

COMMENTARY

ON CHAPTERS

86 TO 101

OF THE

HOLY QUR'AN

PART II

DR. BASHARAT AHMAD

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FOREWORD

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

English Translation of *Anwarul Qur'an*, Part 11

By the grace of Allah we have been able to present to the English speaking peoples the second part of the English translation of the commentary, *Anwarul Qur'an*, by Dr. Basharat Ahmad. It consists of chapters 86 to 101. The first part dealt with chapters 102 to 114.

Most of these chapters and those of the previous publication deal with tribulations of the present times, prophecies about astonishing discoveries, and material progress to be made by man, and his recalcitrance in accepting the reality of the life hereafter. Almost all the chapters contained in part 30 of the Holy Qur'an put forward mainly arguments and evidence from the universe and the life on this earth to prove that the life hereafter is a reality and that man will be accountable for all his commissions and omissions.

This truth has been referred to in the very beginning of the Qur'an in *Surah Al-Fatihah* in which it is mentioned that Allah is *Master of the Day of Requital*. It has also been stated in the beginning of part 30 in the words, *Surely the Day of Decision is appointed (78:17)*. A belief in the life hereafter, where accountability for man's actions in this life will have to be given, is a major theme of the teachings of Islam. The commentary of the Holy Qur'an by Dr. Basharat Ahmad insightfully elucidates the divine wisdom enunciated in the last chapters of the Holy Qur'an regarding this important phenomenon of human life.

The second part of the commentary has been beautifully translated into English by our learned friends, Brother Nasir Ahmad and Imam Kalamazad Mohammed. Over the years they have worked hard and collaborated in producing a number of publications and this is another sterling effort of theirs.

We are thankful to Allah that the first part of the Commentary has been very much appreciated not only in Trinidad but also in the UK, Holland, Suriname and Indonesia. It has been rendered into Dutch by our young but learned brothers, Reza Ghafoerkhan and Riaz Ahmadali in Suriname, and in Indonesian by Imam Musa Projosiswoyo of Jakarta. The Indonesian translation is near completion and will be published, *Insha Allah*, by the end of November.

I hope and pray that the second part of the Commentary will be equally appreciated by people who love to learn more and more of the Qur'an and the guidance it provides for us in our daily lives.

The Muslim Literary Trust, Trinidad and Tobago, is committed to the promotion and dissemination of the teachings of the Qur'an. The publication of the English translation of the beautiful commentary of the Qur'an by Dr. Basharat Ahmad of Lahore, Pakistan, is a humble start in this regard. May Allah bless the members of the Trust and enable us to take up more such noble tasks.

Enayat Mohammed
Chairman

CHAPTER 86

AT-TARIQ (THE COMER BY NIGHT)

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent,
the Merciful.*

By the heaven and the Comer by night!

*And what will make thee know what
the Comer by night is?*

The star of piercing brightness -

There is not a soul but over it is a keeper.

So let man consider of what he is created.

He is created of water pouring forth,

Coming from beneath the back and the ribs.

Surely He is able to return him (to life).

*On the day when hidden things
are manifested,*

Then he will have no strength nor helper.

By the cloud giving rain,

And the earth opening (with herbage):

Surely it is a decisive word,

And it is not a joke.

Surely they plan a plan,

And I plan a plan.

So grant the disbelievers a respite

- let them alone for a while.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ ۝

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ ۝

النَّجْمِ الثَّاقِبِ ۝

إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَنَّاَعْلَمُهَا

حَافِظًا ۝

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ ۝

خُلِقَ مِن مَّاءٍ وَّافْجِنٍ ۝

يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَ

الذَّرَائِبِ ۝

إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْوَةٍ لَقَائِرُهُ ۝

يَوْمَ يَسِفُّ السَّمَاءُ وَيَرُونَ

فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ ۝

وَالسَّمَاءُ ذَاتِ الرَّجْجِ ۝

وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ۝

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ ۝

وَمَا هُوَ بِالْفُتُولِ ۝

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا ۝

وَ أَكِيدُ كَيْدًا ۝

فَتَمِثِلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَهْمُفَهُمْ وَوَيْدًا ۝

