am not the cause for the loss of this horse?’

After several days, the horse returned to the farm accompanied by a herd of horses. His neighbours came to congratulate him on this, but he said to them, ‘What makes you think that this is a blessing?’ A short while later his son went to ride this horse as he was quite attached to it, and the horse threw him to the ground, breaking his leg. The people came to console the man, but he said to them, ‘Perhaps there is a good thing in this.’ Immediately after this an army recruiter came for the young man, but found that he had broken his leg and, therefore, left him. Therefore, we should understand that Allah makes His dispositions wisely and fairly enough. Some of us may understand the

(1) The story of the Chinese man who bread horses

reasons, and others may not. Therefore, we say, take heed not to force things, since you do not know what is best for you, and remember always: '... and it may well be that you love [a thing the while it is bad for you]... (*al-Baqara*: 216) and '...it may well be that you hate [a thing the while it is good for you]...' (*al-Baqara*: 216). Thus, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this lesson, saying: 'Seek matters out with self-respect, for they go according to certain measures.'⁽¹⁾

A holy man says to Allah in his private prayers: 'I praise You for everything You order and the beauty of Your disposition; it is a praise coupled with contentment about Your rule and certainty about Your wisdom.' Thus, a person soothes himself and soothes the world around him. All of this guidance is from the angels' descents as referred to in Allah's saying: '[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Sustainer is Allah," and then steadfastly pursue the right way – upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not"...' (*Fussilat*: 30).

Another kind of angelic descent occurs when the believer enters the hour of his death and is fearful and sorrowful, for he is leaving the comfort of the world. The angels descend upon him and reassure him by giving him tidings of another, perpetual kind of comfort in the Hereafter, which does not vanish like the comfort of this world.

'...Upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not"...' about those things you are approaching in the Hereafter, even if your works are lacking, for you are approaching a forgiving and merciful Lord; so do not fear nor grieve, '...but receive the glad tiding of that paradise which has been promised to you!' (*Fussilat*: 30)

(1) *Al-'Ajuni mentions this in his Kashf Al-khafa' (Hadith 399) with the wording: 'Seek things out with self-respect, for matters go according to certain measures.' He says that it is related by Tamam and Ibn 'Asakir with a weak transmission from 'Abdallah ibn Bisir but is strengthened by what is related by At-Tabarni and Abu Nu'aym from the Hadith of Abu Amama: 'The holy spirit inspired my mind: A soul shall not die until its sustenance be completed; so fear God and seek with propriety.' This is also related by Al-Bazzar from Hudhayfa. In the section via Jabir it is thus as given in the Musnad Al-Firdaws of Al-Hafizh ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani.*

We said that good tiding is good news told before something actually takes place. So, who is giving you glad tidings of paradise? By Allah, if it were simply a man like yourself, you would doubt his authenticity; but given that the one who is giving you glad tidings is Allah Himself, trust in what you have been told. Indeed, the One Who promises paradise is alone capable of true faithfulness, since there is no power that can interfere with His ability to make good on His tiding.

نَحْنُ أَوْلِيَاؤُكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا
 شِئْتُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَدْعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

**We are your allies in this world and in the world
 to come, where you will have everything you
 desire and ask for [31] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 31)**

That is, we are your close supporter, advocating for you in this worldly life and the Hereafter. Some scholars said that angels have been created innately disposed to obedience; for this reason when Adam was created they said: ‘...They said: “Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood – whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?” ...’ (*al-Baqara*: 30). Allah responded to them: ‘[Allah] answered: “Verily, I know that which you do not know” ’ (*al-Baqara*: 30).

That is, I created the angels innately disposed to obedience, ‘...who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do’ (*at-Tahrim*: 6). Those whom I wish to be obedient cannot disobey; but I wish for another creature, one that will come to Me without being forced to do so. Rather, they will come to me in obedience and approach near to Me through love while having the ability to disobey; they will come to Me by choice, not by compulsion or force.

Previously, I gave an example of a person having two servants, one of whom is chained and directed by his master with that chain and the other is free. When you summon them and they come running to you, which of them will be more obedient?

Now, His saying, 'We are close unto you...' (*Fussilat*: 31), that is, we come to you in times of hardship to assist you and in distress to help you attain perseverance and patience.

It is related in the Hadith that one of the Companions⁽¹⁾ of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting and reciting the Quran, and a horse was nearby. He suddenly heard it emit a strange cry like a growl and move about in an unusual way, and saw above its head a light. He went to our master the Messenger Muhammad and told him about this. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'those were the angels come to listen to your recitation; by Allah, had you but waited a while longer they would have greeted you.'⁽²⁾

This is part of the angels' guardianship over us in this world; and in the Hereafter they will also be close to us, for they will be charged by Allah with the work on the Day of Resurrection and judgment, and with receiving the people of paradise with a greeting of peace, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* states: '..."Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [Paradise], herein to abide"' (*az-Zumar*: 73).

He says also: 'Peace be upon you, because you have persevered! How excellent, then, this fulfilment in the Hereafter!' (*ar-Ra'd*: 24) This is the

(1) *He is Usayd ibn Hudayr, one of the patricians among the Ansars (Supporters). The Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said of him: what a good man is Usayd ibn Hudayr. It is related by Anas that Usayd and 'Abbad ibn Bishr were with the Prophet on a dark night; when they departed from him one of their staves illumined the way and they walked in its light, and when they parted ways, both of their staves lit up [Ad-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam An-Nubala', 1/299].*

(2) *Usayd Ibn Hudayr said that once he was reciting at night from the chapter of al-Baqara, with his horse tied next to him. Suddenly, the horse began to get restless and so he stopped reciting, upon which the horse calmed down; he resumed reciting and again his horse grew restless; he stopped and it calmed down again. Thus, when he resumed reciting again and the horse grew restless he desisted and left. When morning had come he told the Prophet, who replied, 'Recite, O Ibn Hudayr!' I turned my face toward heaven and lo, something like a canopy in which there were things like lamps; they then departed till I could see them no longer. The Messenger of God said, 'Do you know what that was?' He said, 'No.' 'Those were angels that drew near at the sound of your voice; had you kept reading they would have become visible to everyone' the Prophet replied [Al-Bukhari, Sahih, chapter on the descent of the Sakina and the angels; Muslim, Sahih, 1327, Hadith of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri].*

greeting of the angels, and Allah will then greet them likewise, as is stated in the chapter of *Ya Sin*: ‘Peace and fulfilment through the word of a Sustainer who dispenses all grace’ (*Ya Sin*: 58).

‘...and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for’ (*Fussilat*: 31). Scholars say that whatever thing a person's soul desires will immediately appear before him, simply by thinking about it. What luxury! I have been to many countries and have stayed in the best hotels there, and the most they can give you is that you can press a certain button and it will give you coffee, for example, or on another button and it will give you tea. Is there anything greater than what Allah has prepared for you in paradise? You have only to think about something and it will appear before you. Paradise also includes other luxuries: ‘what the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has occurred to the heart of man.’⁽¹⁾

Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* wished to create a picture of paradise for us, He did not describe it literally; He only said: ‘...the parable of the paradise which the Allah-conscious are promised...’ (*Muhammad*: 15); its parable, not paradise itself, why? Scholars say that it is because expressions in a language apply to certain meanings and objects; there must first be a meaning which is then given an expression that references it. But that which does not exist has no expression that references it. ‘Television,’ for example, what was its name before they invented it? It had no name because it did not yet exist.

Likewise, the pleasures of paradise; the language does not currently have expressions that refer to them, for we do not know them nor do we know the names of these things. They are things which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and which have not occurred to the heart of man. How, then, could there be expressions to indicate them?

His saying, ‘...and in that...’ that is, in paradise, ‘...you shall have all that your souls may desire...’ (*Fussilat*: 31). What is meant here is souls filled with faith which proceed uprightly on the path of Allah. Now, in paradise there is nothing that is forbidden, and in paradise there is no one who desires forbidden things. The soul desires what is permissible; even when the forbidden

(1) Given by Muslim in his *Sahih* [2824], Ahmad in his *Musnad* [2/466], and Abu Nu‘aym in his *Hilyat Al-Awliya’* [2/262] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.

things of this life appear in the Hereafter, they will be different, being purified from qualities that make them forbidden.

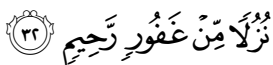
Wine in this world is well known for disturbing one's reason and for not being enjoyable to drink; as for the wine in the Hereafter, Allah says of it: '...and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it...' (*Muhammad: 15*).

For example, you see how they drink in films? They pour it into their mouths all in one go. Why? Because its taste is unpleasant and they want to get it passed their tongues quickly. But, those who drink a cup of mango juice, for example, you see them savour every mouthful because it tastes pleasant and has a pleasant smell.

Likewise, with every pleasure in paradise that has one similar in this world, the True Lord *Glorified is He* purifies it from any deleterious qualities and removes any harmful effects as we know them in this world. Consider His saying about the water in the Hereafter: '...rivers of water which time does not corrupt...' (*Muhammad: 15*), that is, it does not change or become putrid like the water in this world. Of milk, He says, '...and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters...' (*Muhammad: 15*), and of honey, He says, '...and rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed...' (*Muhammad: 15*).

Therefore, do not say that wine is like the earthly wine, nor water like earthly water, nor milk like the milk you drink now. No, these are pleasures of another type which The Creator *Glorified is He* has purified of their flaws.

'...and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for' (*Fussilat: 31*), that is, in paradise you will have all that you ever hoped for or desired.



**As a welcoming gift from the Most Forgiving,
Most Merciful One [32] (The Quran, *Fussilat: 32*)**

The Arabic word '*Nuzulan*' is translated into 'ready welcome'; the Arabic word means a place which is prepared for a guest's lodging. It is necessary that such a place be prepared so that one's guest finds there everything he needs. It is a place of hospitality. For this reason, we use this term for hotels, a type of ready and welcoming lodging that human beings prepare for other human beings. But paradise is a type of welcoming lodging that the Lord and

Creator of mankind has prepared for them; it is the lodging prepared by the Much-Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy towards them.

Therefore, I have said that when I went to San Francisco, I found there extremely tall and luxurious hotels and saw that my colleagues were quite impressed with them. I wanted to make this a lesson about faith, so I said to them: you are impressed by what you see, but consider it meditatively: this is what men have prepared for other men, so how much greater will be what Allah, the Lord of mankind, has prepared for men?

With such a point of view, a person may prevent himself from falling into envy, covetousness or objection. Every fine thing that you see and every beautiful thing your eye falls upon should remind you of the pleasures of the Hereafter.

Often, when we see, for example, a large building or beautiful villa, we ask ourselves where all this property comes from? We are gripped by a certain amount of envy towards its owner, or envy the owner for the blessing they are granted by Allah. But, if we were to consider the subject from a different point of view, we would see that Allah *Glorified is He* has subjected this man and subjected his wealth to the service of society as a whole: he wears himself making money and accumulating property then disburses it to workers, craftsmen and other tradesmen from all the different walks of society.

Thus, this person participates in building up society, and participates in its movement. For this reason, our Lord *Glorified is He* has taught us that when we see something that we like we should say: ‘...“Whatever Allah wills [shall come to pass, for] there is no power save with Allah!”...’ (*al-Kahf*: 39)

That is, this is the gift and the grace of Allah that He gives to whomever He wills of His servants. When you are happy for a blessing that is given to someone else and are glad he received it, the blessing itself will love you; for the blessing loves the one whom it is bestowed upon more than the latter loves it. But, if you begrudge other people because of their blessing, the blessing will itself begrudge you, saying: by Allah, a blessing for which you begrudge other people will certainly not come to you.

Moreover, blessings are preordained, and it is the believer’s duty to be content with Allah’s decree and not to object to it; he must be aware that every preordained thing contains in it a purpose that is construable through faith.

Allah's saying, 'As a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!' (*Fussilat*: 32) indicates that this 'ready welcome' and this pleasure is not attained by the servant through his own works, but rather through the forgiveness and mercy of Allah towards him. This explicates for us the Noble Hadith, 'None will enter paradise through his works.' They asked him, 'Not even you, Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Not even me except that Allah has encompassed me⁽¹⁾ with His mercy.'⁽²⁾

However, the term 'ready welcome' may also have a sarcastic sense; it can mean a hotel, but it can also mean a prison. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter *al-Kahf*: '...Verily, We have readied hell to welcome all who [thus] deny the truth!' (*al-Kahf*: 102).

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those devoted to God'? [33] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 33)

After The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the essential perfection of the believer who has perfected his faith and declares: 'My Lord is Allah', and then walks uprightly on the way, He then says that, after a believer has welcomed faith and tasted its sweetness in his heart, the good effects of this faith will overflow to other people. This is one of the concerns of the believer: to transmit his faith to others and bring good to them.

The believer wants for his brother what he wants for himself,⁽³⁾ and seeks to guard the welfare of society around him; he does not simply look out for himself, nor is he ever selfish.

(1) The phrase 'encompassed him with His mercy' means covered and inserted him in it and inundated him with it. Abu 'Ubayd says 'encompassed me' means covered or wrapped me [(Lisan Al-'Arab), s.v. (root)].

(2) A trusted Hadith given by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [6463] and likewise Muslim in his *Sahih* [2816] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.

(3) A sound Hadith given by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [13] as well as Muslim in his *Sahih* [45] (the book on belief as narrated by Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him with the wording: 'By He in Whose hand is my soul, a servant is not a believer until he wants for his neighbour (or, for his brother) what he wants for himself.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* praises the practice of calling others to Allah (*Da'wah*), calling it the best of speech: 'and who⁽¹⁾ could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto Allah...' (*Fussilat*: 33).

Thus, the noblest work that one whose heart is saturated with faith can do is to communicate and represent that faith to others. A believer, thereby, does good both for himself and for other people; an individual must be affected by the actions of people around him whether they are good actions or bad ones.

Therefore, it is in the interest of a believer that everyone believes. It is in the interest of you who travel uprightly on the path, that everyone travel uprightly too. For this reason, Allah entrusted the charge of *Da'wah* to every believer because He wishes belief to be transferred from those who have tasted it to those who have not yet tasted it, so the compass of belief may be expanded and good extended to all.

The first element of calling people to Allah's (*Da'wah*) is that we first call them to the creed and to belief in Allah; we say: our Lord is Allah, acknowledging and announcing this sincerely and categorically. We, then, are to direct their attention to Allah's signs in the universe, such signs as they might not have considered, and to the signs constituted by the miracles accompanying the Messengers such as they might not know, and to the verses of the Quran which explain Allah's path, consisting of commands and prohibitions.

Consider Allah's saying: 'And who could be better of speech...' (*Fussilat*: 33). The True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to show us how high is the position of

(1) In his Commentary, *Al-Qurtubi* refers to a number of different opinions as to who is meant in this verse: 1) It is the Messenger of God: this is an opinion held by Ibn Sirin, *Al-Sudayy*, *Ibn Zayd*, and *Al-Hasan Al-Basri*. The last named used to say whenever he recited this verse: 'This is the Messenger of God, the beloved of God, the friend of God, the most sincere to God, the best to God, the most beloved to God of all the denizens of the earth, whose prayer God answers and who calls mankind to what he has given.' 2) It was revealed in reference to the *mue'dhdhins*, an opinion held by 'Aisha, 'Ikrima, *Qays ibn Abu Hazim* and *Mujahid*. *Ibn Al-'Arabi* says: The former opinion is more correct, since this is a Meccan verse and the call to prayer was revealed in Medina; it only seems to correspond to a development of the later period, but this was not the intent of the original statement. 3) The verse refers generally to all those who call people to God, an opinion held by *Al-Hasan* and *Qays ibn Abu Hazim*. *Al-Qurtubi* says that this last opinion is the preferable one [*Tafsir Al-Qurtubi*, 9/6026].

Da'awa to Allah and the excellence of those who practise it. Yet, He did not say this in a straightforward way, but rather expressed it in the form of a rhetorical question, 'And who could be better of speech...', communicating His negative intent, that is, that there is no one better than he who calls to Allah, and there is no better speech than his.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* said it this way in the form of a question because He knows that there is no answer for it but that we say: there is no one who speaks better than he who calls to Allah; this makes us declare and affirm the truth ourselves, and affirmation is the foremost mode of demonstration.

The first summoner to Allah is our master the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and every summoner after him draws of his spring and travels in his footsteps. Given the fact that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the last of the Prophets, he has bequeathed to his *ummah* this mission, the mission of summoning people to Allah with wisdom and good counsel. The goodness of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not cut off, but extends after him through his *ummah*, such that every summoner after him takes station from Muhammad's station.

Part of Allah's mercy to this *ummah* is that He gave it an internal check, which is a group of people in it that remain committed to the truth, their job being to straighten the crooked ones, command what is good and forbid what is evil. This group will remain until the Day of Resurrection. For this reason, our master the Messenger Muhammad said, 'There shall remain among my *ummah* a group that adhere to the truth, who shall not be afflicted by those who oppose them until the command of Allah comes and finds them thus.'⁽¹⁾

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in Allah...' (*Al-Imran*: 110).

(1) Given by Muslim in his *Sahih* [1920], (*Book of Imara*), from a Hadith of Thawban Allah be pleased with him as well as by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [7311], and likewise in Muslim [1921] from a Hadith of Al-Mughira Ibn Shu'ba.

This is the defining characteristic by which Allah singled out the community of Muhammad, inasmuch as he is the seal of the Messengers. For this reason, evil will not overcome this community, nor will it be overwhelmed by corruption; it is inherently protected. The previous nations became overrun with corruption, and had none commanding good and forbidding evil. Thus, it was necessary that a new messenger be sent to return the people to the Straight Path.

As for the community of Muhammad, no new messenger will come to it. Therefore, Allah instilled in it this protection and made it the vicegerent of the Messenger of Allah in summoning people to Allah, making it faithful in this mission. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Good is in me and in my community until the day of resurrection.’⁽¹⁾

Allah *Glorified is He* explicated that the Messenger Muhammad will testify that he communicated this Divine mission to his community, and that this community will testify that it communicated the summons of its Messenger to all the nations. He says: ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that The Apostle might bear witness to it before you...’ (*al-Baqara*: 143).

Thus, our witnessing to the nations is a proof that goodness remains in us and will never be cut off.

Our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* urges and encourages us to assume and maintain this trust when he says: ‘Allah flourishes’⁽²⁾ a man who hears my speech and understands it, and then communicates it to those who did not hear it. Maybe the recipient of knowledge understands it better than the one who has heard it!’⁽³⁾

(1) *Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalani* states that he does not know this Hadith, but its sense is sound... *Al-Qari* mentions it in his *Al-Asrar Al-marfu‘a* [457], as does *As-Suyuti* in his *Ad-Durar Al-Muntathira* [220] and *Al-‘Ajluni* in his *Kashf Al-khafa*’ [1/476].

(2) (*Nadra*): bounty, wealth, pleasant life. The phrase ‘God flourished his face’ means that it became handsome and bright. *Al-Hasan Al-Mu‘addib* states: this does not come from handsomeness in the face, but rather, it means that God beautified a person’s face through the goodness of their manners, that is in majesty and power [(*Lisan Al-‘Arab*), (root)].

(3) Given by *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* [1/437], *At-Tirmidhi* in his *Sunnan* [2657, 2658], *Ibn Majah* in his *Sunnan* [232], and *Al-Humaydi* in his *Musnad* [1/47] from a Hadith of ‘*Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud* Allah be pleased with him.

Da'wah (calling people) to Allah is a task of great scope, involving words, deeds, and being a noble example. It is practised through explaining items of doctrine, the rites of worship and the Divine rulings to people in an attractive and interesting manner that does not put them off, nor cause them to despair of the mercy of Allah.

Da'wah to Allah is an art. Read Allah's saying in which He addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee...' (*Al-Imran*: 159).

How do our summoners compare to Allah's statement: 'Call thou [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner...' (*an-Nahl*: 125).

We must know that summoning to Allah is not simply the concern of only the specialist scholars of religion, but rather the concern of every Muslim in every age and in every place. Everyone can be a summoner at his workplace; yes, a summoner through his actions, discipline, dedication, and sincerity.

The scholars of the community are of a consensus that Islam did not spread by the sword or through force with nearly the same effectiveness as by the good example of Muslims endowed with tolerance and love for others; they are a model for us.