This chapter, *At-Tariq* (The Comer by Night), was revealed in the holy city of Makkah and in this chapter, great emphasis has been laid on the fact that deeds are never destroyed. In this chapter, too, we learn further that Allah has provided the necessary arrangements for

the preservation of man's deeds upon which his future life hinges and it was to manifest this truth that our Holy Prophet (*sas*) was sent to this world. So Allah says:

*By the heaven and the Comer by night!
And what will make thee know what the Comer by night is?
The star of piercing brightness -
There is not a soul but over it is a keeper.*

Here, "guarding" or "keeping" refers to the preservation of actions as is evident from these verses of the Holy Qur'an:

And surely there are keepers over you, honourable recorders
(82:10-11).

In the Arabic language, *at-ta-riq* means the one who comes at night and knocks at the door to awaken the sleeping ones regardless of whether he has come as a guest or for some other purpose. The authentic commentators of the Holy Qur'an have applied this designation to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) because he had appeared at a time when the world was steeped in pitch darkness and misguidance. This is quite true, but what is the meaning of swearing by the evidence of the heavens? Just as *at-Tariq* (the Comer by night) makes evident one aspect of the Holy Prophet's glory, in the same way the heavens make manifest another side of his magnificent lustre. In short, anyone who comes by night and knocks at the door can do so for two reasons: he can come for some need of his own or else to warn the sleeping ones of some imminent danger. One can come at night for some compelling reason - either for the caller to satisfy a personal need, or to benefit those who are in deep sleep behind closed doors. And having perceived this, someone may come in the nick of time to give warning and to alert the sleepers by knocking at the door.

Let us emphasise here that the advent of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) on this night of error and misguidance, and his awakening of the people of the world who were heedless and in deep sleep, was not for

any personal benefit of his. Rather, it was only the mercy and compassion of the Creator of the worlds that commanded that he knock at the doors of those negligent ones and wake them up from their sleep and warn them of their evil end; for let it be known that so powerful was the connection of the Holy Prophet with Allah, Most High, and so far removed was he from the ambitions and passions of this world, that if, on account of this sublime exaltation and self-effacement in Allah he were to be called "Heaven", it would not be an exaggeration. And just as no damage is done to heaven by any destruction on earth, so, too, what harm can come to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) from the destruction and deviation of the people of this world? In fact, so intense was his compassion and mercy for Allah's creation that, eschewing all personal ease and comfort, he came on this black night of corruption to wake up the heedless ones from their slumber by knocking repeatedly on their doors and trying ceaselessly to make these negligent people avert a bitter end.

Hazrat Shah Wali'ullah related a vision of his thus:

"There appeared before me the form of a triangle whose base was pointed upwards and its apex downwards like this:



The figure then disappeared and another triangle appeared, but this time, the apex was above and the base below like this:



Then, this figure, too, disappeared and was replaced by a rectangular form like this:



Then, this, too, vanished and after that, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) came into view. He asked me: 'Do you know the meaning of

these figures?’

I replied in the affirmative saying that those figures were really a manifestation of the Holy Prophet himself, whereupon he asked me to elucidate. I explained that the meaning of the first figure,



was that His Excellency (that is, the Holy Prophet) had formed such a strong connection with the Above, that is, Allah, that his self-extinction was complete and so elevated was his degree of self-annihilation that it appeared as if he had no connection with the lower region, that is, Allah’s creation on earth. (The point at the apex of the triangle signifies non-existence.)

The second figure, which was like this:



meant that His Excellency was so lost in his love and compassion for Allah’s creatures that it seemed as if he had no connection with the upper world.

The third symbol,



that is, the rectangle, signified that His Highness’ connection with Allah on the one hand, and his tenderness and solicitude for mankind on the other, had reached such a point of perfection that it seemed as if both loves had coalesced into one, and this indeed is the magnificence of a true and perfect intercessor.

On receiving this reply, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) smiled and said: ‘O Wali’ullah, you are extremely intelligent and your understanding is excellent.’”