Calling people to Allah is the concern of every Muslim who has tasted the sweetness of belief and the religious duties and who wants for others the good things he wants for himself, and, therefore, is keen to bring about good to them. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* charged us with good tasks, He did not leave aside anyone or debar anyone from taking part in that good. For example, we now find an economic problem, war on the economy, fighting over bread and water; how do we solve these problems from an Islamic point of view?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* constantly prompts the rich to be gracious towards the poor. After imposing the obligation of alms for the rich to the poor, He left the door open for the generosity of the rich and their love of giving, making charity a supererogatory act for those who have tasted the sweetness of religious duty.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and in whose possessions there is a due share, acknowledged [by them], [24] for such as ask [for help] and such as are deprived [of what is good in life] [25]’ (*al-Ma’arij*: 24-25). ‘a due share’ here means the prescribed obligatory alms. He says in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*: ‘and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 19) using the same word ‘a due share’, without the word ‘acknowledged’ which means here the non-obligatory charity beyond the obligatory alms. These are supererogatory acts: whoever does them receives their reward, whoever does not do them is not penalised.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* by way of explicating for us the high rank of doing good excellently: ‘[But,] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, [15] enjoying all that their Sustainer will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past [16]’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15-16). He did not say here ‘they were believers’; so what is the rank of doing good deeds? They say that the excellent doer of good (*muhsin*) is the one who abides by doing something which is not required of him but which is similar to that which is required of him by Allah. Thus, the rank of doing good excellently is higher than the level of belief. The obligatory ritual prayer is five prayers, but the excellent doer of good performs these five and then performs more beyond them; or if the requisite percent of alms from one’s income is 2.5%, he will give 5%; and so on with respect to all types of good.

In the verses of the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*, there is an explanation of what this extra is which excellent doers of good impose on themselves.

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘[But,] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, [15] enjoying all that their Sustainer will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past: [16] they would lie asleep during but a small part of the night [17]’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15-17). Does Allah obligate you to keep praying at night and only sleep a small part of it? No, you may pray the evening prayer and sleep until dawn.

As for the excellent doer of good, he has another kind of business with the night. He has tasted the sweetness of staying awake and praying for Allah; he

feels waves of spiritual inspiration coming down upon him, and the mercy of Allah covers him; passion for worship and ecstasy therein is his delight and his comfort. Likewise, 'and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts; [18] and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation [19]' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 18-19). He did not say here '...a due share, acknowledged [by them]' (*al-Ma'arij*: 24) since the latter refers to the obligatory alms, whereas the former is the general voluntary charity which is based on people's varying degrees of love for giving and generosity.

When a believer loves worshipping he prefers it to anything else. Thus, if you were to tally up those who go on pilgrimage to Mecca, you would find that the number of returnees is three to one the number of first-time pilgrims. This is simply due to the fact that people love performing this religious duty.

Therefore, Allah instituted among His servants an incitement to do good, each according to his level. The Holy Quran gives us a picture of the believer who loves to give even though he does not have money. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[But] no blame shall attach to the weak, nor to the sick, nor to those who have no means [to equip themselves], provided that they are sincere towards Allah and His Apostle: there is no cause to reproach the doers of good, for Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy. [91] Nor [shall blame attach] to those⁽¹⁾ who, when they came unto thee [O Prophet, with the request] that thou provide them with mounts, were told by thee, "I cannot find anything whereon to mount you" – [whereupon] they turned away, their eyes overflowing with tears out of sorrow that they had no means to spend [on their equipment] [92]' (*at-Tawba*: 91-92).

This verse makes it clear that Allah *Glorified is He* has distributed good among all mankind; the rich are obliged to give, and the poor may advise the rich and encourage them to give. If the poor person is unable to do either, it is

(1) *Al-Qurtubi* says: It is said that this verse was revealed in reference to 'Arbad ibn Sariya. It is also said that it was revealed in reference to 'A'idh ibn 'Amr. Or, as most commentators hold, in reference to the Banu Muqarrin, seven brothers who were Companions to the Prophet. There are many other opinions on this subject which *Al-Qurtubi* mentions in his Commentary [4/3153].

enough for him that they love giving charity and long to do it; indeed, they weep that they are not given the opportunity to do so. For these, their charity is their longing to give and their weeping for being unable to give. This way, the Creator *Glorified is He* has not excluded anyone from His good, nor has He locked the door in anyone's face.

There is a certain issue that appertains to summoning people to Allah; that is there could be a Muslim person who may be disobedient to his Lord in a certain respect where he commits some kind of sin. Does this disobedience prevent him from being a summoner to Allah? Scholars say that disobedience is not a reason to prevent a Muslim from summoning people to Allah. Perhaps a person whom you call to Allah will do what you yourself have not done, and this may be some way of setting right your omission.

A story⁽¹⁾ is told of a man who was circumambulating the *Ka'ba* when he heard someone else saying, 'O Allah, You know that I am disobedient to you, but I love those who are obedient to You. O Allah, make my love for those who obey You an intercessor in the matter of my disobedience.'

They say that even with those who neglect the ritual prayer out of laziness, this does not prevent them from calling others to prayer, for it is a good that he spreads to others; he will still receive his reward for this. All those who spread good, will have their 'commission' (reward) from Allah. Thus, not a single creature exists but that it has its share in the vast grace of Allah, and no creature exists but that it has this quality of goodness for itself or for another. In fact, this spreading of good is in itself a way of summoning to Allah.

His saying: '...and does what is just and right... (*Fussilat*: 33), that is, calls people to Allah first with speech and then with deeds. The Quran always draws this connection between speech and deed. We know that giving a practical example has a stronger impression on people than talking about an example. It is not right, moreover, that you call someone to do something which you yourself avoid doing. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you bid other people to be pious, the while you forget your own selves – and yet you recite the Divine book? Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*al-Baqara*: 44).

(1) The story of a man who circumambulated the *Ka'ba* regularly

He also says in the chapter of *al-'Asr*: 'Consider the flight of time! [1] Verily, man is bound to lose himself [2] unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity [3]' (*al-'Asr*: 1-3).

Admonition is a kind of interaction between people; each one should admonish his fellow; the obedient should admonish the disobedient. Every one of us may be an admonisher in one situation, and be admonished in another. The emotional reaction towards obedience or disobedience is not constant; when you are inclined to obedience, you may admonish the disobedient, and when you are inclined to disobedience, you will find someone to admonish you in turn, and so on. This is because the soul does not experience a constant flow of any emotion. Thus, each of us is in a position to put right the inclinations of his fellow human beings. This is the meaning of 'enjoin upon one another', that is, between yourselves '...the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity' (*al-'Asr*: 3).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* swears here by the time of afternoon which is an estimated period of time. But He swears by what? 'Verily, man is bound to lose himself' (*al-'Asr*: 2), that is, the human species as a whole is in a state of loss and error, from which state none is exempt 'unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity' (*al-'Asr*: 3).

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to us: examine time and consider history, investigate the civilisations that passed away in ancient times; where are they? What remains of them? Take for example the civilisation of the Pharaohs in Egypt and everything they achieved in terms of scientific progress; we still have not penetrated their secrets until now, even though we are in an age of scientific progress; even the Americans are incapable of penetrating their secrets.

Despite this, all of these ancient sciences vanished because their practitioners did not find a way of preserving them and guaranteeing their survival. The tyranny of this people was the cause of their destruction: 'and with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [10] [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, [11] and brought about great corruption therein: [12] and

therefore thy Sustainer let loose upon them a scourge of suffering: [13] for, verily, thy Sustainer is ever on the watch! [14]' (*al-Fajr*: 10-14)

There are in fact civilisations even greater than the civilisation of the Pharaohs, but they too are buried under the dirt; we know nothing about them. Even when the Quran tells us about them, it gives us only a general picture to express their greatness: 'Art thou not aware of how thy Sustainer has dealt with [the tribe of] 'Ad, [6] [the people of] Iram the many-pillared,⁽¹⁾ [7] the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? [8]' (*al-Fajr*: 6-8).

Yes, these were civilisations that once upon a time were the greatest on earth and talked about by everyone, yet they did not possess the means whereby they could guarantee their survival despite the progress they achieved. Thus, it is enough that Allah says of them: 'the like of whom has never been reared in all the land' (*al-Fajr*: 8). So how were they then? Ahmad Shawqi speaks accurately when he says,

If knowledge is not ennobled by good character
it becomes but a tool for failure⁽²⁾

Therefore, when your work is erected upon everlasting bases, it is constant and everlasting; when you build it on perishable elements, it perishes.

The remaining bases are the Divine values; just as we take Allah's gift in material things, we must take His gift on the level of values, for it is that which will preserve our works and make them eternal, giving them meaning and value.

'...“Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to Allah”' (*Fussilat*: 33); this is a declaration and boasting by a Muslim, a badge on his chest that says: I am Muslim, and my Islam is the point of departure for every

(1) Most commentators say that Iram was one of the great cities of 'Ad located in Yemen. Mohammad b. Ka'b says that it is Alexandria, while Ibn Al-Musayyib says that it is Damascus [Ibn 'Abd Al-Mun'im Al-Himyari, (*Ar-Rawd Al-mi'tar fi khabar Al-aqtar*)].

(2) The verse is by Hafizh Ibrahim, not Ahmad Shawqi, from a *qasida* (poem) in the meter *Al-Kamil*, 46 verses(also lines) in length; this is the 13th verse. Hafizh was born in 1871 in Dayrut, Egypt, and grew up in Cairo as an orphan. He would compose verse during his studies, and graduated from the *Harbiyya* (Military) school. When he was put on provisional retirement, he started work as an editor at the *Al-Ahram* newspaper. He was called 'the poet of the Nile'. He died in 1932 (*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*).

action in my life. This in itself is a calling to Allah and a way of spreading His religion and a means of aggrandising the word of Allah; that is true when you are not preoccupied with yourself but rather with your religion.

So, when you accomplish a piece of work that you attribute to your observance of Allah's religion; you say: I did it because Allah has so commanded me. Thus, you raise up Allah's religion among the people without being concerned with yourself as the actor; and when you raise up Allah's religion, be sure that it will exalt you with it.

Therefore, it is one of the believer's characteristics that he attributes his good and his righteousness to his religion and his Islam.

For this reason we often dwell on the saying of Qarun (Korah) in response to Allah's giving him wealth, glory, and power. Allah reported his saying: '..."This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!"...' (*al-Qasas*: 78) But Allah answered him: given that you were given it through the knowledge that you have, keep it with that knowledge! But the result was: 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling...' (*al-Qasas*: 81). So, when you attain some breakthrough, invention or something good in this world, consider it as deriving from a religious way of life and attribute it to your religion.

Recall the Noble Hadith: 'Whoever makes the Hereafter his goal, Allah makes his heart rich, and organises his affairs, and the world comes to him whether it wants to or not.'⁽¹⁾

For this reason I am always surprised when I hear high-sounding names for charitable associations and groups led by prominent figures in society. Yes, we see them offering assistance and doing much charity, yet when you ask them about their point of departure in doing what they do, you hear different terms like 'Masonry'.

(1) *Given by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2465] from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik, with the wording: 'Whoever makes the Hereafter his goal, Allah makes his heart rich, and organises his affairs, and the world comes to him whether it wants to or not. And whoever makes the world his goal, Allah puts his poverty right before his eyes, and disorganises his affairs, and the world does not come to him, except what has been decreed for him.'*

Then, when they discover that Masonry has Jewish roots, they call it 'Rotary'; one of them says: I do this because I am a Rotarian. Say instead, for Allah's sake: because I am Muslim, my Islam compels me to do this. Why do you not elevate yourself through the nobility of your religion? Why do you throw away the reward of your efforts in the Hereafter? We say, good deeds can be done either for Allah's sake or for people's sake. Good deeds done for Allah's sake have a condition of their own which is that the intent must be sincere, and you will be given your reward by Allah in the Hereafter. As for good deeds done for people's sake, these will give you a high standing and prestige in people's eyes; this is your reward, you have already taken it in this life and will have none for it in the Hereafter. After all, a man seeks his wage from the one he works for.

For this reason, when we are asked about those scientists who serve humanity with their ideas and inventions, whether they will have a share in the Hereafter? We respond: no, they will not have a reward in the Hereafter, since they work for the good of people and of humanity in general and for the progress of society, and take their reward through public acknowledgement, fame, perpetual remembrance of their achievements and so on.

As for Allah, they never have a thought of Him when they do all of these things. Read His saying in reference to such individuals: 'for We shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought, and shall have transformed them into scattered dust' (*al-Furqan*: 23). In another verse, as well, He says: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur*: 39)

The good deeds of the disbelievers will be in the Hereafter like a mirage: you think it is something, but when you go towards it you find nothing there. If only they could stop there! But no, they are startled by the truth which they always used to deny in this life: 'but finds Allah before Him' (*an-Nur*: 39). Yes, Allah, Whom he denied or disbelieved in. He *Glorified is He* will make him stand before Him and reckon his account: you did such and such, and you have no reward with Me; there remains to you only the reward of your denial and obstinacy.

Therefore, we say that the moment you declare that you do the good deeds and invent what you invent because of your Islam, the moment you say I have done this because I am a Muslim; you elevate the goals of Islam and turn non-Muslims to the beauty of this religion. Such actions call people to Allah and you will be on the path of your Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you encounter some difficulties, be patient, for your Messenger suffered in the course of carrying out his mission and was patient nevertheless.

The one who takes up this trust of calling people to Allah and announces it by saying, 'I am a Muslim,' and my Islam regulates all of my actions in life – when he is afflicted with something bad he knows that he is simply participating in the Prophetic legacy. There has never been a prophet but that he suffered and had enemies. Those who bear this responsibility will necessarily have enemies who will abuse, vilify and heap accusations on them. This is only to be expected in the course of calling people to Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy – devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion' (*al-An'am*: 112). This means that those who call to Allah who remain safe from such suffering are missing out on a part of the Prophetic legacy. Therefore, be patient – is any follower of Muhammad better than Muhammad himself that he should be saved from suffering?

If you do not encounter enemies in the course of calling to Allah, know that you are not following the path laid out for you, and that you must reevaluate your position.

I am speaking here about calling people to Allah with truth, directness, sincerity and about the profession of faith that should be uttered on such a path, not in the quest for fame or power or some remuneration with worldly goods that perish. Calling people to Allah should never be simply a means to some other end. For this reason, we say, what is it that protects those who call to Allah today, given that we talk very loudly and write in every media outlet? Allah – He is the One Who protects us. Praise be to Allah that we are not arrested or imprisoned, and that no one can object to us. There are many scholars of religion who declare the word of truth free of any self-interest. Sometimes the ruler gives them his ear and they tell him things which make him tremble; yet despite this we hear of the suppression of men of religion.

We say, if a man of religion is suppressed, it must be because he used forbidden means of communication in calling people to Allah, like those who prefer to solve problems through killing and spilling blood. Say you are in disagreement with a government minister, for example – do you try to shoot him? Is this the solution? What is the fault of the guards whose blood you spill and whose children you orphan?

Your tool is the word. Say what you wish and repair through good words; make them hear what they do not like. I myself previously talked to them in a way that no one used to be able to do, for the courage that is born of faith in calling people to Allah is not a word of truth spoken to just any authority, but only to an unjust authority – yes, spoken to his face.

This is the practical application of the statement of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘The greatest *jihad* [struggle] is speaking the word of truth to an unjust authority.’⁽¹⁾

We do not trade in this word, but only confront with it every oppressive ruler. We say to him we do not object to you personally nor do we want what you rule over, but we love you and wish to help you fulfill your objectives; we simply wish of you that you rule us by the standards of Islam. I wish to be ruled by Islam, not to be subjected to Islam as an excuse.

وَلَا تَسْتَوِ الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ
فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Good and evil cannot be equal. [Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend [34] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 34)

After Allah *Glorified is He* spoke to us about the objective of calling people to Allah, and that it is a Prophetic legacy bestowed on us after the Prophet. He then informs us here of one technique and one model example of carrying this

(1) Related by Ahmad in his (*Musnad*) [3/19, 61], At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [2174] (who deems it reliable), and Abu Dawud in his *Sunnan* [4344] from the Hadith of Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri. In At-Tirmidhi the wording is as follows, ‘Pertaining to the greatest *jihad* is speaking the word of justice to an unjust authority.’

out. It is that you respond to evil with good: 'And not equal are the good deed and the bad.' Indeed, no one thinks good and evil to be equivalent, as the intellect itself states. Go to the thief who steals the property of others, who steals the fruit of the sweat of their brows, and say to him, would you like for others to steal from you? He will say, 'No.' I say, so, do not wish for them what you do not wish for yourself. But he will say, 'You are limiting my freedom – I am free.'

I then say to him, do not forget that Allah Himself has limited your freedom in stealing from others, and you are only a single individual. He has also limited the movement of the entire world from stealing from you. So, who benefits from this? Likewise, with every other matter in the Divine law in which Allah has forbidden you from trespassing on the rights of others; He has also forbidden them from trespassing on your rights. He responds, do not look at what Allah has made forbidden for you with desire. He has commanded all mankind not to look upon your *maharim* (women who other men are allowed to marry from, while you cannot).

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us a model of wisdom in making this summons, when a sincerely believing young man came to him who was nevertheless beset by a certain matter he was unable to renounce; that is, cupidity in looking at and desiring women. He came to the Messenger of Allah and said, 'Messenger of Allah, I am afraid I will commit fornication.'

Consider here the Prophet's wisdom in responding to this. He responded to the young man without scolding him or being harsh with him, but rather smiling at him and reassuring him that he is confronting a sickness for which there is a cure. This of course assumes that the young man was sincere in his faith in coming to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for his cure, without deceiving the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* or himself. For this reason, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* described for him the cure which would tear out this sickness from its roots. The young man then left and fortified that which would make fornication distasteful to him.

What the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him was this, 'Would you like such a thing to happen to your mother?' He said,

‘No, Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘Would you like this for your sister?’ He said, ‘No, Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘Would you like this for your wife?’ He said, ‘No, Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘Would you like this for your daughter?’ He said, ‘No, Messenger of Allah.’ He continued to mention to him various female relatives until he came to the paternal and maternal aunt, and the young man said: ‘No, Messenger of Allah, may I be made your ransom!’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Likewise without everyone else, brother of the Arabs – they do not want this for their mothers or their sisters.’⁽¹⁾

Whereupon the young man said, ‘Now when I want to look at anything I remember my mother, my sister, my wife, my daughter.’

Therefore, the religion requires that one summon people to it with gentleness, wisdom and good counsel so that what you say will be accepted, since the person you are advising in a religious matter, whether he is of a different religion or of the same religion as you but accustomed to disobedience and finds obedience burdensome, it is incumbent upon you to help him out of such a state in a manner that will not be repugnant to him, so that you do not make it seem too difficult to him when you divest from him what he loves, without speaking to him in a harsh or blunt manner. It suffices that you help him disavow what he loves in a way that is not repugnant to him. By such means, you leave him no justification for ill-tempered debate or strong and belligerent opposition.

Likewise, with your treatment of people – you are to counter what is evil with what is good: ‘Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better,’ that is,

(1) *A Hadith narrated by Abu Umama has it that a man came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and said: ‘I am afraid that I will commit fornication. Now someone who was nearby the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him became indignant and insisted that he be punished, but the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, “Let him speak.” He then said to the young man, “Would you like for someone to do this to your sister?” He said, “No.” He said, “Your daughter?” He said, “No.” He continued in this vein mentioning different examples, to all of which the young man responded, “No.” The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him then said, “So hate what Allah hates and desire for your brother what you desire for yourself.”’ The Hadith is quoted by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in his (Muntakhab Al-Kanz) [2/397]; he traces it to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari.*

respond with gentleness and good treatment, 'and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend' (*Fussilat*: 34). Destructive enmity is that which exists between two enemies, each hates the other. In such a situation, enmity becomes entrenched and we cannot find any solution. But what if the sharpness of such enmity could be dulled? Its sharpness is dulled when it comes from only one of the two parties – the enemy on the one hand and the tolerant person on the other side who does not return evil for evil, but rather pardons and forgives. In this situation, the soul of the enemy grows quiet and finds no purchase for his enmity. This is the first step in effecting reconciliation – you bring your enemy over to your side. For this reason, they say, you can counterbalance the one who disobeys Allah with respect to you by obeying Allah with respect to him. By this method, the enemy may be transformed into 'a devoted friend;' how? Do not ask how – for it is through the power of Allah, the Creator of all these souls and the Transformer of all these hearts.

A man once came to me complaining about the harshness of one of his relatives. I told him, dear sir, be patient with him and respond to him gently, and treat him with affection – perhaps Allah will reconcile between you. Sometime later, he came back to me and said, 'I responded to him gently, but he only became meaner and harsher than he was before.' I told him to search himself, for the word of Allah is entirely trustworthy; look for the cause of it in you. You may have thought that you responded gently, whereas in reality you did not. Or perhaps you wanted to test Allah – and Allah *Glorified is He* is not to be tested, for it means that you doubt Him. Had you trusted Allah, He would have trusted you. How lovely is the poet's⁽¹⁾ verse in this regard,

You who are bothered by others' actions whether this or that
respond (may I be your ransom) with what [is better] till you [him
become a true friend]

(1) The verse is by Ash-Sha'rawi himself.