Thus, here, too, in the words, *By the heaven and the Comer by night*, we find a perfect manifestation of these two aspects of the Holy Prophet’s glory - on the one hand, so complete was his connection with Allah and his self-effacement in Him that he was, as it were, Heaven, as regards spirituality, and so completely independent was he of all worldly needs - in fact, his love for mankind was so consuming, that he gave precedence to this work over all his personal needs - that on this night of error and misguidance he abandoned all concerns for his own peace and tranquillity to run hither and thither knocking at the doors of those negligent, sleeping people so that they may not be destroyed and may not ruin this present life of theirs and the next.

These Arabs were people whose hospitality was legendary, yet when the guest of Allah appeared amongst them they snubbed him and treated him with contempt, even though he came for their benefit and at the most opportune moment, too! At this time, when the world was stumbling about in the darkness of error and there was an urgent need of heavenly light, he came and made his appearance like a star of piercing brilliance and brought with him his heavenly light and guidance, the gist of which was, *And there is not a soul but there is a keeper over it*, telling the world that man, even after he dies, does not become extinct, but, in fact, his future existence was preserved within his deeds and thus he should rectify and strengthen his actions so that the next life, which is the real and eternal one, may be filled with peace and happiness for him.

This is a subtle point which every human being should constantly keep in mind and make his heartfelt ambition. Thus, as it were, the true purpose of the Holy Prophet’s being sent to this world was to impress on people that they should focus their attention on good deeds, for on this depended the fate of their future life.

This, then, was the guidance and the light of his nature which appeared in this dark world much like a brilliant star from which people receive light in their darkness and direction, too.

*So let man consider of what he is created.
He is created of water pouring forth,
Coming from beneath the back and the ribs.*

There is a reason for this description which is connected with the verses above, and that is, that in the verses quoted above, it has been pointed out that man's deeds are being kept preserved for his future life, for these very deeds are like hidden seed for his next life - whether this is a visible seed from which his present existence came into being, or whether it is a latent seed of deeds from which his future life will be built.

Man, in his negligence, treats both kinds of seed in a careless and offhand manner. Little does he care that the essence of a human being is contained in this sperm, which if kept well-preserved in the womb, eventually gives birth to a new life and existence. In like manner, he gives little consideration to his deeds.

Each day provides testimony that just as a man pays no importance to the discharge of his visible seed and he evinces no caution or prudence in sowing this seed, so, too, does he behave as regards his actions, although these very actions are like hidden seed for his future life and which, if kept safe like the physical sperm, will form the basis on which his life hereafter will be fashioned.

Every sensible person knows that if human sperm is saved from destruction and is preserved in the womb then it will be the cause of a new life coming into existence. That is, a new life from a sperm-drop depends solely on keeping it safe.

Accordingly, Allah announces here that to create our future existence, He has made distinct and ample provision for the preservation

of deeds: a record is being kept of whatever action man performs and this is being well-guarded, too.

Thus, man should ponder on the semen and the life that comes from it and should perform his duties with due care and deliberation because every deed of his acts like a seed for his future life and all his deeds are being well-preserved. And since the birth of his next life and existence is already well-established, it is hardly necessary for me to repeat that investigations of scientific researchers have also proven this very point, that every word and action of ours is being recorded in the ether.

Nothing is destroyed. Instead, everything is being preserved. And this is what the Almighty is telling us, together with the fact that these recorded deeds act as the seed and semen of our life in the hereafter. And this is a fact, for the preservation of deeds must have some purpose and result, and that is the life hereafter.

Surely He is able to return him (to life).

Today, scientists are lamenting the fact that we do not possess the means of reading the hidden book that is being recorded in the ether otherwise we would have been able to tell the true history of the world. Let alone their reading it, look how subtly Almighty God has informed us that to reproduce for us the entire book of our deeds is easy for Him for there is no difficulty in bringing back something that is well-guarded.

Take, for example, the gramophone by means of which voices are preserved. On a black disk are recorded the softest words which no one can read, yet when it is placed on a sound box and spun, every word is recalled and comes alive and every word which is spoken or sung can be heard. And, so, if man can bring back his recorded voice, is it difficult for Almighty God to reproduce His preserved book of records? Indeed, this is a secret which is still impossible for man to unravel.