وَمَا يُلْقِيهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقِيهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

But only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness [35] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 35)

That is, this characteristic and this status, that of responding with something that is better, is not attained except by those who are patient in suffering. It is only attained by those ‘having a great portion [of good],’ that is, an overflowing share of giving. Why? Because he restrains himself from responding in kind, and when he restrains himself for the sake of Allah, Allah makes it turn out well for him in the end, and gives to him lavishly.

We observe here the Quranic technique of repeating a phrase: ‘none is granted it.’ It is suggested that this phrase is repeated because the context is different; the first is given for patience in adversity, the second given as a reward. Orientalists and perceptive people generally, often focus on such instances of repetition in the Book of Allah in an attempt to search out the reason for it – for Allah’s Book is perfect and exact, without a single unnecessary word or slip.

Those who are patient when suffering harm, they are patient in self-restraint, they are patient in standing up to Satan who tempts them with the pleasure of revenge and makes attractive to them the prospect of repaying them with the like. And the end result of patience is a reward and abundant good fortune.

We must not be heedless of Satan’s role in this matter – his concern is to ignite the fires of enmity between people and to drum up discord so as to turn them aside from Allah’s objectives. He whispers to you insinuatingly, ‘Why be forbearing with him when he treated you so badly? Why do you accept humiliation? Is he better than you?’

This is because ever since the devil was commanded to prostrate to Adam and he refused, with the result that he became cursed and cast out from the mercy of Allah from that time, he has been in a state of enmity with the human race. He will not leave them be until he has brought them to a position like his own.

For this reason he swore: ‘[*Iblis* (Satan)] said, ‘By Your might, I will surely mislead them all. Except, among them, Your chosen servants’ (*Sad*: 82-83).

That is, O Lord, I have rebelled against You only in the matter of the seed of Adam. The one whom You wish to be obedient I cannot beguile, for I have no power over Your true servants. Part of the devil's failure is that he divulges his secret and discloses the means whereby he beguiles the sons of Adam. Now it is obvious that someone with a plot or devising a conspiracy would keep the details of his plan to himself, but the devil has divulged his details – thereby Allah secured for us the upper hand.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, relating the devil's statement: 'I will surely sit in wait for them on Your Straight Path' (*al-A'raf*: 16), that is, along the path of uprightness and doing good so as to distract them from it and to make it seem useless to them. For this reason, we say that Satan does not go to the pub, for example, but rather goes to the mosque.

In another instance, Satan continues: 'Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left' (*al-A'raf*: 17).

Allah says:

وَأِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٦﴾

**If a prompting from Satan should stir you, seek refuge
with God: He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing [36]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 36)**

Part of Allah's Mercy towards us is that He *Glorified is He* has not left us as spoils to this enemy who lies in wait to catch us, but has instead given us a defence where we may take refuge. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if there comes to you from Satan an evil suggestion, then seek refuge in Allah;' remind him of Allah, the All-Powerful. If you find yourself weak before him seek help against him from, the All-Powerful, Allah. The moment he sees you by the side of Allah, he will not dare to make an attempt on you, because you are thereby included among those whom he has exempted: 'except Your sincere servants among them' (*Sad*: 83).

Beware of the fact that he will not come to you except when you are on the straightway, so as to corrupt it for you. He comes to you during your prayer, and reminds you of something about which you were not thinking. So,

it is with the most important matters of yours in this life – the only thing he cares about is obstructing you from the Hereafter at any price.

If you find in yourself any hint of this prodding and insinuating, say, ‘I take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from Satan, the accursed.’ Say this every time the devil comes to you while you are performing the prayer, or while you are reciting the Quran, or while you are carrying out any other act of worship.

You must speak this phrase! It will not by any means void your act of worship. When you persist in saying this, he will despair of you and stay away; and he will know that you are firm and resolute, strong with power extended to you by Allah. He will turn away from you – why not, since you know his games and have discovered his tricks?

But the problem is that many of us are drawn after Satan and surrender our reins to him. What Satan does is that he pulls them in the direction he wants and then lets them continue by themselves without any effort or trouble on his part; they are those whom Satan debases and subjugates, those who form his retinue unthinkingly and uncomprehendingly.

Say that a thief comes to your house and circles it. You make a sound that he can hear to indicate to him that you are there and are awake; he will leave. Perhaps he considers that it was simply a coincidence, so he comes back another time; but you make a sound again so he realises it was not a coincidence. You are observing him and perfectly awake. He therefore leaves without coming back again. It is likewise with Satan.

We say that it comes from the devil’s foolishness and heedlessness that he announces his plans to us to entice people as well as the means by which he will do so. Yet, how much greater the foolishness of those who know these plans and these means but still allows themselves to be drawn after them without taking precautions.

Now when we contemplate the devil’s statement: ‘Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left,’ (*al-A‘raf*: 17) you see that he left out two directions he will not approach you from them; from above and from below. Why? They say that it is because the top is the direction towards Allah, the direction of the dignity of lordship,

and the bottom represents the humility of being a servant as when you prostrate to Allah in humility to Him. Thus, Satan does not come from these two directions.

His saying: 'Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing' (*Fussilat*: 36) is the One from Whose Hearing nothing escapes; thus He Hears and Knows what Satan whispers to you.

After the Quran elucidates this for us, it returns again to describing certain signs of Allah in the universe by which we may extrapolate the existence of the Creator and His Power, such that even if they are revealed by disbelieving scientists, we profit by them. By Allah, how impoverished are those scientists from whose work all mankind benefits yet they themselves do not benefit, for (as we have said) they do not have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* as their point of departure in creating all of these things. They are like pack animals by whom people benefit but they do not benefit at all – except that the goods of this life are perishable.

The Lord says:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ لَا تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ
وَأَسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُنَّ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

The night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His signs. Do not bow down in worship to the sun or the moon, but bow down to God who created them, if it is truly Him that you worship [37] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 37)

His saying: 'And of His signs,' here we see a particularisation, that is, these are certain of His signs in the universe, given that they are many and indeed infinite. An awe-inspiring sign is in its makeup which speaks of the Power and Wisdom of Allah and the wonderfulness of His Fashioning.

'Night and day' are two of Allah's signs in the universe, and they together constitute a full day as we know, a full rotation of the clock. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Which Allah imposed upon them for seven nights and eight days in succession' (*al-Haqq*: 7).

These signs of the universe mentioned here ‘night and day and the sun and moon,’ enjoy a large share in the procession of prophetic missions and in creedal beliefs. In the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he was searching for the truth while looking at the universe around him, when he saw a star, he said: ‘So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said, “I like not those that disappear.” And when he saw the moon rising, he said, “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said, “Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray.” And when he saw the sun rising, he said, “This is my lord; this is greater.” But when it set, he said, “O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah”’ (*al-An‘am*: 76-78).

The sun and moon are linked to day and night and have a part to play in introducing one to belief in Allah. This thing is rendered an indicator to believe in a matter about which the Arabs were still in doubt when the Quran was revealed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. These signs in the universe are in the first place an introduction to belief in Allah, and in the second place an indicator that inspiration was not cut off from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

You know the story of the descent of inspiration to the Messenger of Allah for the first time in the cave of Hira’, and that He *peace and blessings be upon him* was suffering from his meeting with the angel given the difference between human and angelic natures. He *peace and blessings be upon him* would then go to his people sometimes saying ‘Enwrap me, enwrap me’ and other times, ‘Cover me, cover me’ because of the change that had been effected in his nature. In the beginning, the inspiration weighed heavily on the Messenger of Allah; as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, We will cast upon you a heavy word’ (*al-Muzzammil*: 5).

The Companions relate that the Prophet’s brow used to drip with sweat at what the angel revealed to him, and the companion who was sitting next to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and resting his leg against him found that when the inspiration descended, it was so heavy he could not bear it.⁽¹⁾

(1) *Al-Bukhari relates in his (Sahih) [(Kitab As-Salat, bab ma yudhkar fi al-fakhidh), 12] the statement of Zayd ibn (Thabit): ‘Once Allah revealed to His Messenger when his=*

For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* wished to lessen the suffering of His Prophet and stopped the inspiration for a period of six months so that the Messenger of Allah could rest and the weariness of the first encounter could be relieved, so that he would long to meet with the angel once again and to hear the words of Allah which had been cut off from him; doubtless it is this longing which gave him the capacity to bear the inspiration and the summons thereafter.

Now, the disbelievers in Mecca saw an opportunity in the inspiration ceasing to come to the Messenger of Allah, so they said, 'The Lord of Muhammad has gone off him;'⁽¹⁾ that is, has abandoned and left him. They did not know that the abatement of the inspiration was not abandonment, but rather the farewell of a lover for his beloved until the next, longer meeting. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed: 'By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness, Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]' (*ad-Duha*: 1-3).

This is the proof in that the Lord *Glorified is He* swore to them by the bright morning hours, (that is, day) and by the night when its darkness comes, thus making of these two signs an indication that the inspiration had not been cut off, but that Allah simply wished to allow His Messenger to rest from his labour and renew his strength to once more receive inspiration, just as you labour and grow tired during the day and rest at night.

It is well known that the bright morning hours belong to the sun and the night belongs to the moon. Thus, the period during which the inspiration abated from the Messenger of Allah was intended to lighten his burden, as He says: 'Did We not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast? And We removed from you your burden. Which had weighed upon your back' (*ash-Sharh*: 1-3).

This means, We have opened up your heart for the revelation of the Quran and you long for it, and have the capacity to receive it. It is as though the Quran takes them from the sensible signs in the universe to their underlying

= *leg was upon mine, and it became extremely heavy upon me such that I feared my leg would be crushed* [Fath Al-bari, 1/478].

(1) *It is related from Jundab ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajali that he said: 'Jibril (Gabriel) kept the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him waiting, and the polytheists said, "Muhammad's Lord has bid him farewell."'* [Ibn Kathir, (Tafsir), 4/522]

meanings, making what they see a proof of what they deny. Given that in your daily activity you need the night in which to be still and rest from the toil of the day, likewise the Messenger of Allah needs this period to rest from the labour and burden of inspiration so as to renew his energy and cause him to long again for the meeting with the angel. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life];’ (*ad-Duha*: 4) for the return of the inspiration will be greater and better than what it was at first since its return will be longer and more powerful.

Just as the signs in the cosmos – night and day, sun and moon – are held to be relevant in the creedal statement in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) and in the inspiration revealed to the Messenger of Allah, so too are they relevant in solving a certain problem in social issues with which Islam is concerned such as the issue of equality between men and women.

This issue is quite controversial, and biased persons use it as leverage to attack Islam, although Islam is the religion most concerned with doing justice to women and giving them their rights, and requiring society to respect them. Islam views men and women as two types of a single species.

They must necessarily share a measure in common. But when they were divided into two parts, male and female, each developed its distinctive feature. Thus, in order to clarify for us the Quranic context of this issue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘By the night when it covers. And [by] the day when it appears, And [by] He who created the male and female. Indeed, your efforts are diverse’ (*al-Layl*: 1-4). Just as the day and night complete each other and cooperate with each other and do not oppose one another, each having their proper purpose in life, the one for work and the other for rest; likewise it is with man and woman; they are two elements of a single thing, they complete each other and cooperate with each other and do not oppose one another, just like the day and night. When you observe men and women, you do not see them as two different types within a species that might be at cross-purposes with each other, since they are of a single species, and a single kind does not clash with itself. It has a single mission. All members participate in carrying this mission out, each according to his or her capacity as created by Allah and with the powers and abilities given by Allah.

Now this is a controversial issue, especially among the unbelievers who look at the species but not at the underlying genders of male and female; despite the differences between the two types, they want them both to have the same purpose, thus removing any difference between man and woman. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* gives us this explanatory example of the day and night: is the purpose of the night like that of the day? To each is its own purpose and nature, and whoever opposes this nature wears themselves in life. Likewise, the man was created for work, power and toil, while the woman for kindness, affection and the care and rearing of children – keeping in mind that the infancy and childhood of the human being is the longest of its kind in nature; only women are capable of such upbringing, not men.

The Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us by this example to refer what we differ on back to that on which we agree. Just as we do not differ as to what the purpose of the day or the night is, likewise we should not differ as to what the purpose of man or of woman is, nor simply repeat the word ‘equality’ without understanding the respective natures of man and woman and the roles Allah created them for.

In another place, the Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us the wisdom expressed in the creation of day and night. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you light? Then will you not hear?” Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you a night in which you may rest? Then will you not see?”’ (al-Qasas: 71-72)

After this, He *Glorified is He* made further categorisations of time beyond day and night: periods of time such as hours, minutes, and seconds, with which time is regulated. Now the hour which regulates your time would not serve this purpose unless it itself is totally regular. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* made the sun and moon serve another purpose, the regulation of time, making them dependably regular in their movements.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation;’ (ar-Rahman: 5) that is, according to a precise and sure measure that never changes or alters. From the movement of the sun and moon, we

calculate time, especially religious affairs which we cannot determine except by this movement.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘that you may know the number of years and account [of time]’ (*Yunus*: 5). From the movement of the sun, we know day and night, and from the movement of the moon, we know the beginning and end of months. Therefore, from the movement of the sun and moon and from day and night, we are able to determine exactly the movements whereby to discharge the obligation of ritual prayer at its different appointed times, the times which perpetually testify to faithfulness to Allah *Glorified is He* at all times and in every place; and which result from the different times of sunset and sunrise in a given 24-hour period.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then gives us another perspective on the sun and moon, since they are among the greatest created things, and are associated with stability and precision and grandeur in the creation, to the extent that some people have worshipped the sun or the moon. The Lord *Glorified is He* here wishes to turn the attention of His creation to the grandeur of the Creator Who is more deserving of worship than His creations.

But he made the sun and moon subject to a change such as solar and lunar eclipses. Whatever the sun is, and whatever the moon is, they are still mutable creations, which means they cannot ever be worshipped. He *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are discussing here: ‘Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship’ (*Fussilat*: 37).

This grand creation must be honoured through Allah’s own honouring of it, but it is not permitted to transgress beyond such honouring to the point of worship, to the point of prostrating oneself to a created thing however great, for it is created and therefore mutable. Allah does not change because of His servants – His servants change because of Him. This matter explicates for us the issue of the angels’ prostration to Adam *peace be upon him* which was not a prostration of worship, but simply in obedience to Allah Who commanded them to prostrate to Adam. But why did Allah *Glorified is He* make them prostrate to Adam? They say that it is because Adam would descend to earth to build it up, and the angels were to be his help and would assist him in carrying out his purpose on earth. The angels were entrusted with the affairs

of men and made administrators of them, as Allah *Glorified is He* described them: 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah' (*ar-Ra'd*: 11).

Now the angels which were commanded to prostrate did not include all angels, but only those who would have some connection to mankind. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* was acquainting them with this new creature in whose service they were destined to be; so they were made to prostrate to him as a display of humility and obedience, to know that they are in his service and administrators of his affairs.

For this reason, there is the following Hadith,⁽¹⁾ 'Angels come to you in succession by day and night, gathering together during the dawn prayer and the afternoon prayer. Those who have passed the night with you ascend to Him and He asks them (though He knows you well), how did you leave My servants? They reply, "When we came to them they were praying, and when we left them they were praying."'

There is another type of angel that has nothing to do with human beings and no connection to them. They know nothing of this world of ours. They are the exalted ones of which Allah speaks in talking of the devil: 'Are you too proud (to fall prostrate to Adam) or are you one of the high exalted?' (*Sad*: 75)

Thus, when our ancestors honoured the sun and moon to the point of prostrating to them, they were made aware that their Creator is more deserving of such prostration: 'Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship' (*Fussilat*: 37). That is, if you heed His command.

We may note something else about the sun which gives us to understand a strange feature we were unaware of previously. In the chapter of *al-Kahf*, the Quran tells us the story of Dhul-Qarnayn (the two-horned one); Allah *Glorified*

(1) Related by Muslim in his (*Sahih*) [632] and Al-Bukhari in his (*Sahih*) [555] on the authority of Abu Hurayra... An-Nawawi says in his commentary on Muslim's, 'Their being gathered together at dawn and in the afternoon is part of Allah's graciousness and kindness to [His servants]. He has the angels gather with them and leave them precisely at their prayer times when they are obeying their Lord, and [the angels] testify of the good they have witnessed.' (*Sahih*) [3/139, Beirut, Dar Al-Qalam edn]

is He says: ‘And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about Dhu Al-Qarnayn. Say, “I will recite to you about him a report.” Indeed, We established him upon the earth, and We gave him to everything a way. So, he followed a way. Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it [as if] setting in a spring of dark mud, and he found near it a people. Allah said, “O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness”’ (*al-Kahf*: 83-86).

That is, the setting of the sun is simply so in the eye’s perspective, for if you were to arrive at that dark, turbid, sea you would find that the sun is still far off: ‘and he found near it a people. Allah said, “O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness.”’ This is because he was a powerful man on the earth, of great rank and authority.

Now the purpose of powerful men is to enforce the balance of justice and standards of right and punishment, for the actions of people in this world do not proceed aright except if the good-doer is rewarded and the evildoer is punished.

‘He said, “As for one who wrongs, we will punish him. Then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment. But as for one who believes and does righteousness, he will have a reward of Paradise, and we will speak to him from our command with ease” ’ (*al-Kahf*: 87-88).

He then speaks of the point of sunrise, and says: ‘Until, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had not made against it any shield’ (*al-Kahf*: 90). He says nothing further about the sunrise, unlike with what He mentions in the previous lesson taken from the sunset. It has a function and role with respect to those who do good and those who do evil. As for the sunrise, He simply says, ‘We had not made against it any shield,’ and nothing more. It is as though the point here is that we understand that Dhu Al-Qarnayn had arrived at a place whose day was very long and the sun was not hidden at any point.

After scientists discovered the longitudinal and latitudinal lines, we know that certain places around the poles experience long days that may last up to three months or even six months – this being a small example of the scientific inimitability of the Quran.

You may ask how one lives in such places; how can one pray or past properly? We say that in this case, one should measure out a normal day and a normal night and then divide the time into a normal day and night, and likewise when the night lasts three or six months.

Another observation may be made with respect to the wording of the verse and its evident rhetorical precision. The Lord *Glorified is He* begins the verse by mentioning the night and then the day, and then begins the next phrase with the sun followed by the moon. Assumingly, it would have been more fitting to link the moon with night and the sun with day.

But the wording of the Quran has its own wisdom and rhetorical precision. The Lord *Glorified is He* begins with that which is more important for daily life; the night is for rest while the day is for work, for The Creator *Glorified is He* created mankind to build up the earth and to strive in its territories. Now there is no cultivation on earth without action, and action requires two phases of time: a time for rest, and a time for work.

He thus mentioned night first because you will not produce anything unless you first get enough rest. It is as though rest is the basis on which work can be carried out – a weary, exhausted person cannot produce anything. Likewise, He mentions the sun before the moon because it is greater and more important, and from it all the stars and planets derive their light.

As long as we are talking about night and day, someone will certainly ask us which of them was created first. Some say that night was first, given that we determine, for example, the arrival of *Ramadan* in its first night, not its first day; when we see its crescent, we announce *Ramadan* is tomorrow. Those who hold that night was created first are supported in their position, namely that day does not usurp the night.

The Lord *Glorified is He* resolves this issue, for He *Glorified is He* says: '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).

We thus arrive at the cosmic reality that the Lord *Glorified is He* has established the day does not usurp the night, nor does the night usurp the day, for as we have explained they were created together at the beginning of creation simultaneously, and thereafter each cycles together with the other.

فَإِنْ أَسْتَكْبَرُوا فَالَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُ
بِالْأَيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

If the disbelievers are too arrogant, [remember, Prophet, that] those who are with your Lord glorify Him tirelessly night and day [38] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 38)

His saying, ‘But if they are arrogant,’ that is, too proud to obey Allah’s command and prohibition given in the previous verse: ‘Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship’ (*Fussilat*: 37). The concept of being too proud here indicates a lack of belief in Allah, the Commander and the Prohibiter, because they prostrate to the sun and prostrate to the moon as an act of worship, and worship connotes the obedience of a worshipper to the worshipped. But the sun and the moon do not give orders or issue prohibitions, and so to worship them is futile, and indicates only the ignorance of those who worship them and their dishonesty in worshipping them, as they do not reward those who obey them nor punish those who rebel against them.

We have said that the word worship as used here is a misnomer and is false, a delusion; that is, such people only want to have an object of worship to satisfy their desire to be religious, and nothing is simpler than for someone to take as a god that which does not impose any requirements or obligations. For this reason, when they say: ‘We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah’ (*az-Zumar*: 3), we respond: the term ‘worship’ here is falsely used because you would not seek refuge in any of them but only with Allah: ‘And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him’ (*al-Isra*: 67). He says also: ‘And when adversity touches the people, they call upon their Lord, turning in repentance to Him’ (*ar-Rum*: 33).