*On the day when hidden things are manifested,
Then he will have no strength nor helper.*

Allah says that one day this secret will be disclosed and the book of deeds will be brought back. But on that day, man will have no intrinsic power to save himself from the consequence of those deeds, nor will there be any external helper to save him from the evil repercussions of his actions. Thus, man should be extremely careful when he is filling the record with deeds. Even when making an ordinary speech, see how careful a man is. And at the time of filming a motion picture, look at how cautious an actor is for he knows that every act of his will be revealed again, and publicly, too. So consider then, how great the need is for caution in man regarding this extraordinary Divine record, for remember, the Holy Qur'an warns us: *So he who does an atom's weight of good will see it, and he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it (99:7-8).*

*By the cloud giving rain,
And the earth opening (with herbage):
Surely it is a decisive word,
And it is not a joke.*

Allah says here that the preservation of deeds is a serious and decisive matter and certainly not a groundless assertion. In this very world, He discloses to us to some extent the consequences of actions. For example, just as when rain falls the seeds that are beneath the soil burst and sprout into luxurious vegetation, so, too, when Allah's prophet comes into the world, he brings a spiritual rain which enlivens and causes to flourish the capacities that lie latent in the hearts of men. As a result, there bursts forth and comes into view, in the record of deeds for each person, whatever kind of seed is preserved and hidden in his heart, whether good or bad. So, the deeds of men, whether good or evil, flourish on this very earth and bring forth in a small measure their own fruits and consequences. Thus, up to a limit, a picture of Judgment Day is seen right here, and in this very world we get a sight of the triumph and success that attend good deeds and the destruction

and abasement that result from evil deeds. And all this happens so as to provide convincing and irrefutable proof of the consequences of actions and of the reality of the next life. So, for our benefit, this example is also most beautifully exemplified in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*).

Surely they plan a plan,

And I plan a plan.

So grant the disbelievers a respite - let them alone for a while.

Allah says that the unbelievers are continually engaged in devising stratagems for the destruction of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and his mission, but He, Allah, is also making plans for the preservation and victory of Islam. So the consequences will be seen after a while - that is, who will be triumphant and who will become useless and ruined. It takes time for a seed to grow into a tree. Therefore, some time should be allowed for the unbelievers' deeds to grow and bear fruit and from the record of their deeds they will come to know that the preservation of deeds is an indisputable fact and thus, however short it may be, a respite should be given. Now, it is also an indisputable fact that Prophet Muhammad's swift and total victory over his enemies is unparalleled in the annals of religious history. In fact, this respite was not long, but in a very short space of time their deeds bore their own fruit.

In short, as regards the preservation of deeds, in this chapter the philosophical and scientific arguments are put forward and then examples from natural phenomena and the visible laws they obey are presented as evidence by Allah. Then He makes this open proclamation to the opponents and objectors that in this very life He will expose to view, to some degree, the consequences of whatever evil plans they were hatching against Muhammad (*sas*), the Messenger of Allah. And He will cause them to taste and to see, in this very world, a little of the fruits of their deeds so that they may obtain certain knowledge of this fact that deeds definitely carry their own consequences. So, in order that these consequences may not be attributed to the vagaries of time,

He has therefore made this prophecy long in advance, at the same time issuing the challenge that they should put all their effort into their secret plots and stratagems to forestall whatever repercussions He had prophesied. On the other hand, He Himself has a plan and that is simply that in a short while they will taste, right here on earth, some of the consequences of their actions. After this announcement, you will observe that in spite of all their exertions, the aftermath of their deeds was so frighteningly destructive that all their plans were ground to dust. The bad met their fate and the good received their reward - which served to prove and to establish and to provide tangible evidence that deeds are preserved and that actions bear fruit - and all this was made in the announcement long before the events came to pass.

In addition to the deeper meanings given above, the verses,

*By the cloud giving rain,
And the earth opening (with herbage)*

contain many profound and subtle proofs concerning the everlasting nature of human life and the consequences of actions, also. In the coming of rain again and again from the heavens there is irrefutable proof that just as water turns into vapour and is never destroyed, but only its form is altered, and when Allah wills, these vapours return as rain from the clouds and fall down upon the earth as water again, similarly, the soul of man, when separated from his body, does not become extinct but only its condition is changed and it will return to Allah at an appointed time.