Now His saying: ‘But if they are arrogant – then those who are near your Lord exalt Him by night and by day, and they do not become weary’ (*Fussilat*: 38). The meaning here is that the Lord *Glorified is He* is not in need of the obedience of those who are too proud to worship Him, just as He is not in need of His servants. He *Glorified is He* has angels that glorify Him, and they

do not disobey what Allah commands them and they do as they are told, praising Him day and night without cease; indeed, they have no other work but to praise Him, and never grow weary of it nor bored.

About the word 'near' as used here in 'then those who are near your Lord', they say that it denotes the 'nearness of standing', not that of place. It is the kind of nearness of ennoblement and honour. As He *Glorified is He* says of the martyrs: 'And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive near their Lord, receiving provision' (*Al-Imran*: 169). He *Glorified is He* says also: 'Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and rivers. In a seat of honour near a Sovereign, Perfect in Ability' (*al-Qamar*: 54-55).

Now these angels are not with Allah in a single place, nor do they sit with Him, but rather, they are just like us in that they cannot see Allah, and just like us they believe in Him without seeing Him; Allah is invisible to them. Some commentaries hold (and I subscribe to this view) that Allah *Glorified is He* does not have a (specific) location because He is everywhere, and every place is with Him. For this reason, read the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Then why, when the soul at death reaches the throat. And you are at that time looking on. And Our angels are nearer to him than you, but you do not see' (*al-Waqi'a*: 83-85). Some say that the 'nearness' referred to here is that of knowledge. But if this were the case, then He would not have said, 'but you do not see'. Given that He said so, it refers to an absolute kind of nearness that pervades every place.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ تَرَى الْأَرْضَ خَاشِعَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ
وَرَبَّتْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمُجِي الْمَوْتِ إِنَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send water down on to it, it stirs and grows. He who gives it life will certainly give life to the dead. He has power over everything [39] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 39)

The Quranic context continues to deal with signs in the universe which prove the Power of the Creator *Glorified is He*. 'And of His signs' used here to

indicate items in a larger series, that is, these are some of the signs of Allah in the universe which indicate His Power. These signs being things which are astounding and that point to the marvelousness of their fashioning, ‘You see the earth stilled,’ that is, fallow and packed down without any growth upon it, for earth was created to provide ground for plants. It is as though earth without any growth upon it is sorrowful and humiliated, quiet and motionless because it has not yielded plants; in this it perhaps resembles a woman who is barren. ‘But when We send down upon it rain, it quivers and grows.’ It stirs, swells and puffs up. You see a bean, for example, which appears dry and unchanging, but when you sprinkle some water on it swells in size and puffs up. What is meant here is that the ground stirs and moves with the plants growing out of it. ‘Indeed, He who has given it life,’ that is, He brings this dormant earth to life with plants, changing its terrain to a verdant expanse – ‘is the Giver of Life to the dead’. Therefore, take this sensible and visible sign as a proof of what is hidden to you, as through it Allah is informing you of the resurrection of the dead. Those who deny the resurrection of the dead do not understand the lesson of the resurrection of the desolate and barren earth with plants.

‘Indeed, He is over all things competent.’ Allah’s power is absolute, for He *Glorified is He* is not incapable of anything, and the One Who created everything out of nothing is certainly able to restore it; for to resurrect a dead person is to deal with something that exists, and this is easier – if indeed we may speak of ‘easy’ and ‘easier’ with respect to Allah, though we understand what is meant here. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Did We fail in the first creation? But they are in confusion over a new creation’ (*Qaf*: 15).

The Lord *Glorified is He* informs us how He created man – and the one who built something knows how to destroy it since, as we say, it is the opposite of building. What is first built is destroyed in the end. Now the last thing to happen in building is the first thing to happen in destruction, and here is where spirit comes in.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا لَا يَخْفَوْنَ عَلَيْنَا أَفَمَنْ يُلْقَى فِي النَّارِ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ
يَأْتِيهِ آمَنًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَلُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Those who distort the meaning of Our message are not hidden from Us. Is he who is hurled into the Fire better, or he who comes through safely on the Day of Resurrection? Do whatever you want, God certainly sees everything you do [40]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 40)

They divert the signs of Allah away from their true meaning to a false meaning they themselves think is right, or interpret the signs in accordance with their desires. For the signs of Allah have many meanings, but they distort those meanings. It is in this sense that we hide the dead person underground, someone who used to walk on top of it. So they hide such realities to satisfy their disbelief and their desires.

Part of this act of hiding or distorting Allah's signs is certain people's falling into the mistake of over identifying Allah's Names and Attributes with human attributes. When they understand by one of Allah's attributes something that exists in human beings, they likened Him to us. But Allah's hearing is not like our hearing, and His hand is not like our hands, and His sight is not like our sight. Thus, we should not take these attributes as applying generally to all His signs: 'there is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura*: 11).

This includes their saying that Prophet Musa's (Moses) miracles with Pharaoh were only instances of magic. The difference between a miracle and a magical act is that miracles are actual physical transformations in reality, whereas magic is a visual illusion. It is true that Prophet Musa's (Moses) miracles appeared to resemble the magicians' acts, but these miracles were not visual illusions.

When the Pharaoh's sorcerers' threw their ropes, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saw these ropes as snakes. However, the sorcerers themselves still saw them as ropes. Magic gives you the illusion that a particular item resembles another object, although this illusion is only a figment of your imagination. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...their ropes and staffs

seemed to him to be moving rapidly,' (*Ta Ha*: 66). They were an illusion, and not elements of reality.

When Prophet Musa (Moses) threw down his staff, it was transformed into a real serpent, as Allah says: 'And in his heart, Musa (Moses) became apprehensive,' (*Ta Ha*: 67). Prophet Musa (Moses) could not have been afraid of his own staff if it had remained a staff. Thus, we know from this that the staff transformed into a real snake and Prophet Musa (Moses) saw it as such. Additionally, Pharaoh's sorcerers, who were experienced in the various magical techniques, were able to distinguish between their magical illusions and the reality of the staff's transformation. That is why they surrendered to Prophet Musa (Moses) and believed in him, after they witnessed his miracle. Had Prophet Musa (Moses) effected an illusion, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have said to him: 'Said He (Allah), "Take hold of it (the staff), and fear not: We shall restore it to its former state,"' (*Ta Ha*: 21).

Just as the earlier disbelievers described Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as a sorcerer, the later disbelievers also described Prophet Muhammad as a magician. Had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* been a sorcerer who put a spell on those who believed in him, why did he not put a spell on the ones who disbelieved in his message?

The disbelievers tried to distort Allah's signs by claiming that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was possessed. They made these claims although they had never experienced any misconduct from him. Indeed, they knew that he was honest, trustworthy and of noble character. Those who have good morals cannot be possessed. Allah *Glorified is He* responded to their claims by saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You (O Muhammad) are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman' (*al-Qalam*: 2).

The disbelievers also tried to distort and hide the true nature of the Quran by claiming that it was formed of poetry. This was a strange claim to come from them because they clearly knew the styles of poetic diction and expression. They also knew that the Quran was inimitable and that it was unlike anything else of that kind. Nevertheless, they denied its true status, and this was their distortion.

Part of the greatness of the noble Quran is its inimitable style and special literary taste. The Prophetic Hadiths had their own literary taste and the Qudsi Hadiths also had a literary flavour of their own. Thus, comparatively, each of these styles gives a different effect than the other styles. Allah *Glorified is He* responded to the disbelievers' false accusations in the verse in which He says: '...and (the Quran) is not the word of a poet – little do you believe' (*al-Haqqā*: 41).

One of their malicious methods of disbelief was changing the words of Allah's revelation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Among those of the Jewish faith there are some who distort the meaning of the (revealed) words, taking them out of their context and saying (as it were,) "We have heard, but we disobey," and "Hear (the revelation) without paying attention," and, "Listen to us (without being heedless) (*ra'ina*), (O Muhammad)" – thus making a play with their tongues, and implying that the (true) Faith is false,' (*an-Nisa'*: 46).

The Jews of Medina used the word *ra'ina* when talking to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This word has two different meanings in the Arabic usage. The first meaning of the word is, 'listen to us,' but this was not the meaning these people intended. The second meaning of the word *ra'ina* comes from the word *ru'oona* (heedlessness), and thus, they used it as a play on words to insult the status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* forbade the believers from using this word of disrespect when talking to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'O you who have believed! Do not say (to the Prophet), "Listen to us (without being heedless) (*ra'ina*)," but rather say, "Have patience with us," and listen (to him), since grievous suffering awaits those who deny the truth,' (*al-Baqara*: 104).

Another form of their distortion of the truth was their manner of greeting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Instead of saying, 'peace (*salam*) be upon you,' they used to say, 'death (*sam*) be upon you.' Therefore, they employed many ways to distort Allah's words. Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that they had forgotten a portion of what they were taught. Even those of them who did not forget their knowledge actually distorted it, and

those who did not change it concealed its reality. Their brazenness against Allah *Glorified is He* reached such an extent that they dared to fabricate the verses in the scripture with their own hands. Thereafter, they claimed that their fabrications were revelations from Allah *Glorified is He*. These were their many methods of changing the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that: ‘Verily, they who distort the meaning of Our messages are not hidden from Us,’ (*Fussilat*: 40). Indeed, the literal meaning of this verse, which is that they are not hidden from Allah’s encompassing knowledge, is a commonly known concept. However, this verse has an additional meaning. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the previous verses to inform these disbelievers of their crime before punishing them and taking them to task for it. This is because a crime and its punishment are two distinct entities. The legists say that a crime should be defined before its punishment can be rightful and that there is no crime without a prior legal text.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Hence, which (of the two) will be in a better state – he that is (destined to be) cast into the fire, or he that shall come secure (before Us) on Resurrection Day?’ (*Fussilat*: 40) Allah *Glorified is He* knows that our answer to this question will be as He wishes, and that all sane people will want security on the Day of Resurrection. Through this question, Allah *Glorified is He* is ordering us to strive in carrying out His commands, and to avoid those actions which are forbidden. This is the path of safety and salvation from the hellfire.

The previous verses discussed how the disbelievers tried to distort Allah’s words. Then, this question was posed to signify that anyone who distorts the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* will be cast in the fire on the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, those who believe in Allah’s verses will be granted a safe return. Indeed, after this comparison, it is a form of sheer idiocy for a person to disbelieve in Allah’s words in order to achieve temporary power or a transitory status in this world, after which they will find an agonizing fate in an eternal fire.

A person may be enjoying the greatest levels of luxury in this life, in the form of extended wealth or extreme power, authority and dignity. However, a major factor that disturbs their enjoyment of these luxuries is that these

pleasures will not last. Indeed, wealth and power may desert them while they are still alive, or they may themselves die and leave the world itself behind them.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of the eternal fate of those disbelievers who enjoy their temporary luxuries in this life. He said: 'One of them (the disbelievers) will be dipped a single time in the fire. The angels will ask him, "Did you ever see luxury in the previous world?" He will reply, "No, by Allah *Glorified is He* I never saw any luxury there!"' ⁽¹⁾

No sane person would choose to abandon an eternal and everlasting pleasure in the Hereafter for an adulterated and transitory pleasure in this world. You experience pleasure in this world based on the extent of your own abilities and capacities, but in the Hereafter, you will experience pleasure in accordance with Allah's power and generosity. The garden will contain things which no eye has seen, nor ear heard of, nor has occurred to the mind of man.

We are thus confronted with two very contrasting options, and although the correct choice is clear, we are still free to choose for ourselves. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do what you will: verily, He sees all that you do' (*Fussilat*: 40). Here, Allah warned us and provided a caution for the people. They can do what they please in this world, but Allah *Glorified is He* sees them and observes all their actions. Afterwards, He is able to reward or punish them accordingly. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

(1) Anas ibn Malik narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said: 'On the Day of Resurrection, the most opulent individual from among the disbelievers will be brought forward, and it will be said, "Dip him in the fire a single time." He is dipped in the fire, and then asked, "Have you ever experienced any luxury?" He will say, "No, I never experienced pleasure." And a believer who suffered the most pain and harm will be brought forward, and it will be said, "Dip him in paradise a single time." He is dipped in paradise, and then asked, "Have you ever experienced pain or harm?" He will say, "I never experienced pain or harm."' This Hadith was narrated by Ibn Majah in his *Sunnan* (Hadith 4312).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِالذِّكْرِ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤١﴾ لَا يَأْتِيهِ
الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِّنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

Those who reject the Quran when it comes to them – though it is an unassailable Scripture [41] which falsehood cannot touch from any angle, a Revelation sent down from the Wise One, Worthy of All Praise [42] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 41 - 42)

The literal meaning of the word *kafaru* (disbelieved) means ‘those who covered’. These disbelievers have covered their belief in the Necessary Existent Deity. A cover implies that something has been concealed. In this case, the concept that these people have concealed is the concept of faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. This means that belief in Allah *Glorified is He* is an innate concept in the minds of people, while disbelief is an emergent fabrication that conceals the true nature of the pure heart. Therefore, in this regard, the lexical connotation of the word *kufir* (disbelief) is a reference to the truth of faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

The word ‘reminder (*dhikr*)’ is a reference to the Quran which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad’s heart. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Behold, it is We Ourselves who have revealed, step by step, this reminder (*dhikr*): and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it (from all corruption)’ (*al-Hijr*: 9). The word *dhikr* is also used to describe the previous scriptures that were revealed before the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and if you have not (yet) realised this, ask the followers of the (earlier) reminder (*dhikr*)’ (*an-Nahl*: 43).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘and, indeed, We vouchsafed (Our revelation) unto Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) (as) the standard by which to discern the truth from the falsehood, and as a (guiding) light and a reminder for the pious (people),’ (*al-Anbiya*: 48). The word *dhikr* (reminder) also connotes reputation and high standing. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And, verily, this (revelation) shall indeed become a reminder for you and your people’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 44). He also says: ‘(O men!) We have now bestowed upon you a Divine book containing all that you ought to bear in mind (in remembrance for you (*dhikrukum*))’ (*al-Anbiya*: 10).

The word *dhikr* also applies to the praise of Allah *Glorified is He* as Allah says: 'By means of intoxicants and games of chance (gambling), Satan (Iblis) seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah and from Prayer' (*al-Ma'ida*: 91). The word *dhikr* is also used to mean our remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* through our obedience, and the remembrance of Allah's graces and forgiveness to His servants, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So remember Me, and I shall remember you' (*al-Baqara*: 152).

Allah *Glorified is He* described the Quran by saying: '...for, behold, it is a sublime ('*aziz*) book' (*Fussilat*: 41). The word '*aziz* (sublime) has a number of meanings. The first meaning is 'a valuable rare object.' The second meaning is 'a person who has absolute authority, and who cannot be vanquished.' For instance, the second meaning can be found in Allah's words: '...for Allah is Almighty ('*Aziz*), an avenger of evil' (*Al-Imran*: 4).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* described the Quran as being a victorious and a supreme book that takes hold of hearts and achieves dominance over them. This refutes the hopes of the disbelievers who say:⁽¹⁾ 'Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it, so that you might gain the upper hand' (*Fussilat*: 26). Indeed, those who listen to the words of the Quran with pure hearts and a tender sensitivity will necessarily be amazed by it.

We have seen this effect in the story⁽²⁾ of our master 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. He was one of the staunchest opponents of Islam until the day in which he learned that his sister and her husband⁽³⁾ had become Muslims. He immediately went to her house and beat her until blood ran down her face. It was this blood that induced tenderness in his heart, and this newfound tenderness overcame his ignorance. He started listening to her recitation of the

(1) That is, the disbelievers of Mecca. Abu Jahl said, 'When Muhammad reads (the Quran), shout in his face to make him lose his place.' (*Tafsir Al-Qurtubi*, 9/6021)

(2) The story of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab's conversion to Islam

(3) Her husband was Khabbab ibn Al-Aratt ibn Jandala ibn Sa'd, from the Tamim tribe, known as Abu Yahya At-Tamimi. He is one of his esteemed earlier companions, and he participated in Badr. It is said that he died during the caliphate of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them* who performed his funeral prayer. However, he actually died in Kufa in 37 A.H. and 'Ali performed his funeral prayer. It is also said that he lived 73 years [*Az-Zirikli*, (*Al-A'lam*), 2/323].

Quran, but this time, he heard the verses with a pure heart-felt attitude. This had an overwhelming effect on him, and he embraced Islam that day.

Therefore, the Quran is a powerful and victorious book. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, 'This religion is strong. So, pursue it ardently but with gentleness, for the traveller who pushes his camel beyond its capacity, in his haste to arrive to his destination, will not reach his destination nor will he keep his camel (healthy and alive).'⁽¹⁾ He also said, 'Anyone who shall pull vehemently upon this religion will be vanquished.'⁽²⁾

If you want to make a choice between two options, you must allow your mind to be clear and your heart to be devoid of whims. Then, you should make the choice with a balanced logical approach. If you feel relieved with one of these options, then pursue it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body' (*al-Ahzab*: 4). Therefore, if 'Umar had evil in his heart, he would not have approached faith and good deeds. Thus, it is necessary to primarily expel evil from our hearts before it accepts the good, as the evil will prevent the reception of the good.

Allah *Glorified is He* described how the hypocrites and disbelievers received the Quran. He says: 'now among those (hapless sinners) are those who (pretend to) listen to you, (O Muhammad,) and then, as soon as they leave your presence, say (with scorn) to those who have knowledge (of your message): "what is it that he has said just now?"' (*Muhammad*: 16) They are not affected by the Quran and do not understand it, due to their pride and obstinacy. Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them by saying, 'Say: it is a guidance and a source of

(1) Given by Al-Bayhaqi in his *Sunnan Al-Kubra* [3/18] from narration of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah that Prophet Muhammad said, 'This religion is strong... So, pursue it ardently but with gentleness, and do not make the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* hated by yourself. The traveller who pushes his mount beyond its capacity, in his haste to arrive to his destination, will not reach his destination, or keep his mount.' Al-Bayhaqi also narrates it in the section on the people of faith [3728] from the narration of 'Aisha, and [3729] from the narration of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As.

(2) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [38] from the narration of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said, 'This religion is that of ease, and anyone who shall pull vehemently upon this religion will be vanquished; therefore focus on your goal, draw near and rejoice.' It was also narrated by An-Nasa'i in his *Sunnan* [4948].

health to the believers; but as for those who will not believe – in their ears is deafness, and so it remains obscure to them' (*Fussilat*: 44).

Indeed, the same Quran has different effects according to the receptive ability of the listener. It is a book of guidance and healing to the believers, but the people of disbelief and hypocrisy will be blinded by its truth. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted us to choose logically and fairly between the two options presented in the verse. If fairness is employed in this judgement, the Quran will necessarily triumph, as nothing can compete or contest with it if it is properly received. At that point, a healthy sentiment can easily comprehend what the mind cannot understand. For this reason, we said that the influence of the Most Merciful cannot be deflected by the influence of Satan (Iblis). The mother of Prophet Musa (Moses) did not protest against the message of the Most Merciful when He said to her: '...and then, when you have cause to fear for him (Musa), cast him into the river, and have no fear and do not grieve...' (*al-Qasas*: 7). Pure reason does not comprehend this action, but a pure instinct can accept it. Thus, those who hear the Quran but are not affected by it are occupied with concepts that oppose its healthy reception.

Therefore, we are in need of justice in order to make our free choices, just as we are in need of protection and security after we make the choice. Some people claim that Islam spread with the sword, but this is not true because in the history of Islam, the sword was not used to impose a dogma, but rather to protect the peoples' freedom of choice. It also protected the freedom of the religion to proclaim itself. Freedom of belief is an obligation in Islam, and this was evident as many people remained as disbelievers in Muslim territories. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it' (*al-Kahf*: 29).

Islam's launching point was the concept of freedom of belief. It has made the choice of religion a personal choice. Some people have used the issue of the legally prescribed punishment against apostasy⁽¹⁾ in their attempts to

(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him said: 'Execute whoever changes his religion.'* This Hadith was narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih* [2794, 6411], *Abu Dawud* in his *Sunnan* [3787] and *At-Tirmidhi* in his *Sunnan* [1378]. *At-Tirmidhi* mentioned it as a sound narration and this ruling is issued by the scholars regarding=

defame Allah's religion. They claimed that Islam is at odds with the freedom of belief and forces people to accept it. However, this is a false accusation. Those who consider the matter more closely will find that Islam declares, to any person thinking of embracing Islam, that apostasy is punished in this way. Thus, anyone who wants to embrace Islam should think and contemplate their choice carefully before announcing it because the legally prescribed punishment will be executed if they publicly denounce it later. So, in fact, this ruling aims to place obstacles in the path of a disbeliever wanting to embrace Islam, as Islam wants their conviction to be solid and firmly established in their hearts before they embrace it. Thus the penalty of execution for apostasy does not interfere with their right of free choice. It only warns them to avoid embracing this religion before adherently and sincerely acknowledging it as the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'No falsehood can ever attain to it openly, and neither in a stealthy manner' (*Fussilat*: 42). This means that no falsehood will ever overcome it from any direction. For instance, some orientalists made the preposterous attempt to seek out what they thought were defects in the Quranic verses. They pointed out the similarity between two verses in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the first: '...and do not kill your children due to poverty – (for) it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them...', (*al-An'am*: 151) and then He says in another verse: 'Hence, do not kill your children for fear of poverty: it is We who shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you...' (*al-Isra'*: 31).