Indeed, just as rain water, in addition to earthly properties, contain heavenly ones which contain within themselves life and the potential for growth, in the same way, the soul of man, at the time of its return to its Lord, will also include traces of heavenly influence and life.

The second point of comparison is that just as seeds sprout from the earth and when mixed with rain water grow luxuriantly and bear fruit according to their God-given nature, in like manner, in the Hereafter,

the seed of deeds together with the human soul which contains the potential of a heavenly life, will combine and sprout and flourish and will bear fruit, each according to its deeds, and thus will the life after death be fashioned.

AL A'LA (THE MOST HIGH)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High!

Who creates, then makes complete,

And Who measures, then guides,

And Who brings forth herbage,

Then makes it dried up, dust-covered.

We shall make thee recite so thou shalt not forget –

Except what Allah please. Surely He knows the manifest, and what is hidden.

And We shall make thy way smooth to a state of ease.

So remind, reminding indeed profits.

He who fears will mind,

And the most unfortunate one will avoid it,

Who will burn in the great Fire.

Then therein he will neither live nor die.

He indeed is successful who purifies himself,

And remembers the name of his Lord, then prays.

But, you prefer the life of this world,

While the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

Surely this is in the earlier scriptures,

The scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سُبْحَانَكَ يَا أَعْلَى

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَتَسُبِّحْهُ

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ

وَالَّذِي أَحْرَقَ الْكُوفَىٰ

فَتَجَدَّدَ عُقَابَهُ

سُبْحَانَكَ يَا أَعْلَى

الَّذِي مَا فَتَنَّا اللَّهُ

الْمُحْسِنُ وَالْمُكَرِّمُ

وَالَّذِي لَكَ اللَّيْلُ

قَدَرٌ كَرِيمٌ

سُبْحَانَكَ يَا أَعْلَى

وَالَّذِي لَهَا الْأَنْبُ

الَّذِي يَخْلُقُ النَّارَ

لَعْنَةً يُعَذِّبُ

قَدَرٌ كَرِيمٌ

وَدَاكِرٌ اسْمُهُ رَبُّهُ

بَلْ كَرِيمٌ

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ

لَنْ هَذَا الَّذِي كَتَبْنَا

كُتُبِ الْأَوَّلِينَ

indispensable ingredient in the glorification of the Lord, Most High, we are commanded: *Sabbihisma Rabbikal A'la* (Glorify the name of thy Lord, Most High).

We are told in the *Hadith* that when this verse is recited, whether in *salah* (formal prayer) or outside of it, we should say: *Subhana Rabbiyal A'la* (Glory be to my Lord, the Most High).

Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High!

Tasbih (glorification of Allah) means that we should understand and express the belief that Allah, Most High, is perfect and without any trace of blemish or defect in His attributes, whilst by *taqdis* (declaring the sanctity of Allah) we express the same regarding His deeds. In *tahmid* (praise of Allah) we appreciate and declare the conviction that Allah's attributes comprise every beauty and every perfection.

Unfortunately in our country today, by *tasbih* (the glorification of Allah) is meant the rosary which Hindu pundits, Jogis (Hindu ascetics), Muslim jurists and many *maulvis* and their so-called religious followers count. This is a palpable innovation for neither did our Holy Prophet (*sas*) nor his blessed companions tell any beads. Muslims have seen and copied this practice of the Magians, Hindus and Christians. What has happened now is that they rush through their *salah* (prayer) haphazardly in a few minutes and then sit down for hours counting beads. This they call *tasbih* (glorification of Allah). Now, of all the tricks of ostentation that people use, this rosary business is the greatest one, for whatever the occupation in which they are engaged – sitting, conversing, abusing someone, offering a bribe to another, or committing any other act of dishonesty, the rosary is ever present. In short, it is an innovation, but as an adjunct to trickery it is an especially powerful one, for through this, an awe-inspiring aura of religiosity is firmly established in the minds of others.

A Sufi was once telling beads and a woman happened to pass by. She asked him what he was doing. "I am calling out the name of my Be-

loved,” replied the Sufi.