Some orientalists observed this repetition in the two verses, and claimed that if one of them is eloquent, then the other one cannot be so. They considered that one of the two verses is futile. Unfortunately, these orientalists did not have the basic faculty that would help them to understand the words of Allah *Glorified is He* and receive His Gift properly. Were they to observe the context surrounding each of the two verses, they would have found that each verse is

= apostates. Likewise, it was narrated by An-Nasa'i in his *Sunnan* [3991, 3992, 3993, 3994, 3995], Ibn Majah in his *Sunnan* [2526] and Ahmad in his *Musnad* [1775, 2420, 2421, 2813, 21007]. This narration is sound, and the majority opinion is that the apostate is to be asked to repent over a period of three days, and some hold the opinion that he is given a period of a month, to give him ample opportunity to contemplate his choice. Therefore, each apostate has his specific state upon which basis he is to be judged.

particularly suitable to its context. Each verse is eloquent in expressing the issue it is discussing.

In the first verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and do not kill your children due to poverty – (for) it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them’ (*al-An‘am*: 151). The person this verse is talking to is a person living in poverty, and so, is occupied with supporting himself before thinking about supporting his children. It is for this reason that the verse ended with Allah’s statement, ‘...it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them’ (*al-An‘am*: 151).

As for the second verse, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the term: ‘...for fear of poverty,’ (*al-Isra’*: 31) instead of the phrase, ‘due to poverty.’ This second verse is directed to a person who is not afflicted by poverty, but they fear that it will afflict them when a child comes in their lives. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures this person that the child will come along with its appointed sustenance. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...it is We who shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you’ (*al-Isra’*: 31). Therefore, every verse is eloquent in its proper place.

Likewise, these orientalist pointed out the similarity between two verses in the chapter of *al-Baqara*. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the first verse: ‘And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom be taken from them, and none shall be succoured’ (*al-Baqara*: 48). Then, in another part of the chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says in an apparently similar verse: ‘And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them, and none shall be succoured’ (*al-Baqara*: 123).

A hasty glance will not detect a great difference between the two verses, but people with a higher linguistic ability who consider their meanings more closely will be able to observe the difference. Each verse is describing a different type of soul on the Day of Judgment. The first verse is speaking of a righteous soul that has the ability to intercede for the souls of sinners. On the

other hand, the second verse is describing the soul of the sinner waiting for a righteous person's intercession in order to avail itself.

On the Day of Judgment, the soul of the sinner will acknowledge its crimes and offer a ransom to escape the punishment. However, the verse mentions that a ransom will not be accepted on that day. Therefore, the sinner will search for a better soul to intercede on its behalf, after the ransom has been refused.

The better soul that will try to intercede for the sinner and will stand before Allah *Glorified is He* and say: 'O Lord. I intercede for this sinner. If my intercession is not accepted, then take the ransom from me.' Therefore, each verse is eloquent in its proper place.

Unfortunately, some people do not understand what Allah *Glorified is He* intended in His Revelation and do not receive His Words with a good heart. In fact, they accuse the Quran of having faults and say, 'We do not understand the verses that your Lord said.' Indeed, He is our Lord, praise be to Allah *Glorified is He* and we wish that they see Him as their Lord as well.

Another verse they point out is the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They aim to extinguish Allah's light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth' (*as-Saff*: 8). The orientalists rejected this verse because they said that Islam did not prevail over all religions, as after fourteen centuries there are still Jews, Christians, atheists and adherents of other religions in the world. This statement also indicates their lack of comprehension of the holy Quran's methods and meanings.

The verse: '...that He (Allah will) make it prevail over all (false) religions,' (*as-Saff*: 9) does not mean that all the people will become Muslims because the word 'prevail' here is only referring to the strength of the Islamic argument over all the other religions. So, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* was declaring the power of His Revelation's argument, after which the people have the freedom to believe or deny the truth.

Additionally, if the person who rejected this verse read the Quran with some insight, they would have noticed that the precise Quranic words actually pointed out that the other religions of polytheism and disbelief will continue to exist

in the presence of Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* says that the Islamic argument will prevail: ‘...however hateful the polytheists may be’ (*as-Saff*: 9) and ‘...however hateful the disbelievers may be’ (*as-Saff*: 8). Therefore, these two classes of disbelievers will still be present alongside the believers in Islam.⁽¹⁾

Islam may even prevail over the other religions through the widespread acceptance of its judgements and rulings even if those who accept these rulings are not Muslims. Their life circumstances may compel them to take refuge in the rulings of Islam to find solutions for their problems. This is another great way in which Islam will prevail.

For instance, the Vatican used, for a long time, to reject the possibility of divorce, and divorce is a concept that Islam put forward as a lawful solution to marital problems. However, with the passage of time and the multitude of problems they encountered, the Vatican was forced to accept this approach as a solution to their issues as well. Thus, they adopted the ruling of Islam even though they were not Muslims. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truthfully when He says: ‘...Had it been issued from any source but Allah, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction’ (*an-Nisa*: 82).

These and other verses indicate the integrity of the words of Allah *Glorified is He* and that they are not afflicted with falsehood or contradiction, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘No falsehood can ever attain to it openly, and neither in a stealthy manner,’ (*Fussilat*: 42) for falsehood can only occur if the speaker is not truthful, and who is more truthful than Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who revealed the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...(since it is) sent down by the One Who is truly wise (*hakim*), and the One Who is ever to be praised (*hamid*)’ (*Fussilat*: 42). The Arabic adjectives *hakim* (wise) and *hamid* (ever to be praised) indicate the intensified forms of wisdom and praise. Wisdom entails the placement of effort in its proper place, and praise means that Allah *Glorified is He* is praised for all of His Acts, Decrees, and Power. The phrase, ‘Praise be to Allah *Glorified is He*’ combines all of these meanings together. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘All praise is due to Allah alone, The Lord of all the worlds’ (*al-Fatiha*: 2).

(1) Islam will not eradicate them, and they will not all become Muslims.

We previously said that part of Allah's mercy toward us is that He taught us the form in which we are to praise Him for His Favours towards us. This praise is lexically formed of a subject and a predicate: 'Praise is to Allah.' If Allah *Glorified is He* did not set down for His servants the form in which they are to glorify Him, they would differ as to the correct way to do so, and people would contend in this matter. The articulate litterateur would then praise Allah *Glorified is He* in a way of which an illiterate person or a simple shepherd would be incapable. Had the matter been left to the differing aptitudes of people, there would not have been any sort of equivalence in people's praising of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, it is from His Mercy to us that He has commanded us, to raise our hands and praise Him in this manner. He has prescribed this for us so that all people will praise and glorify Him in an equivalent way. Everyone is to utter the same phrase: 'All praise is due to Allah alone.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to praise Allah *Glorified is He* with the following saying, 'Glory be to You (Allah)! We cannot count your blessings. You are as You have praised Yourself.'⁽¹⁾

It is incumbent upon the one who has been taught and guided to the correct manner of praising Allah *Glorified is He* using the phrase, 'All praise is due to Allah alone,' to praise Him in this way without fail. In this way, the servant will keep praising his Lord countless times.

Then, in the verse we are studying, Allah used the word '...sent down (*tanzil*)' (*Fussilat*: 42). When you hear the word *tanzil* (sending down), you should understand that it refers to an object sent down from above, even if that term refers to material objects descending upon the earth. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Hadid*: '...and We sent down (upon you) iron, in which there is awesome power as well as (a source of) benefits for man' (*al-Hadid*: 25). Thus, even though iron is extracted from the

(1) Narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad* [6/58, 120], and likewise Muslim in his *Sahih* [486], from a Hadith of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her who said, 'One night I noticed the absence of the Messenger of Allah from the bed, so I went to look for him until my foot came into contact with the soles of his feet. He was praying in the mosque and his feet were propped up. He was saying, "O Allah, I take refuge from Your Wrath in Your Good Pleasure, and from Your Punishment in Your Forgiveness; I take refuge from You in You. I cannot recount Your Praise, You are as You have praised Yourself."'

ground, Allah *Glorified is He* told us that He sent it down from the skies, for the service of mankind upon the earth.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قِيلَ لِلرُّسُلِ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو
مَغْفِرَةٍ وَذُو عِقَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

[should remember that] you [Prophet] are not told anything that the previous messengers were not told: your Lord is a Lord of forgiveness, but also of painful punishment [43] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 43)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* consoled His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and lightened his sorrows. These sorrows were the result of the polytheists' denial of the truth and their resistance to Allah's revelation. Allah *Glorified is He* told Prophet Muhammad that he was the master of all the messengers, and that all the messengers before him had encountered trouble and harm. If the level of harm were to correspond to the level of the messenger in Allah's sight, then indeed, the people's attacks on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would simply be more severe than the attacks suffered by the previous messengers.

Now, the phrase, '...nothing is being said to you,' in this verse could have one of two meanings.

The first meaning of this phrase is that no new words of consolation were said to Prophet Muhammad. This is because similar consolations were also revealed to the messengers before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient in the face of the adversaries and harm directed by the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'For, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts would (in the end) be victorious!' (*as-Saffat*: 171-73) Since Prophet Muhammad was one of those messengers, therefore, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* sent him glad tidings of timely victory with his army and followers.

The second meaning of this phrase could be that no new words of disbelief were uttered by the enemies and opponents of Prophet Muhammad *peace and*

blessings be upon him as they were only repeating what the previous disbelievers had said to their messengers. In other words, this was also an order directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be discouraged by the disbelievers' actions, for this is the customary attitude of disbelievers towards those who deliver Allah's messages to them. According to this meaning, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was being told not to bear a burden that is heavier than his mere responsibility of delivering the message, irrespective of the consequences.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'and whether We show you (in this world) something of what We hold in store for those (deniers of the truth), or whether We cause you to die (before that retribution takes place – know that, in the end), it is unto Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir*: 77).

Another cause of sorrow in Prophet Muhammad's heart was that he had tasted the sweetness of belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and he wanted the same blessing for everyone. He wanted to guide all the people to Allah's way without failure. For this reason, he used to push himself beyond the limits of his obligation, and his Lord often blamed him for doing so in the way one might blame his beloved. Allah blamed him for overburdening himself in the following verse: 'But (why) would you (Muhammad), perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf*: 6) Allah *Glorified is He* also says to him: '...but no more is an apostle bound to do than clearly deliver the message (entrusted to him)' (*al-'Ankabut*: 18).

We often find that the Noble Quran has stories of the previous prophets and messengers to reassure Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the strength of his message and to lighten his burden.

For instance, Allah told him the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah), who called his people to Allah *Glorified is He* over the course of nearly 950 years. Yet, only a small number of people believed in him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(And after a time, Nuh (Noah) said, "O my Lord! Verily, I have been calling unto my people night and day, but my call has only caused them to flee farther and farther away (from You). And, behold, whenever I called unto them with a view to You granting them forgiveness, they put their fingers into

their ears, and wrapped themselves up in their garments (of sin), and grew obstinate, and became (yet more) arrogant in their false pride”” (*Nuh: 5-7*).

Prophet Nuh's (Noah) saying, ‘...“they put their fingers into their ears,”...’ (*Nuh: 7*) is lexically meant to emphasise the strength of their rejection and indicate that they went to full lengths to stop their ears from hearing his call. They did not simply want to put their fingertips into their ears, but figuratively wanted to use their whole fingers to block the delivery of the message. Furthermore, they ‘...“wrapped themselves up in their garments”” (*Nuh: 7*). This means that they covered their faces with them, thereby blocking every aperture of comprehension and understanding, as though they did not want to hear or even see the truth. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was also told to be patient, as he was not the first to experience either this trouble or this kind of obstinacy and rejection.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Behold, your Lord is indeed full of forgiveness – but He has also the power to punish (the disbelievers) most grievously’ (*Fussilat: 43*). Upon contemplation, this statement appears to be a ‘diplomatic statement’. The scholars call this a statement combining an incentive with a punishment. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the different states of those who opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so addresses them in a manner appropriate to any of their possible reactions. For those who return to Allah *Glorified is He* and to the Straight Path, the gate of repentance is always open, but for those who persist in their opposition, Allah *Glorified is He* has the power to punish them severely.

You can observe that the promise of forgiveness in this verse preceded the threat of punishment. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* promises those who truly believe that He will forgive their sins and even graciously give them good deeds instead of their evil deeds. This is as an expression of His Graciousness and Magnanimity, as though Allah *Glorified is He* is trying to put His servants at ease even though He is in no need of them.

The history of Islam is full of people who viewed Islam and its call with hostility and opposed Prophet Muhammad and the believers with him. They were indeed its grimmest of enemies at one point, but then, subsequently, they became its partisans and supporters and gave their lives to the way of Allah.

Had the door been shut in their faces, such individuals would never have embraced Allah's religion. This has occurred in the famous stories of the conversion of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Hamza, 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl, Khalid ibn Al-Walid and 'Amr ibn Al-'As *Allah be pleased with all of them* as well as others who were champions of disbelief.

The Quran even justly described the Jews and Christians who upheld Allah's Commandments and considered them a part of their religion, instead of a mere temporal authority. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the righteous people of the Book: 'And among the followers of earlier revelations there are people who, if you entrust one of them with a treasure, will (faithfully) restore it to you; and there are among them many who, if you entrust them with a tiny gold coin, will not restore it to you unless you keep standing over them' (*Al-Imran: 75*).

The Quran then told Prophet Muhammad that certain disbelievers will never be guided to the true faith, even though they were still in the expanse of this world and in their period of free choice. These people did remain in their disbelief refusing to pay the slightest testimonies to this religion, even if hypocritically to distort the Quranic truth.

These people included Abu Lahab, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad, who used to walk behind the Messenger of Allah and falsely describe him as a liar. Allah *Glorified is He* therefore passed His Judgement against him that he will die in his disbelief, and that his fate will be the hellfire (we take refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* from it). The following chapter was revealed about him: 'Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and that entire he has gained? (In the life to come) he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing, together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales, (who bears) around her neck a rope of twisted strands!' (*al-Masad: 1-5*).

Abu Lahab heard about the revelation of this chapter. It was within his power to stand in front of the people's assembly and proclaim with a hypocritical loud voice, 'I testify that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,' if he wanted to prove the chapter as false. However, he did not do so because Allah *Glorified is He* had passed the judgement against him that he would never testify to faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* is thus ‘...full of forgiveness...’ (*Fussilat*: 43) for every disbeliever, denier and opponent who returns to the right path and repents. However, He also has ‘...the power to punish most grievously’ (*Fussilat*: 43) those who persist in their disbelief, opposition and hostility to the call of Allah *Glorified is He*.

It is obvious that the juxtaposition of a meaning with its opposite in one place is one of the features of the Quranic style because referring to opposites clarifies each term in the pair. All things are distinguished by their opposites. Therefore, your Lord informed you of the gravity of the situation and left it up to you to choose for yourself, whether to opt for forgiveness or look forward for punishment, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَقَالُوا لَوْلَا فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ ۖ أَأَعْجَمِيٌّ وَعَرَبِيٌّ قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هُدًى وَشِفَاءٌ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرٌ وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَمًى ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ يُنَادُّونَ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

If We had made it a foreign Quran, they would have said, ‘If only its verses were clear! What? Foreign speech to an Arab?’ Say, ‘It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it, it is as if they are being called from a distant place’ [44] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 44)

Allah *Glorified is He* started this verse with the words: ‘If We had willed this (Divine book)...’ (*Fussilat*: 44). This Divine book is the Quran which is called as such because it is meant to be read, as *Qara’a* is the Arabic word for ‘read’. Then Allah *Glorified is He* continued: if He had ‘(willed this Divine book) to be a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue (*‘Ajamiyun*)’ (*Fussilat*: 44), ‘...they (who now reject it) would surely have said, “Why is it that its messages have not been spelled out clearly?”’ (*Fussilat*: 44) The disbelievers would have still wondered about it and asked, ‘Why was it not revealed in Arabic?’ For instance, the Taurat (Torah) was revealed in Hebrew, which is the language and origin of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Some of the disbelievers asked why the Quran was not in the Hebrew language, like

the Taurat (Torah). The answer was that Prophet Muhammad was an Arab by origin and by language. Therefore, it was fitting for the Quran to be revealed to him in his people's language. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear that had the Quran been revealed in a non-Arabic language, they would have demanded and wished it to be in Arabic.

Additionally, aside from the language in which it was revealed, the Quran is in its essence a guidance and a source of health, as Allah *Glorified is He* described it: 'Say (O Muhammad): "This (Divine book) is a guidance and a source of health to all who have believed; but as for those who will not believe – in their ears is deafness"' (Fussilat: 44). That is, the ears of those who do not believe in it are impaired, and so, they cannot hear what is beneficial and fruitful for them. '...and so it remains obscure to them' (Fussilat: 44). To them, the Quran is a dark and suspicious text in which they become lost.

Thus, the Quran is one, but the fruits of its reading vary, for the way the Quran is received varies according to the intention of the one who receives it. The one who listens to it with a conscious ear and a pure unbiased heart, unoccupied by its opposing concepts, will find in it guidance and a source of health.

On the other hand, those who are blind to its truth will be lost, not knowing where they are headed. This person reads or hears the Quran without understanding it and without becoming affected by it. Allah *Glorified is He* described these people in another verse: 'now among those (hapless sinners) are those who (pretend to) listen to you, (O Muhammad,) and then, as soon as they leave your presence, say (with scorn) to those who have knowledge (of your message): "what is it that he has said just now?"' (Muhammad: 16)

We have previously explained the idea of the active subject and the object. When the active subject does an action, the object will become affected by the actions in accordance with its nature. For example, the difference between a peasant striking the soil with an axe, and striking a rock with the same axe, is that the soil becomes affected by the axe and gives its fruits, whereas the hardened rock does not comply with the active axe and does not become affected by it.

Therefore, do not make judgments regarding the active subject except after looking at the receiving object. You have to observe this interaction

between both elements. We previously gave an example concerning a cup of hot tea. Blowing air upon the hot cup cools it down, whereas if you are in a freezing cold environment, blowing air upon your hands will warm them. Thus, the act of blowing air is one, but the effect is different because of the difference between the objects.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the inattentive disbelievers: ‘...and so it (the Quranic message) remains obscure to them: they are (like people who are) being called from a distant place’ (*Fussilat: 44*). They have heard the Quran and have not been affected by it, and so Allah *Glorified is He* compared them to a person being called from a distant place and so cannot hear the call clearly, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَاخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ
 مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

We gave the Scripture to Moses but disputes arose about it – if it were not for a decree that had already been issued from your Lord, they would already have been judged – and still they are doubtful and suspicious of it [45] (The Quran, *Fussilat: 45*)

This verse narrated to Prophet Muhammad the events that occurred to the revelation bestowed upon Prophet Musa (Moses). This verse is still describing what has been mentioned in a previous verse as, ‘...nothing is being said to you but what was said to all (of Allah’s) apostles before your time,’ (*Fussilat: 43*).

Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was among those prophets who endured his people’s cruelty and obstinacy. His story is thus a consolation for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Thus, too, have We previously bestowed revelation upon Musa (Moses),’ (*Fussilat: 45*). This previous revelation was the Taurat (Torah), ‘...and thereupon disputes arose about it,’ (*Fussilat: 45*). This means that the people disagreed upon the message of Prophet Musa (Moses). Some of them altered it, while others forgot parts of it. Some of them even wrote parts of it by themselves, claiming that these verses had been sent by Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord’ (*Fussilat*: 45). This Divine decree and decision refers to the eradicating punishment that annihilated some previous nations of disbelievers such as the extermination of the people of ‘Ad and Thamud, as well as the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and the people of Prophet Lut (Lot). Allah’s Decree was different for the following nations, as He did not subject their disbelievers to such tortures in this world, leaving their punishment until the Day of Resurrection. ‘Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord, all would indeed have been decided between them (from the outset)’ (*Fussilat*: 45). Were it not for this different decree, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have given them time until the Hereafter. He would have punished them in this world from the outset of their disbelief, just as He has done with the preceding nations who called their Prophets liars.

Allah *Glorified is He* then described the people of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being in: ‘...grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it (the message) entails’ (*Fussilat*: 45). This means that their indecision made them worried and uncertain.

Doubt is one of several ways of dealing with occurrences and events. The first of these ways is the way of knowledge. This is when you have certitude about the event and are able to bring evidence in support of it.