“I also have a Beloved, but I have never called out His name like this,” the woman remarked. “He lives in my heart all the time and His name is on my lips.”

On hearing this, the Sufi burst into tears and threw away the rosary.

The Holy Prophet says: “There are two expressions that are light on the tongue but heavy on the scale: Glory be to Allah, and with His praise. Glory be to Allah, the Great.”

The Holy Prophet would frequently repeat these phrases. Similarly, Maulana Nur-ud-Din, a well-known commentator of the Holy Qur’an, did the same. In our *salah* (ritual prayers) we also glorify Allah by saying: “Glory be to Allah, the Great” and “Glory be to Allah, the Most Exalted.”

The object of repeating all these phrases of glorification is that such repetitions should so affect the heart that it should always remember the divinity and holiness of Allah and that one’s deeds may also reflect this.

Extolling Allah’s praises is of two types. One is a declaration by the tongue and a simultaneous affirmation by the heart of Allah’s Glory and of His being free from all defects and blemishes. That is, one should not attribute anything to Allah which is against His perfect and goodly attributes. One should firmly believe so in his heart also, in addition to the verbal affirmation.

Correct divine gnosis and *tauhid* (unity of Allah) depend on this very *tasbih* (glorification of Allah) because polytheism presupposes a weakness and a defect in Allah, Most High. *Tasbih* and *tauhid* are therefore co-related things. *Tauhid* is not perfected unless the *tasbih* is perfect and *vice-versa*. Until one considers Allah to be free from all defects and blemishes, one cannot attain correct divine gnosis. This

type of *tasbih* is limited to human beings only.

The second type of *tasbih* (glorification of Allah) is through the demonstration of Allah's Glory through deeds or condition. This type of *tasbih* is a mandatory part of every created thing, which is that everything created speaks of the high quality of workmanship and the beauty of the qualities of the Creator, because the organs and faculties bestowed on all things are so perfect for the achievement of their purpose in life that no human intelligence can design better organs and faculties.

Thus, every particle which is present and functioning in this universe and is busy and trying hard to achieve its purpose in life is manifesting the perfection of its Creator and His being free from all defects and blemishes; that is, of His *subhaniyyat* (being Holy and free from all defects). In other words, it is engaged in the *tasbih* of its Creator through the language of its condition, or what the Holy Qur'an has described in the verse: *And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44).

What a beautiful statement! Allah says that everything, for whatever purpose its creation, enjoys such a perfect creation that just observing a created thing offers a lucid argument for the holiness and perfection of its Creator. The only difficulty is that since man does not know the purpose of this creation and has no knowledge of the powers and the capability inherent in something, he starts to raise objections due to his ignorance and lack of understanding. Otherwise, if a man's knowledge were perfect and if he should become aware of the powers and the purpose of the creation of every particle of this universe, he would be able to hear the glorification of the Creator of the universe coming out of every particle, and his own heart would join in this glorification. The following Persian verses of Shaikh Sa'di capture this point:

Each leaf of the green tree

Unfolds volumes of God-gnosis
To the eyes of an intelligent observer.

Once an Englishman, an atheist, was looking through the microscope at the creation of life in an egg, and as he kept watching the drama of the creation of life unfolding before his very eyes, he became ecstatic and cried out: "Indeed! There is really some God Who is making this chick with His own hands!"

I had the occasion to go to East Africa in 1900 and made two or three trips by ship carrying Indian labourers. Once, when at sea, the rains continued to fall for several days, and as I was watching the rainfall while sitting on the deck, a sudden misgiving arose in my mind: what is the use of rain falling on the sea? Had it rained on land, it would have benefited the crops, but rain falling on the sea is a waste of good water. Is this not against the *Subhaniyyat* (Glory) and Wisdom of Allah? I then sought Allah's pardon and offered *istighfar* (seeking pardon for one's sins) for entertaining such an impertinent misgiving. It was through Allah's Grace that suddenly this idea entered my mind, that is, what is my knowledge compared to Allah's knowledge and the following verse of the Qur'an came to mind: *Glory be to Thee, we have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us* (2:31).