The second way is relying upon another person’s authority, or emulating that person. This is when you know that an event happened in reality and are convinced by it, but you are unable to bring an argument to support it. This is like the case of small children who are taught by their parents that Allah *Glorified is He* is one. The children will emulate and believe that concept not because they understand it, but because they trust their parents or teachers, knowing that their parents wish them good. The parent, however, is unable to bring an argument that would prove the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* to the immature mind of the child. Therefore, in this case, the child will be emulating the parent or teacher.

The third scenario is the case of ignorance. This is when a person falsely believes that an event has occurred. Thus, the event did not coincide with reality, but that person is wrongly convinced that it is true. That is why we previously pointed out that it is more difficult to teach an ignorant person than

an unaware illiterate person. This is because an ignorant person believes in something which is untrue, and may require an increased effort to correct their thoughts. Firstly, we need to free their minds from the wrong information, and secondly, we still need to teach them the truth of the matter. On the other hand, an unaware illiterate person has an open and a free mind that does not defend any positions. That is why you will find them obedient, and able to accept much of what is taught to them without wrongful disputes.

The fourth and final scenario is that of doubt, which is when you have a real case in which your belief equals your disbelief, leaving you undecided. When your confidence and conviction prevail, this is called a suspicion, but when doubt prevails over certainty, this is known as a delusion.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As it is, behold, they (who will not believe in this Divine book) are in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it entails' (*Fussilat*: 45). This means that they have not reached the degree of faith, or the degree of relying on authority, or the degree of ignorance. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَنْ عَمِلْ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٤٦﴾

Whoever does good does it for his own soul and whoever does evil does it against his own soul: your Lord is never unjust to His creatures [46] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 46)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* affirms an existing truth which He wants His servants to believe in and wants this concept to be firmly established in their minds. This concept is that when each one of them does something, they are only benefiting themselves. Their belief and obedience does not benefit Allah in any way.

Similarly, the disobedience of the sinners and the denial of the disbelievers do not harm Allah *Glorified is He* for He had all the qualities of Magnificence, Beauty, and Perfection before He created this world. It is the servants who will be harmed by their evil deeds.

Therefore, the legal obligations are expressions of Allah's care for His creation. Every maker wants his creation to be in the best form, and thus, guards it from corruption and from causes of failure.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, the human among you and the jinn among you, those of you present and those absent, were as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, this would not add anything to My Kingdom. If the first of you and the last of you, the human among you and the jinn among you, those of you present and those absent, were as immoral as the heart of the most immoral man of you, that would not decrease My Kingdom more than a needle decreases the sea when placed therein. For I am generous and praiseworthy, I give by uttering a word and I make you suffer by uttering a word. When I will a thing to be, I but say unto it, “Be” – and it is.’⁽¹⁾

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed the concept that everybody is free to believe or disbelieve because every person will be rewarded or punished according to his or her deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good’ (*Fussilat*: 46). Allah *Glorified is He* does not earn anything from them. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and whoever does evil, does so to his own hurt’ (*Fussilat*: 46). Surprisingly, even after knowing this, human beings still commit acts that may lead to their own demise. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has described most of mankind as wicked and foolish.⁽²⁾

When Allah *Glorified is He* warns us from His Punishments, He does not want to punish us, but wants to divert us from these harmful sins that will bring these punishments upon us. He wants to frighten us from these crimes

(1) *At-Tirmidhi quotes the Hadith in his Sunnan [2495] from Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him stating that it is sound. It is also quoted by Ahmad in his Musnad [154, 5/77] and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [4257].*

(2) *Allah Glorified is He said in the chapter of al-Ahzab: ‘Verily, We did offer the trust (of reason and volition) to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish’ (al-Ahzab: 72). Ibn ‘Abbas said, ‘Trust means obedience, and religious duties.’ Zayd ibn Aslam said, ‘Trust means three things: prayer, fasting, and ablution after ritual impurity.’ Ibn Qatada said, ‘Trust means “religion,” “religious duties,” and “limits”.’ Ibn Kathir has said in his Tafsir [3/522], after quoting these previous explanations: ‘There is no contradiction between any of these words. They agree with one another and refer to the acceptance of commandments and prohibitions, with the condition that if one fulfils them he will be rewarded and if he abandons them he will be punished. Man has accepted them with the help of Allah Glorified is He despite his weakness, ignorance, and transgression.’*

due to their dangers. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is free from any injustice: '...and Allah is not a transgressor against His servants' (*Fussilat*: 46). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* frightened you to protect you! Indeed, when He says: 'Whoever kills shall be killed,' He does not want to kill people, but wants to prevent bloodshed. Whoever contemplates murder, then, will have a greater fear that they will be killed for it!

The Quran says about military power: 'Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster so that you might terrify thereby the enemies of Allah, who are your enemies as well' (*al-Anfal*: 60). It is bizarre that Islam's enemies use this verse as an argument for proving that Islam advocates terrorism just because the Quran mentions the word 'terrify.' This is a mistaken interpretation of the Quranic style. Preparing a force that terrifies enemies means that I do not want battle and do not want confrontation. When my enemy learns that I am prepared to fight, he will refrain from combat.

On the issue of military force, it is said that the balance of power preserves peace in the international community of nations. In the days when there were two equal powers, namely the Soviet Union and the United States of America, there was military peace. Each of them feared the other's power, so the war between them was called a 'Cold War'. However, the Soviet power collapsed and America became dominant. So, now, there is only one great military power, and it does whatever it pleases without any deterrent from another force.

Thus, we say that when Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us to prepare military force, this does not mean that He pushed us towards the battlefield, but rather, He wanted to preserve peace between us and our opponents. Clearly, you never attack someone who is stronger than you. The verse thus wants peace, and not terror as is claimed by those who reject this verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and Allah is not a transgressor (*zhallam*) against His servants' (*Fussilat*: 46). The word *zhallam* (transgressor) follows the *fa'al* lexical pattern. This means that it is the intensified active form of the word *zhulm* (wrongdoing), just as the word *qattaal* (fighter) is the intense active form of the word *qatil* (killer).

The Arabic language deals with sentences of affirmation in a different pattern than sentences of negation. In the case of affirmation, mentioning the intense

quality implies the less intense quality still exists. For instance, when you say that a person is *allaam* (a very knowledgeable scholar), you are intrinsically implying that he has the basic attribute of being '*alim*' (a scholar). Traditionally, however, in the case of negation, negating the intense quality does not automatically imply the negation of the lesser basic form of the quality.⁽¹⁾

Now, does this mean that the verse we are studying only negated that Allah *Glorified is He* has the intense quality of transgression (*zhallam*), while not negating the basic attribute of transgression (*zh'alim*)? Indeed, the answer is no, as Allah *Glorified is He* is glorified above any wrongdoing. The explanation is that, in the verse, Allah says: '...against His servants' (*Fussilat*: 46). The verse used the plural word 'servants' instead of the word 'servant'. Therefore, the verse negated that Allah *Glorified is He* is a transgressor (*zhallam*) against all his servants, so using the intensified word *zhallam* is suitable with using the plural word 'servants'. So, the rejection of this meaning of *zhallam* (transgressor) still implies the negation of any form of wrongdoing by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good; and whoever does evil, does so to his own harm' (*Fussilat*: 46). Therefore, Allah is a just judge between us and our own selves. This means that we are not opponents to Him, as He will issue rulings with or against every soul according to a just scale. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَيْهِ يَرْدُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَمَا تَخْرُجُ مِنْ ثَمَرَاتٍ مِنْ أَكْمَامِهَا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنْثَى وَلَا تَضَعُ
إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِيَ قَالُوا أَعَدْنَاكَ مَا مِمَّا مِنْ شَهِيدٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

Knowledge of the Hour belongs solely to Him and no crop comes out of its sheath, nor does any female conceive or give birth, without His knowledge. On the Day He asks them, 'Where are My partners?' they will answer, 'We admit to You that none of us can see [them]' [47] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 47)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'To Him alone returns the knowledge of the Hour,' and this means that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows of the time of the Hour. The

(1) For instance, negating that a person is a very knowledgeable scholar (*allaam*) does not negate that he is still a scholar ('*alim*').

Hour is the Day of Resurrection, and His Knowledge is the knowledge of when it will happen. This is one of the examples of the knowledge that Allah *Glorified is He* has reserved for Himself and has not disclosed to anyone. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: ‘...“None but He (Allah) will reveal it in its time. Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; (and) it will only fall upon you suddenly.” They will ask you – as if you could gain insight into its (mystery) by dint of persistent inquiry!’⁽¹⁾ Say: “Knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone; but (of this) most people are unaware” ’ (*al-A‘raf*: 187).

There are great wisdoms in the concealment of the Last Hour. The most important objective is to prevent people from becoming careless, and to prevent the deceitful, the whimsical and the lustful people from persisting in their lust. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* prepares everybody for it so that everybody hurries to do good deeds. Indeed, no one is assured of the time he will leave the abode of deeds in this worldly life, to enter the Abode of Reckoning in the Hereafter. In fact, a person’s reckoning and resurrection start when he dies.⁽¹⁾

This is why we have said that fulfilling religious obligations is connected to a specific time span. For example, the noon prayer is performed from the moment the sun is at its zenith to the moment when the shadows are twice as long as their objects. So, whoever prays during this period, will have fulfilled his duty. Why is it then preferable to perform these prayers as early as possible? This is because a person is not guaranteed to live until the end of the given period of prayer. If a person dies a second after the period begins, without intending to hurry for prayer, they will have sinned. This is why, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the

(1) *This Hadith has been narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him in ‘Ajluni’s book Kashf Al-khafa’, under the number 2618. Its full version is, ‘Remember death frequently, for if you remember it in prosperity, its remembrance will make you loathe the prosperity, and if you remember it in poverty, it will ease the poverty for you. Death is Resurrection; when someone dies, his Resurrection comes.’ Ad-Daylami has narrated this Hadith on the authority of Anas in Musnad Al-firdaws [1117] with the following wording, ‘When one of you dies, his Resurrection comes; so worship Allah Glorified is He as if you were seeing Him, and repent before Him every hour.’*

(2) *Muslim, in the Kitab Al-Iman of his Sahih (no. 85) has narrated the following Hadith, from ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud: ‘I asked the Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him about the most virtuous action. He said: “Prayer in its time.”’*

most virtuous action, he replied, ‘Prayer in its time.’ Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Verily, for all believers, Prayer is indeed a sacred duty linked to particular times (of day)’ (*an-Nisa*: 103).

The same concept is true for pilgrimage. Sometimes you may see a man who is affluent and is able to spend on the expenses of pilgrimage, yet he does not perform it, wishfully delaying it to a later time. Is that person sure of living until that time?

Allah *Glorified is He* has concealed the time of the Hour and the time of each person’s death. He kept this knowledge concealed from all of His creation for a wise purpose. Resurrection and death are a reality. Death is like an arrow that is imminently destined to hit you, and your life will last for as long as the arrow travels and until the time it reaches you.

Therefore, the concealment of the knowledge of the Hour is the clearest of demonstrations of this world’s fragility. Announcing that it might come at any time will make you prepared for it. Thus, you should anticipate it and expect it in every instant. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Blessed is He (Allah) in whose hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: It is He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test (and thus show) which of you is best in conduct,’ (*al-Mulk*: 1-2).

He has made death more important for His creatures than life, although life comes first. This is because it will always reside in every person’s mind and thoughts. Therefore, you must accept life with caution and not be deceived by it. Expect death to arrive at any moment. It is out of Allah’s Mercy for His servants that He has made great and small signs that indicate that the Hour is drawing near. This will frighten people and awaken them from their ignorance of the Resurrection.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continued in the verse we are studying: ‘And no fruit bursts forth from its calyx,’ (*Fussilat*: 47). The word ‘calyx’ denotes the green cover that envelops the fruit. Then it gradually splits until the fruit emerges from it. For example, you may see a rose hidden in a green sheath before blossoming, as if keeping its eyes closed before finally opening its lids and emerging from its cover.

‘And no female ever conceives, nor ever gives birth, except with His knowledge’ (*Fussilat*: 47) – these are all things which are hidden from people but are not hidden from Allah *Glorified is He*. Female conception is a well-known phenomenon, where a female’s ovum is fertilised with a male spermatozoon, and this meeting results in conception, which is Allah’s gift in any case. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills’ (*ash-Shura*: 49).

Even barrenness and infertility may constitute a Divine gift in the eyes of a person who ponders and seeks wisdom. When you look at a child who has killed one of his parents, or a child who has brought so much shame upon his family that they wish that death frees them from him, or when you look at the disobedience of some children, you should understand that infertility itself can be a blessing and a gift from Allah *Glorified is He* that requires gratitude. Thus, a servant should be grateful if they are infertile, just as another servant is grateful for the birth of children.

You may observe that the Quran puts the female first in this verse. This is because Arabs in ancient times did not desire female daughters. This is why the Quran has assigned a lofty reward for the man who raises daughters and treats them well, and for those who respect Allah’s preordainment to bear daughters. It is as if a voice from Allah *Glorified is He* were calling to him, ‘My servant, for as long as you accept My gift, blessing, greatness and majesty, I shall bestow upon each of your daughters a husband who will fulfil your hopes in her, and will be more faithful to you than your own sons.’

We have seen wonders in the issue of bearing children that illustrate and affirm Allah’s absolute Power. We have seen married couples who are unable to conceive, and were then separated by divorce. Then, the man married another woman and had children with her, and the woman married another man and conceived from him. Thus, conception was impossible between these two individuals in particular.

Contemplating the phenomenon of conception from a rational point of view, it can be found that Allah’s Omnipotence has encompassed it in its four ways. The natural conception occurs between a male and a female. However,

Allah *Glorified is He* with His Absolute Omnipotence, created Adam *peace be upon him* without a husband or a wife. *Hawwa* (Eve) was created from a father but had no mother; whereas *Isa* (Jesus) *peace be upon him* had a mother but was fatherless. At times, there may be a husband and wife and yet the conception does not occur. All such cases affirm the Absolute Omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He* as regards the creation of beings.

In the Quranic verse: ‘...On the Day He asks them, “Where are My partners?”...’ (*Fussilat*: 47) It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who says: ‘...My partners...’ which refers to those false deities ascribed to Him. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...whom you imagined...’ (*al-An‘am*: 22), to which they reply: ‘...We confess to You...’ (*Fussilat*: 47) that is, we have told and informed You. The Arabic word *‘adhannaka* (told and informed you) is derived from the word *udhun* (ear) which is the organ of hearing, which receives speech signals and through which knowledge is acquired, thereby it is deemed as the first means of acquiring knowledge.

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the earth: ‘obeying its Sustainer, as in truth it must’ (*al-Inshiqaq*: 2) that is, it listened to the commands. ‘...[T]hey will answer, “We admit to You”...’ (*Fussilat*: 47) that is, we informed You: ‘...that none of us can see [them]’ (*Fussilat*: 47), that is, none of us witnesses that You have partners. Instead of Allah *Glorified is He* declaring Himself far from having partners, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘...My partners...’ (*Fussilat*: 47) leaving it to them to reject the existence of His partners. They only believe that Allah *Glorified is He* has no partners when it is too late, as though the word ‘partner’ has never crossed their minds.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَظَنُّوا مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَجِيصٍ ﴿٤٨﴾

The gods they invoked before will have vanished away; they will know that there is no escape [48] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 48)

The Quranic phrase: ‘...will have vanished away...’ (*Fussilat*: 48) indicates that they will turn away and get lost from them. ‘The gods they invoked before...’ (*Fussilat*: 48) alludes to the false deities whom they ascribed as

partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. They will know for certain and be assured, as maintained in the verse: ‘...they will know...’ (*Fussilat*: 48) that ‘...that there is no escape’ (*Fussilat*: 48). They will find neither retreat nor flight that would save them from chastisement; one looks here and there but does not find a place of refuge or a hideout. After all, the disaster is imminent and there is no rescue from it. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

﴿٤٩﴾ لَا يَسْتَمُ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ دُعَاءِ الْخَيْرِ وَإِنْ مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَيَئُوسٌ قَنُوطٌ

**Man never tires of asking for good, but if evil
touches him he loses all hope and becomes
despondent [49] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 49)**

This verse clarifies that ‘man,’ which refers here to the disbeliever, is never weary of ‘...asking for good...’ (*Fussilat*: 49). He keeps supplicating for good things for himself; such as obtaining wealth, children, and health. A person may ask Allah to help him have an apartment to live in, for instance. Yet, once he is granted the apartment, he prays for a small villa. Even as Allah *Glorified is He* fulfils his wish, he desires for a tower!

Man is created with a yearning for material wealth and is motivated by greed. ‘Only dust can fill man’s eyes, but Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive those who repent.’⁽¹⁾ Indeed, few are those who are satisfied with what they are given.

Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was given abundant wealth. However, when one day, sitting on the roof of his house, he found a flock of golden locusts, he tucked his cloth and began to collect the locusts in it. Allah *Glorified is He* called to him and said, ‘O Dawud (David), did I not give you enough?’ He replied: ‘Yes, Lord, but I cannot get enough of Your favours.’⁽²⁾

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*, *The Book of Tendering Hearts*, Hadith no. (6438), and by Abu Nuaym Al-Asbahani in *Hilyatu-Awliya* (1/337). Both mentioned the narration of Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr who said in his sermon given in Mecca, ‘O people, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to say, “if man is given a valley filled with gold, he will wish for a second, and if he is given a second, he will wish for a third; only dust can fill man’s stomach, and Allah will forgive those who repent.”’

(2) *peace be upon him*. It was narrated by Imam Rafi’i in his book *At-Tadwin fi Akhbar Qazwin*, on the authority of Abu Hurayra, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Once, when Ayyub (Job) was bathing naked, golden locusts fell on =

If this were the condition of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* how would it be then for the ordinary believer? On the other hand, how could it be for the disbelievers, and whoever has similar traits, about whom the following verse was revealed: ‘And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!’ (*al-Kahf*: 36) In another verse, they are mentioned to have said: ‘...“the ultimate good awaits me with Him”...’ (*Fussilat*: 50).

Thus, ‘man’ here alludes to the unbeliever,⁽¹⁾ whereas for the believers they are required to be satisfied with what they are given. Guiding us to have contentment as one of our traits, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed his uncle Al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib: ‘The little that makes you satisfied is better than the abundant that makes you restless.’⁽²⁾

In another Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘We are a people who do not eat until we feel hungry, and when we eat, we do not eat to our fill.’⁽³⁾ Further, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, ‘One third of it (one’s stomach) is for eating, one third is for drinking, and one third should be left for breathing air.’⁽⁴⁾

= him, so he began to collect them into his clothes. Allah Glorified is He called him and said, “Oh Ayyub (Job), did I not give you enough, more than what you see?” He said, “Yes, my Lord, but I cannot get enough of your goods.””

- (1) This is the opinion of As-Suddi. It is said that ‘man’ here refers to Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, or to ‘Utba and Shayba, the sons of Rabi’a, and Umayya ibn Khalaf. (This is narrated by *Qurtubi* in his *Tafsir* [9/6039]). See also Ibn Al-Jawzi’s interpretation of the verse in his *Zad Al-Masir*.
- (2) Narrated by *At-Tabari* in his *Tahdhib Al-Athar* [5/478, *Hadith* no. 2494] on the authority of Abdullah ibn Bisir Al-Mazini, who said, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his uncle *Al-Abbas*, “O uncle, the little that exhausts you is better than the abundant that makes you restless,” that is, the little that tires you. *Al-Bayhaqi*, in his *Dalai’l An-Nubuwwa* [5/375], narrated on the authority of Abu Umama al-Bahili who narrated, ‘*Tha’laba ibn Hatib* came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, “Oh Allah’s Messenger, ask Allah to make me wealthy.” Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, “woe on you, *Tha’laba*, the little that makes you grateful is better than the abundant which you cannot forbear.”’
- (3) This is a well-known saying, falsely attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but its meaning is correct.
- (4) *Miqdam ibn Ma’di Yakrib* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘man has never filled a container more evil than his own stomach. A few morsels=

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* in a Qudsi Hadith says: 'I will provide – according to My measure – him who is content with what I have preordained for him.'⁽¹⁾

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us different ways of preventing many diseases, and gives us solutions for developing the economies of nations. In earlier times, physicians did not understand the relation between heavy breathing and the stomach. They believed that only the lungs were responsible for breathing, while food, which rests in the stomach, had no bearing on the rate of respiration. In modern times, nonetheless, they understand that both are intimately related, for if the stomach is filled with food, it exerts pressure upon the diaphragm, suppressing the lungs and weakening the heart.

However, their prior fallacious perception was corrected by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who taught us how to combine the various components of life such as food, water and air, guiding Muslims not to be voracious, 'Man has never filled a container worse than his own stomach.'⁽²⁾

Returning home from work so hungry that you cannot wait until the food is ready, you may eat whatever leftovers you find, be it even a loaf of bread, some watercress and some cheese. Surprisingly, you find this simple food

= that keep his back upright are sufficient for him. If, however, he cannot help doing it, let him keep one third of it for food, one third for drink, and one third for his breathing.' This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* [4/132], At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [2380], and Ibn Majah in his *Sunnan* [3349].

- (1) In his book *Ihya Ulum Ad-Din* [4/344], Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali recorded several Hadiths regarding contentment with Allah's Decree and Predestination, some of which are the following: 'When someone is content with a little provision from Allah, Allah *Glorified is He* will be content with little of his work.' Another Hadith states, 'If Allah loves one of His servants, He tries him; if the servant forbears, Allah chooses him, but if he is happy, Allah makes him one of the elect.' There is no firm proof, however, that the Hadith mentioned by the Sheikh is authentically attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* neither is it ever mentioned in the reliable books [Adil Abu Al-Maati].
- (2) *This is the previously mentioned Hadith on the authority of Miqdam ibn Ma'di Yakrib. It was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [4/132], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2380], and by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [3349].*

tasty because of eating while hungry, which makes you agreeably accept everything that you can eat.

Once an Arab man of healthy nature stated, 'Hunger is a condiment.'⁽¹⁾ It is also said, 'A hungry person's food is wholesome and a tired person's bed is cosy,' that is, comfortable. Surely, a tired person falls into deep sleep, even if he is lying on pebbles or on a mat, whereas he who is not tired, rolls in his bed unable to fall asleep, even if he is lying on silk material. Therefore, pondering on the principles of Islam, one can find solutions for our economy's difficulties and for our endless troubles.

Islam teaches one to be content with what one possesses and not to strive towards what is beyond one's possibilities. Yet if one does, one will be like the one who drinks seawater, the more one drinks, the thirstier one becomes.

Reporting the other side of the disbeliever's nature, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '...but if evil touches him he loses all hope and becomes despondent'⁽²⁾ (*Fussilat*: 49). If evil fortune befalls the disbeliever, '...he loses all hope...' (*Fussilat*: 49). To reveal how much depression he feels, the exaggerated form of the word *ya's* (despair) is used. It signifies the person who has lost all hope and optimism, and *ya's* (despair) is a trait of the soul. Nonetheless, the word: '...despondent' (*Fussilat*: 49) (*qanut*) represents an exaggerated form of the word *qanit*, but it is a quality of the body. This is because giving oneself up to *qunut* (despondence) is the outward expression of despair reflected on the body, especially on the face. Hence, a person dust-stained, sullen, and shivering is likely to be of the same condition as the despondent disbeliever mentioned in the verse. As for the believer, his face radiates wellness, light, and faith; and thus he is merry, joyous, openhearted, smiling, and happy.

(1) Mentioned by Al-Asm'ai on the authority of 'Uthman Ash-Shahham, who narrated it from Abu Raja Al-Ataridi, who said, 'When we heard that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him started killing, we ran away and grilled the leg of a hare by burying it. Then, we let our camels kneel down on the buried hare, and I will never forget that meal.' Whenever Al-Asm'ai was reminded of this incident, he would say, 'Yes, hunger is a condiment, and moderation is surely the slogan of Muslims.' It was narrated by Al-Jahiz in his *Al-Bukhala'* [1/76].

(2) The word 'evil' (*sharr*) in the verse refers to poverty and sickness [(*Tafsir Al-Qurtubi*), 9/6039]. According to Ibn Kathir, it refers to trials and poverty [4/104].

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَلَيْنَ أَذَقْتَهُ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَرَاءٍ مَسَّاهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ هَذَا لِي وَمَا أَظُنُّ
السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَئِنْ رُجِعْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي إِنَّ لِي عِنْدَهُ لَلْحُسْنَىٰ فَلَنُنَبِّئَنَّ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِّنْ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

Whenever We let him taste some of Our mercy after he has been afflicted, he is sure to say, ‘This is all my own doing: I do not think the Hour will ever come, but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward would await me with Him.’ We shall most certainly inform the disbelievers of what they have done and give them a taste of severe torment [50] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 50)

The Quranic verse states: ‘...he is sure to say, “This is all my own doing”...’ (*Fussilat*: 50), that is, ‘this is my right, I have deserved it with my work and effort,’ so, he denies Allah’s Favour upon him. The same words were uttered by Qarun (Korah), as stated in the verse: ‘...“This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me”...’ (*al-Qasas*: 78). In reply, it is as though Allah *Glorified is He* told him that if he were given it only by virtue of his knowledge, then let him keep it by virtue of that knowledge! As a consequence, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling...’ (*al-Qasas*: 81).

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Nay, surely, man becomes grossly overweening[6] whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient’[7] (*al-Alaq*: 6-7).

Gaining in arrogance, man will say, as stated in the Quran: ‘...but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord...’ (*Fussilat*: 50) that is, in the Hereafter. It means, the disbeliever maintains that even with the assumption that there will be resurrection and recompense, ‘...“the best reward would await me with Him”...’ (*Fussilat*: 50). He thinks that just as Allah *Glorified is He* granted him good things in this world, He will give him even more abundantly in the Hereafter.

Informing the wrongdoer of his evil deeds is the first stage of his torment, as stated in the verse: ‘...We shall most certainly inform the disbelievers of what they have done...’ (*Fussilat*: 50). He will be reminded of his misdeeds,

which will be counted, in preparation for his reckoning. In the meantime, he knows that there is no return to the worldly life to make amends to his Lord.

This is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran: ‘...he prays “O my Sustainer! Let me return, let me return [to life] [99] so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed [a foretime]!”[100]’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 99-100), to which Allah *Glorified is He* replies: ‘...Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters: for behind those [who leave the world] there is a barrier [of death] until the Day when all will be raised from the dead!’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 100)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘...and if they were brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them...’ (*al-An’am*: 28).

The Quranic verse: ‘...and give them a taste of severe torment’ (*Fussilat*: 50) refers to harsh punishment which is given various descriptions in the Quran. It is at times described as: ‘...grievous suffering...’ (*al-Mulk*: 28), and at other times as: ‘...shameful suffering...’ (*al-Mujadala*: 16), that is, suffering inflicting shame and humiliation. Thus, painful suffering fits the crime and nature of some of those punished, whereas for others, shameful suffering is more fitting, for it demolishes their arrogance, even without physical pain.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَسَى بِجَانِبِهِ
وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَذُوْ دُعَاءٍ عَرِيضٍ

**Whenever We are gracious to man, he goes away
haughtily, but, as soon as evil touches him, he turns to
prolonged prayer [51] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 51)**

The Quranic verse: ‘...he goes away haughtily...’ (*Fussilat*: 51) means, he turns away from Allah *Glorified is He* being granted what he asked for and no longer in need of Him. Many people possess this quality. Someone in need of your help regarding some issue or difficult situation may wait outside your door day and night. Once his need is fulfilled, he may forget to even say ‘thank you’! The poet⁽¹⁾ has artistically put it:

(1) These verses were composed by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul*.

Those who need you, follow you meekly,
But when they get what they need, they leave you and hasten away,
When someone reviles you, the best among them
Will stand still, not rejecting, but [also] not inventing lies [about you],
Do not abandon righteousness however much they hide,
For Allah's reward is greater and more abundant.

Remember that those who refuse to acknowledge your help are of most profit to you, for the one who rewards your charity is Allah *Glorified is He* Who gives rewards according to His measure, unlike people's gifts, which are according to theirs.

Hence, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to his people, as stated in the Quran: 'O my people! No reward do I ask of you for this [message]...' (*Hud*: 51). It means, I deserve to get rewarded for what I do, but I only want to be rewarded from my Lord, for He is the One Who can reward me and evaluate my work.

In the course of this verse, the action of turning away is gradual: '...he goes away...' (*Fussilat*: 51) meaning that he turned his face away, then turned his back '...haughtily ...' (*Fussilat*: 51). Thus, he first turned his face away, and then turned his side and his back. The same order is observed in the Quranic verse: '...But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come]: [34] on the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] "These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!"[35]' (*at-Tawba*: 34-35)

These verses are said to have been revealed regarding the one who turns away from the needy with his face first, then his side, and then turns his back towards him. Compensation, then, is paid according to one's deeds and branding is to be inflicted to the degree of one's hoarded wealth.

As the disbeliever is touched by evil, he recurses to prolonged supplication, as stated in the verse: ‘...but, as soon as evil touches him, he turns to prolonged prayer’ (*Fussilat*: 51). His prayers are described as ‘*Arid* (prolonged and continuous),⁽¹⁾’ as can be noticed in the verse, rather than ‘long’. Everything has length and width, the former is known to be greater than the latter. Though, the Quran uses width to refer to greatness, as stated in the verse describing paradise: ‘...a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 133). If its width is as vast as the heavens and the earth – which is the greatest measure possible – how great its length is!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ كَفَرْتُمْ بِهِ
مَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنْ هُوَ فِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Have you ever thought, what if this revelation really is from God and you still reject it? Who could be more astray than someone who cuts himself off so far [from God]?’ [52] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 52)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is ordered in this verse to say to the disbelievers: ‘...Have you ever thought...’ (*Fussilat*: 52). Think for yourselves and tell me: ‘...what if this revelation really is from God and you still reject it?’ (*Fussilat*: 52) When you deny the Giver of bounty: ‘...Who could be more astray than someone who cuts himself off so far [from Allah]?’ (*Fussilat*: 52) This is to say, no one is more astray than he who does not attribute Favours to the Bestower of Favours, thereby enjoying His Blessings and acting ungratefully towards Him. Hence, the ‘who’ clause, in the verse, stresses surprise and rejection, for bounty requires gratitude and praise to its Giver.

In other verses, Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrates favours bestowed upon us in a generous and graceful manner, saying: ‘...and should you try to count Allah’s Blessing, you could never compute them...’ (*Ibrahim*: 34).

(1) *Ibn Manzur* in *Lisan Al-‘Arab* on the stem of ‘-r-d states, ‘*arid* means “abundant,” but it is used instead of “abundant” because each of them denotes a different measure.’ This view is also maintained by *Al-Qurtubi* in his *Tafsir* [9/6040]. *Ibn ‘Abbas* upheld that the word ‘*arid* in the verse: ‘...he turns to prolonged prayer’ (*Fussilat*: 51) alludes to supplication with humility and pleading.

In the verse, the Arabic word *in* (should) denotes doubt, for man never undertakes the calculation of anything unless it is possible to count. Even with the assumption that you would try to count Allah's Blessings, you would never be able to compute them. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to His Blessings using the singular form of the word 'blessing' rather than the plural 'blessings' because when you contemplate just one of Allah's blessings, you will find it encompassing many other hidden blessings.

This verse is mentioned twice but with different endings; one is: '... [And yet,] man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ungrateful!' (*Ibrahim*: 34), and the other is: '...God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of Mercy' (*an-Nahl*: 18).

Giving blessings has three elements: the blessing itself, its giver, and the one who receives it. The blessing is abundant and incalculable, its Giver *Glorified is He* is much forgiving, and a dispenser of mercy, and he who receives it is persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ungrateful.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is telling His servants not to despair of His Mercy and not to disincline to praying to Him, however much engaged in wrongdoing and stubbornly ungrateful they are, for He is much forgiving, a dispenser of mercy.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

سَنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ
الْحَقُّ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

**We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth
and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is
the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses
everything? [53] (The Quran, *Fussilat*: 53)**

The Arabic particle *sin* 'shall' in the phrase: '...shall show them ...' (*Fussilat*: 53) denotes the future tense. Therefore, this saying remains truthful and in effect until the Day of Resurrection. In the verse, '...Our signs...' (*Fussilat*: 53), this refers to the cosmic signs proving His Power and His

marvellous creation. The word *afaq* ‘...In every region of the earth...’ refers to the farthest place that could be seen with one’s eyes.

In this verse, *afaq* (literally horizons) alludes to the heavens and the earth. Hence, the saying ‘such and such has a broad horizon,’ is used to mean he has deep insight into abstract matters; the wider one’s view, the broader one’s vision.

Does the Quranic verse: ‘...shall show them Our signs ...’ (*Fussilat*: 53) – by its reference to the future – mean that in the past Allah *Glorified is He* has not shown them His signs? No, He did in fact show them many signs, but they ignored and turned a blind eye to them. They were heedless of the verse: ‘for, long ago has Our word gone forth to Our servants, the message-bearers, [171] that, they – they indeed – would be succoured, [172] and that, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious! [173]’ (*as-Saffat*: 171-173)

This is the way Allah treats His servants, whom He sends as Messengers. He *Glorified is He* promises to grant them help and victory. Allah *Glorified is He* has neither partners nor opponents to come between Him and His promise.

This verse also teaches us the essentials of warfare and the conditions for victory. Fulfilling such conditions leads to victory, whereas violation of them results in defeat, as Allah’s Way necessitates. Therefore, when Muslims lose a battle, it is as a consequence of violating these conditions. When they are vanquished, we do not say, ‘Islam has been vanquished,’ but rather, ‘Muslims were defeated owing to violating the commands of their leader and the conditions of victory.’ Defeat is necessary in order to give them a lesson and teach them to obey the commander’s orders, for had they become victorious after violating the rules of warfare, they would be careless in executing the commands of their leader.

We learned this lesson in the Battle of Uhud, when the archers disobeyed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who told them to stay in their positions whatever the outcome of the battle is.⁽¹⁾ They craved for

(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him appointed ‘Abdullah ibn Jubayr as the commander of the archers, who numbered fifty on that day. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him told him, ‘Shoot arrows at the cavalry lest they could attack us from behind – whether they are for us or against us – and hold firm on to your place lest=*

temporary material gain, and were allured by the booty when they saw the signs of victory; so they descended and left their positions. In turn, Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* had to simply turn around and encircle the Muslim army from behind, and thereby they were defeated, or at least did not win. Can we, then, say that Islam was defeated?

Thus, we should correct our understanding of this issue. The army of the Muslims, among whom Prophet Muhammad is present, may be defeated, for it did not follow the means of victory. On such an occasion, we do not say that Islam was defeated, but Muslims disobeyed the orders and thereby deserved to be defeated. So, in case you, O Muslims, search for the reasons for your defeat and backwardness, you will reach the conclusion that your deviation from the Divine Way of Guidance is the main reason behind all of that. This is the true reason for defeat. It is well proven throughout history.

In the battle of Hunayn, some Muslims said, ⁽¹⁾ 'we shall not be defeated today, not on account of our being few.' Who said this? Abu Bakr himself said it when he saw the numbers of Muslims reaching ten thousand. A bit vain with their great numbers, Allah taught them a lesson, so they were defeated in the beginning; but then Allah's Mercy descended upon them, reviving their morale, and giving them victory in the end.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '...on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers and they proved of no avail whatever to you – for the earth, despite all its vastness, became [too] narrow for you and

= they could approach us from your side.' [(Sirat Ibn Hisham) 3/10]. Al-Bayhaqi, in his *Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa* [3/229], narrated that the archers, after the defeat of the idolaters, left their positions to collect booty and Ibn Jubayr told them, 'Have you forgotten what Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him told you?' They replied, 'We shall go to take our share of booty.' The unbelievers then attacked the Muslims, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was left with only twelve men.

(1) In his *Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa* [5/123], Al-Bayhaqi narrated that Rabi ibn Anas said that on the day of Hunayn someone said, 'we shall not be defeated because of our small number' (they numbered twelve thousand). Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him being displeased with that, Allah revealed to him the verse: '...on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers...' (Al-'Imran: 25). This was also narrated by As-Suyuti in *Asbab An-Nuzul* [p. 138].

you turned back, retreating: [25] whereupon God bestowed from on high His [gift of] inner peace upon His Apostle and upon the believers, and bestowed [upon you] from on high forces which you could not see, and chastised those who were bent on denying the truth: for such is the recompense of all who deny the truth! [26]' (*at-Tawba*: 25-26)

The defeat that Muslims almost experienced in this war was a lesson, not an expression of Allah's hatred toward His servants, as a poet⁽¹⁾ puts it:

He became harsh only to hold himself back; he who is decisive,
May he sometimes become harsh over him whom he pities.⁽²⁾

Therefore, we maintain that if Allah promises victory, He does not come short of fulfilling it, but it is the Muslims who fail to have His promise fulfilled by failing to follow the route to the victory with which they are promised.

However, why do the idolaters persist in their disbelief and obstinacy, closing their eyes to Allah's signs which are so clear? It is because they are masters with temporary power, of which Islam seeks to strip them, putting an end to their mastery and declaring all people equal like the teeth of a comb, where there is no supremacy of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, except in piety.⁽³⁾

Salman the Persian, Suhayb the Roman and Bilal the Abyssinian *Allah be pleased with them* were all first rank leaders in Islam, that Prophet Muhammad

(1) *He is Abu Tammam Habib ibn Aws ibn Al-Harith At-Taai. He was born in Hawran in Syria in the year 188 AH, then he went to Egypt and settled there. Al-M'utasim brought him to Baghdad and made him a leading poet of his time. In his poetry is power and eloquence. The books he wrote include Fuhul Ash-Shu'ara and Diwan A-Hamasa. He died in Mawsil in the year 231 AH, forty three years of age.*

(2) *This is a line from Abu Tammam's poem composed in the kamil meter, consisting of six lines.*

(3) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [5/411] from Abu Nadra, who heard it from one of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. It was also narrated by Abu Nuaym in his Hilyatul-Awliya' [3/100] on the authority of Abu Nadra, who heard it from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah, who said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him gave a sermon in one of the Tashriq days (three days following the Feast of Sacrifice), saying, "Verily, your Lord is One, and your Father is one, and verily no Arab is privileged over a non-Arab, a non-Arab over an Arab, a red man over a black man, a black man over a red man, except in piety." '*

peace and blessings be upon him even said, 'Salman is one of us, the people of (my) household.'⁽¹⁾

Thus, kinship and lineage should be related to Islam. At the time when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declared Salman as one of the people of his House, Abu Lahab, his uncle, was banished from Allah's mercy due to his disbelief!

We learned this lesson from the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* with his son. In spite of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* being eager for the salvation of this son and invoking Allah for him, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches him the lesson: '[God] answered: "O Nuh (Noah), he is not of your family, for, surely, he was not righteous in his conduct. Therefore, do not ask of Me that of which you have no knowledge: thus, do I admonish you lest you become one of those who are unaware [of what is right]"' (*Hud*: 46).

It is clear in the verse that filiation and kinship are not based on family and blood ties, but on religion, guidance, and belief. Filiation is based on a mutual desire to do good and to follow the true path.

The group who attacked and fought against Islam were protecting their sovereignty and high position in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, they gathered and united against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers. This can be observed during the period of the siege which they imposed upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in *Shi'b*, closing all the windows on him and his followers, cutting from them all sources of livelihood, until they were forced to eat carrion and tree leaves.⁽²⁾

(1) *It was narrated on the authority of 'Amr ibn 'Awf Al-Muzani who said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him drew the trench in the year when the Battle of the Trench took place. It extended from Ajam As-Samar near the stationary place of Banu Harith to Midad. Being fit and strong, each of the Immigrants and the Helpers sought to claim Salman Al-Farisi [the Persian] as their own. Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, "Salman is one of us, the people of (my) Household."'* This was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in *Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa* [3/418], and Al-Hakim in his *Mustadrak* [3/598]. Adh-Dhahabi, nonetheless, deemed its chain of narrators as weak, having Kathir ibn 'Abdullah as one of the narrators.

(2) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated this story in his Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa* [1/315], recounting the terrible suffering that befell them, saying, '... until one could hear the voices of their children screaming behind the Shi'b from hunger.'

Then they tried to kill him more than once and harshly persecuted him, his family, and his Companions. Yet, far were they from harming him when Allah watches over and protects him. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to tell them not to think that their efforts to hinder the call to Islam in the Arabian Peninsula would be fruitful! Surely, the call would spread not only over the Peninsula but also over all the horizons of the world! ‘We shall show them Our signs in every region...’ (*Fussilat*: 53).

The call to Islam was competent enough to prevail for several reasons. Most importantly, the Arabs by their nature were people of war and combat and did not need to be trained in the art of warfare. Accordingly, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to fight, he did not establish a military academy, nor did he train anyone in fighting. Instead, he found people who were already prepared to go to war, knowledgeable in its ways and methods. Whenever one of them heard a war cry, he would rush towards it; this is because Arab tribes were in perpetual war. One of their wars, for example, lasted for forty years.⁽¹⁾ Secondly, the Arabs were wandering nomadic people. They knew no homeland and no rest. An Arab’s house was on his camel’s back; he would pitch it wherever he stopped and anywhere water and grass could be found. Not connected to a homeland, the Arabs were ready to take Islam to all horizons of the earth and all regions of the world.

It is also not by chance that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* happened to be illiterate, born into an illiterate nation who did not know how to read and write and who were uncivilised and had no culture. Although these traits represent shortcomings for other nations, in the case of the Muslim *Ummah* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they are deemed as an honour and a distinction. Had the Arabs been a people of knowledge, culture, and civilisation, Islam would have been perceived as only a civilizational leap.

(1) Narrated by Abu 'Ubayda Muammar ibn Al-Muthanna in his *Dibaj*, stating, ‘The war of the tribes of Baghid Abs and Dhubyan because of Dahis and Ghabra’ lasted for about forty years.’ It broke out on account of a horse race between two horses named Dahis and Ghabra; the stakes were one hundred camels, according to Ibn Abd Rabbuh in *Al-Aqd Al-Farid*.

These three things paved the way for the victory and prevalence of Islam over all horizons of the world. It is as if Allah were telling the disbelievers and those who opposed His religion, resisted His Messenger and ignored His words: 'for, long ago has Our word gone forth to Our servants, the message-bearers, [171] that, they – they indeed – would be succoured, [172] and that, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious! [173]' (*as-Saffat*: 171-173) Allah *Glorified is He* shall show them other signs which they will never forget and by virtue of which Islam will be victorious and will spread in the horizons of the world, east and west.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* depicts a situation which makes us laugh and enrages them. He *Glorified is He* says: 'If anyone thinks that Allah will not succour him in this world and in the life to come, let him reach out to heaven by any [other] means and [thus try to] make headway: and then let him see whether this scheme of his will indeed do away with the cause of his anguish' (*al-Hajj*: 15). The intended meaning is, let him bind himself to the sky with a rope, then cut the rope and come down like someone who has been hanged. Afterwards, let him see whether his fury will pass; the verse implies that he will die and perish, but his fury will not end.

Consider how Islam, in its beginning, started among the poor and slaves, to be followed by the powerful and the wealthy. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to preach among the people of Ta'if, they met him with oppression and mockery. No one protected him or stood by his side except Mut'am ibn 'Adi,⁽¹⁾ who was a disbeliever. Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* used him to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And none can comprehend Your Sustainer's forces save Him alone...' (*al-Muddaththir*: 31). Similarly, during the *Hijra*, he took as his guide Abdullah ibn Urayqit,⁽²⁾ who was also an unbeliever.

(1) Muta'm ibn 'Adi was one of Quraysh's allies and chiefs. It was he who sheltered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the latter returned from Ta'if, and rescued Sa'd ibn 'Ubada from the hands of Quraysh after they had caught him when performing 'Umra [Musa'b Az-Zubayri, (*Nasab Quraysh*)]. He also snatched and tore the document of the Quraysh related to the siege of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Shi'b and cutting him off from the rest of the world [An-Nuwayri, (*Nihayat Al-Arab fi Funun Al-Adab*)].

(2) He was the guide of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr during their *hijra* (migration) to Medina. He followed his people's religion; I have not=

Then He *Glorified is He* tells them to look at the land of Islam and the land of unbelief; Islam began from Mecca, the Mother of Villages, and its surroundings; now it is conquering the entire earth, east, and west. The land of Islam is growing, and the land of unbelief is shrinking. ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon? For, [when] God judges, there is no power that could repel His judgment...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 41). Did they not learn a lesson from that: ‘...For, [when] God judges, there is no power that could repel His judgment...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 41).

Could there be any doubt that Allah helps His Religion? Did this illiterate nation not conquer the greatest civilisations on earth of the time – the Persian civilisation in the East and the Roman civilisation in the West – simultaneously and in a short period? Despite their military techniques and skills in warfare, which the Arabs did not have and did not master, they nevertheless became victorious!

It was narrated that elephants were used in their wars, of which the Arabs knew nothing. However, Allah inspired Sa’d ibn Abu Waqqas to do a trick by which he would overcome the elephants. He learned that the elephant’s trunk is its weak point, so he ordered special swords to be made, with which warriors would strike the elephants’ trunks, thus bringing them down.⁽¹⁾

It was only a matter of half a century before Islam entered all these countries, east, and west, finding in them supporters and followers. Some embraced Islam out of piety and conviction, whereas others – because they found in it what they had been looking for: justice and tolerance, as opposed to the oppression of the rulers, and the abundance of injustice and perversion.

= seen his name mentioned among the Companions except in Dhahabi’s (*Tajrid*). ‘Abd Al-Ghani Al-Muqaddasi stated in his *Sira* that he does not seem to have converted to Islam; An-Nawawi in his *Tahdhib Al-Asmaa* upheld the same view [(*Al-Isaba fi Ma’rifati As-Sahaba*) 2/100].

(1) In the section on the elephant’s trunk, in his *Kitab Al-Hayawan*, Al-Jahiz states, ‘On the day of Qadisiyya, Zuhara ibn Juya asked, “Is it impossible to kill this animal?” They told him that it was possible – by hitting its trunk. Therefore, he charged on them until he became close; then he approached an elephant, and each of them attacked the other. He then struck its trunk and it fell, and the enemy retreated.’

All such signs can be inferred from the verse: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth...' (*Fussilat: 53*). The Islamic conquest, which spread throughout the world, is the foremost of signs. You could not prevent this extensive spread because Allah *Glorified is He* promised it to the believers and the Messengers. Such promise was not made in secret, but it is declared in the Quran, to be recited and promulgated until the Day of Resurrection. Allah took it upon Himself to keep and fulfil His promise, even though people record their own rights on other people so that they will not forget them, they do not do the same concerning others' rights on them. Being given by Allah *Glorified is He* such promise will be fulfilled come what may.

Another meaning inferred from the verse: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat: 53*) is that victory is in the offing. Muslims, in the beginning, were persecuted and were not yet allowed to fight back, that some of them had even died before Allah's promise of victory was fulfilled. Nonetheless, once they read the verse in question, they knew that victory was coming even if they died before witnessing its fruition.

It is clear that Allah *Glorified is He* did not command Muslims to fight until belief and faith struck firm roots in their souls and hearts. One of Prophet Muhammad's Companions asked him, 'Is it true that what stands between me and Paradise is that I fight them and they kill me?' To which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Yes indeed!' In turn, the man threw down the date which he had been chewing, and hurried to the battlefield, hastening to his martyrdom. It was because faith was deeply rooted in his heart, telling him that he would go to a better place, and that he was about to enter paradise, as wide as the sky and the earth.⁽¹⁾

The Arabic future particle *sin* (shall) in the verse: '...We shall show them our signs...' (*Fussilat: 53*) means He keeps bestowing upon us endless gifts

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* [Hadith no. 3740] from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah who narrated, 'A man once asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the day of Uhud, "Can you see where I will be if I am killed?" He replied, "In Paradise". Thus, the man threw the dates in his hand and fought until he was killed.' The same narration was narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* [3518].

until the Last Day, which will be the greatest sign. Allah *Glorified is He* shall show them His signs at all times, which will be in favour of this religion bringing about victory to its followers in every region of the earth. The Quranic phrase: ‘...in themselves...’ (*Fussilat*: 53) signifies the signs found in oneself, one’s person, flesh, blood, soul, limbs and organs; in every cell of one’s body is a sign to contemplate.

Allah *Glorified is He* created man from clay, and then informed us of the stages of his creation. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a scientist nor did he know anatomy, or embryology; he was Divinely informed about these. Modern science then came to affirm what Allah *Glorified is He* tells us regarding the creation of man from clay, procreation through humble fluid, and developmental stages from a blood clot, then a clinging substance, then a foetus, then bones, until the bones are covered with flesh.

Wonders and marvellous things in ourselves, of which we had no idea, are revealed to us every day by virtue of knowledge. Reading the latest discoveries of science on the human body, one finds in himself a wondrous world and a firmly and delicately built structure. Truthful is what the poet composes⁽¹⁾:

You think that you are but a small body,

But in you, a great world is hidden.⁽²⁾

Some wonders of creation were previously discussed, such as body temperature. It is normally thirty-seven degrees for those who live on the equator and who live near the two poles alike. Notwithstanding this fact, the temperature inside the body does not change, but even each organ is kept at the most convenient temperature. For instance, the liver’s temperature is always forty degrees, while the eye’s does not exceed nine. Although they are in the same body, their temperatures do not affect one another.

(1) The poet is 'Abd Al-Latif ibn Ali Fath Allah, a litterateur from Beirut. He worked as a judge and a mufti, and is known as *Al-Mufti Fath Allah*. He composed fine poetry, published in a *Diwan* (book containing a collection of poems), poetic stories, and a collection of poems in his own handwriting, composed in his youth in the year 1200 AH. He died in the year 1260 AH [*(Al-Mawsua Ash-Shi'riyya)*].

(2) The line is quoted from a poem written in the *Mutaqarib* meter, consisting of six lines.

Consider how blood, the liquid of life, preserves its degree of fluidity in the body, which, if it exceeds, causes haemorrhage; but if it fails to reach that degree, it may cause a clot or paralysis, Allah forbid!

Ponder over how mysterious, powerful, and wondrous the kidneys are. If one of them fails to function properly, the other takes over its task, making up for the lost one. Accordingly, one can live with one kidney if the other one is lost. On this basis, transplantation of kidneys from one person to another is forbidden. The Creator *Glorified is He* has given us two kidneys; each has one million cells, ready to function. Only a hundred thousand of them function, if they stop working, the other hundred thousand take over, and so on.

How do kidneys fail? The scientist explains that it happens when the one hundred thousand cells stop working, but the next hundred thousand do not function and substitute them. Therefore, taking a kidney from one person to another is a crime and a suicide, in my viewpoint. In such case, if the donor's other kidney stops working, he will die.

One of the wonders and Divine signs in man's creation is the skin and whatever it conceals of secrets revealed in the verse, speaking of the punishment of the unbelievers: '...every time their skins are burnt off We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]...' (*an-Nisa'*: 56).

It is deduced from this verse that skin is the organ of feeling, if it burns, the sense of feeling gets lost. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* replaces their skins so that they taste the chastisement which never ceases. It was not until before the World War that this fact was known worldwide. The Germans discovered that the skin is the organ of feeling, based on the evidence that when you receive an injection, you only feel pain the moment your skin is pierced by the needle, and then you stop feeling it. The Quran told us about this wonder long before the whole world could know it.

Furthermore, one of Allah's wonders is the natural pharmacy in our bodies, which cures every emerging illness. This is inferred from the verse: '...out of an embryonic lump complete [in itself] and yet incomplete...' (*al-Hajj*: 5). *Al-Mudgha Al-Mukhallaqqa* (the formed lump of flesh) is that from which man's internal and external body organs have been formed and is referred to

as ‘complete’; whereas ‘incomplete’ refers to that which remains in the body as a substitute, making up for what it lacks and curing its illnesses. For example, one of the modern ways to cure wounds and ulcers is for them to be left to the natural healing ability of the body, without recourse to chemical substances that leave traces on the skin.

Observe one of your limbs, or any of your body’s systems. Consider how balanced and straight man is made, how balanced, and erect he becomes. Look at the palm of your hand, at its fingers, symmetry, regularity, and flexibility.

Ponder over the digestive or respiratory system. Reflect on how your heart, which is merely a muscle not exceeding the size of your fist, works unstoppably from birth to death. These signs, wonders, and mysteries show the Omnipotence and marvellous creation of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Allah will keep showing His signs at all times as stated in the verse: ‘...We shall show them Our signs...’ (*Fussilat*: 53) so that every day we discover and contemplate more marvellous signs in His creation, in every region of the earth and in ourselves. On reading the Quran, one finds it encompassing past, present, and future: ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 41). With respect to the future, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...’ (*Fussilat*: 53).

The Arabic particle *sawfa* (shall) is used in the Quran to signify the distant future, alluding to the incidents occurring in the Hereafter. This is clear in the verse: ‘But in time you will come to know who it is that [in this world] shall be visited by suffering which will cover him with disgrace, and upon whom long-lasting suffering shall fall [in the life to come]!’ (*Hud*: 39)

The future tense of a verb whose subject is Allah *Glorified is He* is different from one whose subject is man. For Allah *Glorified is He* Time whether past, present, or future – is one and the same. Look at the verse: ‘Allah’s judgment is [bound to] come: do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent...’ (*an-Nahl*: 1); it implies the Day of Resurrection despite the past tense in the Arabic text.

Some orientalist accused the Quran of being inconsistent, claiming that it uses the verb 'come' in the past tense, whereas the verb '...do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent!' is used in the future tense. It should be noted that Allah *Glorified is He* to whom belongs time in its entirety, is the One speaking here. He *Glorified is He* uses the past form of the verb 'come' on account of His Omnipotence and Unity, given that no one can prevent Him from doing it. Hence, the Resurrection being undeniable truth, He *Glorified is He* uses the past tense to allude to it, as if it has already happened.

The Quranic verse: '...We shall show them Our signs...' (*Fussilat: 53*) is true for all times, therefore each generation finds in the Quran a new gift. Thus, today we know of such Divine signs – in the universe and in humans – which were unknown to people in the Prophet's time, although they existed and the Quran spoke about them.

I once asked some economists, 'when was the lift invented?' They replied, 'In the year such and such,' that is, in the twentieth century. Now, read the following verse: 'And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways whereon to ascend' (*az-Zukhruf: 33*). The word 'stairways' indicates what is known at present as the lift!

Likewise, the steamboats and the gigantic many-storied ships, which appear in the sea as if they are moving cities! Although they did not exist at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they are mentioned in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas' (*ar-Rahman: 24*). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* created and He knows what will happen to His creation in the future.

A question may be raised as to why these signs did not appear at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. The answer is that had it happened, the Quran would have become depleted of its miracles and wonders in one century. In this way, the following centuries receiving the Quran will be left with no wondrous gifts or marvellous signs to dazzle and show them the Omnipotence of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants each new generation to receive the Quran in a new way, taking a share of its gifts so as to be assured that He *Glorified is He* Who sent it down in the past contained therein what will happen in the future. This is also to prove that Allah *Glorified is He* is One, with no partner to object to what He says.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth...’ (*Fussilat*: 53) which means they will understand that the Quran is the Truth and that Allah is the Truth. Truth indicates something steady and unchangeable, the opposite of which is falsehood, which is unstable and untrue; truth glitters, falsehood falters.

Allah *Glorified is He* portrays truth and falsehood in a material, observable way, saying: ‘[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 17).

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Truth, and what He says is truthful. Some people see the reason for the truthfulness of His speech, while others doubt, as the signs are hidden from them for some time, until incidents show and prove, by actions and deeds, that it is the truth from Allah *Glorified is He*.

At some point, falsehood may prevail, but in the end, truth must triumph, hence the saying, falsehood rules for an hour, whereas truth rules until the last Hour. The believer who is knowledgeable and who firmly believes in Allah’s help does not care if falsehood prevails, for he knows that its victory is transitory. He will patiently wait for the hour when truth prevails, and falsehood departs.

The believer knows that falsehood, when it rises, is one of truth’s soldiers. Falsehood is a means of revealing truth to whoever does not know it, for it is through the contrast of opposites that goodness is perceived. Were it not for the suffering and disasters which falsehood inflicts on people, they would not know truth nor yearn for it.

Reflecting on the Quranic formulation: ‘...brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah’s Cause remained supreme...’ (*at-Tawba*: 40), one understands that truth is stable, being the foundation upon which all creation rests. Although the word of the unbelievers might rise high, it ends up being lowest, for Allah brings it down.

On the other hand, in the phrase: ‘...whereas God’s Cause remained supreme...’ (*at-Tawba*: 40), the word *kalamat* (God’s cause) stands as the subject of the sentence, which means it is fundamentally supreme – rather than made as such. Unlike ‘the cause of the disbelievers,’ it is never the lowest. Thus, not only did Allah make His cause supreme, it is supreme by its nature. Falsehood rises, afflicting people with disasters, to remind and guide people to the truth.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?’ (*Fussilat*: 53) Indeed, it is enough that He *Glorified is He* sees and knows, and that nothing can hide from Him. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were telling them that it is not befitting that you should wait for signs in order for you to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. You should rather believe immediately because what he tells you is from Allah, Who is a witness over him, and no one can dispute with what He says, or overrule what He commands.

When asked as to why Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was called (As-Siddiq), that is one who confirms the truth, we answer that it is because when he was told that his friend claims prophecy, he merely said without arguing, ‘if he says so, then it is true.’ Similarly, when he learned about Prophet Muhammad’s heavenly ascension, he said the same thing, without waiting for the Quran to be revealed and reassure him of that.

The Quran was revealed to convince the adamant unbelievers and the doubters, but As-Siddiq has the highest degree of certainty and belief. It was enough for him to have known how truthful Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was throughout his earlier life, which stands as evidence of his truthfulness in the meantime.

The word ‘witnesses’ (*Fussilat*: 53) here alludes to a witness who affirms truth, a judge who judges with it, and an executive power enforcing rulings.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ فِي مَرِيقَةٍ مِّنْ لِّقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ أَلَا إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّحِيطٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

**Truly, they doubt that they will meet their Lord;
truly He encompasses everything [54]
(The Quran, *Fussilat*: 54)**

The Arabic word *ala* (truly) is used to introduce a new idea. Not to surprise the listener, the speaker uses this linguistic device, alerting him to what he is going to tell, lest anything should escape him, as if he were saying, ‘be prepared, and listen to what I will tell you, for it is important!’

The important part then is: ‘...they doubt that they will meet their Lord...’ (*Fussilat*: 54), that is, the unbelievers doubt resurrection after death, thinking that Allah created them in this world, and with that it all ends! They doubt the return after death, punishment, and reward, and do not pay heed to the Day of Judgment. Why? It is because they did not send ahead good deeds for this meeting, therefore they act heedlessly towards it. Some of them, with false desire, think this meeting is a lie, thereby denying resurrection, punishment, and reward. Others – acknowledging the truth of this meeting – are full of haughtiness, claiming: ‘...if [it should come, and] I should indeed be brought back to my Sustainer, then, the ultimate good awaits me with Him...’ (*Fussilat*: 50). Yet others say: ‘...if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!’ (*al-Kahf*: 36)

Thus, they are in ‘doubt’ about this day, that is, they are suspicious, distrustful, and uncertain. The Arabic root for the word *mirya* (doubt) implies dispute with false argument, stubbornness, and pride, directed against accepting and submitting to the truth. Therefore, the word *jadal* (dispute) signifies a discussion that brings two sides to an agreement, to a satisfactory outcome. On the other hand, the word *mira*’ (quarrel) suggests a discussion where each side wins for itself, not caring whether it reaches truth or not.

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us how to disagree, argue and dispute in the Quranic verse: ‘Say: “I counsel you one thing only:”...’ (*Saba*: 46) – and

what is that, Lord? ‘...“Be [ever-conscious of] standing before God, whether you are in the company of others or alone; and then ponder [within yourselves that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow-man”...’ (*Saba’*: 46). That is to say, do not decide on a matter collectively in front of the masses, rather do it alone or in pairs. The judgment of crowds is not disciplined, as every side there wants their view to prevail, unwilling to lose the dispute in front of others, thus persisting in their falsehood.

We have previously stated that the clamour of crowds drowns individual voices making them indistinct. For example, The poet Ahmad Shawqi depicts this situation in his play about Cleopatra, after she had been defeated in the battle of Actium⁽¹⁾:

Listen to people Dayun

How they inspire him!

They have filled the air with shouts

which demand the lives of his two murderers.

Lie has left its mark on him,

and falsehood has covered him.

Oh what a parrot,

whose intellect is in its ears!

It is shameful that they doubt, not paradise for instance, but: ‘Truly, they doubt that they will meet their Lord...’ (*Fussilat*: 54).

This is great shame and a disgrace! As the saying goes, the flesh of their faces falls off from shame before Allah *Glorified is He*. When they return to Allah, full of regret, they find themselves standing before Him, after having disbelieved, rejected and denied Him in the worldly life. This reality, then, takes them by surprise: ‘...he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!’ (*an-Nur*: 39)

(1) This battle took place in September, in the year 31 BC; here, Octavian defeated Julius Caesar’s heir [Wikipedia].

Had they doubted their Lord's bliss, it would have been acceptable because people vary as to the degrees and levels of the good deeds they accomplish. Some do good fearing the fire, while others do it out of longing for paradise. Yet others do good deeds out of love for Allah Who imposed upon them performing good deeds, seeking His pleasure. It is not fear of His fire nor longing for paradise that motivates them, it is rather Allah Himself.

Rabi'a Al-'Adawiyya was reported to have said to Allah *Glorified is He* during one of her meditations, 'O Lord, if I worship You in hope of paradise, deprive me of it. If I worship you for fear of hellfire, burn me in it. Nay, I love You because You deserve to be loved.' Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting his Sustainer [on Judgment Day], let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe to anyone or anything a share in the worship due to his Sustainer!' (*al-Kahf*: 110) In the verse, the word 'anything' encompasses paradise.

In the verse: '...truly, He encompasses everything' (*Fussilat*: 54) another truth is affirmed by the introductory device *ala* (truly). It means that Allah's knowledge completely encompasses everything and no one escapes from Him. Not even the weight of an atom becomes absent from Him in the heavens or on the earth. Encompassing indicates covering something from all sides.

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