But what a great favour was shown by Allah to this humble scribe, when after twenty-five years He clarified my knowledge of this misgiving through a book. I happened to look through a book by an English scientist in which he said that the sea's marine life gets its oxygen and nitrogen through the rain, and were it not for rain on the sea, all marine life would perish. On gleaning this knowledge, a glorification of Allah arose from the depths of my soul and I could hear at that time every particle glorifying Allah. In short, it is man's ignorance of the benefits of something that makes him raise objections. How can the limited intelligence of man comprehend the creation of the entire universe and the purpose of its creation? So we should understand that everything is busy in celebrating Allah's glorification through the language of its condition and it does so by striving for the

attainment of the purpose for which it was created. That is why we are commanded in the Qur'an to say: *Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High*. That is, O man, you should also engage yourself in glorifying Him Who has created you and Who wants to elevate you to great heights by virtue of His attribute of *Rububiyyat* (bringing something to perfection). Just as He, Himself, is Most High and His attributes also embody the Most-High quality and His Exaltedness is free of all defects and blemishes, similarly, He, through His *Rububiyyat*, wants to lead man up to the highest pinnacle of progress. Hence, if man wants to become heir to the greatest of progress through Allah's perfect *Rububiyyat*, it is essential that he should engage in the glorification of Allah, both through his heart and his tongue, and also through his deeds and his condition.

An explanation of what the glorification of the heart and the tongue means has already been given. Now listen to the explanation of the glorification through the language of one's deeds and the language of one's condition from Allah, Most High, Himself. He says: *Who creates, then makes complete, and Who measures, then guides*.

Here, four reasons for glorification are given. First, creating; second, leading to perfection; third, setting a destiny and a limit for everything; fourth, providing guidance. Since no specific object has been mentioned for these four verbs, here the whole of creation would be the object, that is, Allah created everything, He gave perfection to everything, He set up a destiny and a limit for everything, from which it cannot escape, and gave guidance to everything, that is, made it subservient to a Law, by following which it can attain to its perfection. In other words, everything that has been created has four things attendant on it:

1. It has been created by Allah;
2. It has been endowed with certain organs and capabilities for the attainment of the object of its creation, and these organs and capabilities are so perfect that nothing better could be suggested by human intelligence. In the Qur'an

this is called *taswiya* (making a thing in perfect form);

3. He made a Law and a destiny for the functioning of these organs and capabilities. They have to follow this path and cannot deviate from it. This is called *taqdir* (destiny).
4. He has endowed its nature with a tendency to tread a certain correct course, and the course that it is treading, which in the process of attaining its purpose of creation, is called *guidance*, as He says elsewhere in the Qur'an: *Our Lord is He Who gives creation to everything then guides it* (20:50). That is, He grants it guidance by following which it can attain its purpose of creation. This guidance is inherent in its nature and it does not deviate from it. We refer to this faculty by the names *nature* and *disposition*.

Another thing that must be understood is that man is endowed with two types of faculties. One type pertains to those faculties that he has in common with other living things. Such faculties and organs are to carry out the dictates of their nature involuntarily, and man has no control over their functioning. For instance, the tongue, when it indicates something to be sweet or bitter, functions independently and man has no control over it. But there are other types of faculties and organs which work under man's volition, and since man has been created as an entity with a will and with the power of discrimination, and has been granted self-consciousness and an independent will, that is why he has been made responsible for his deeds. Hence, these organs work under his will and volition. For example, the tongue can speak the truth as well as tell a lie. Here the human will is in action and the tongue will follow his will.

The guidance which has been vouchsafed to man is also of two types – one is the guidance given to those of man's organs which are not functioning under his will and are common to all creation and hence this guidance is inherent in his nature as it is in all creatures, man having no hand in its operation. For example, man's stomach, liver, lungs, heart etc. are all working independently of his control and are engaged in fulfilling the purpose of their creation. The second type of

guidance is for the faculties, the functioning of which is subject to the human will and intention.

Therefore, it was essential to give a role to the human will and intention in this type of guidance. Hence, this guidance was given to man through knowledge. That is, Allah revealed to man his purpose of creation by giving him guidance and He told him those ways by treading on which he can attain to that perfection which is a prerequisite of being a vicegerent of Allah and for which he was created. Thus, he was given guidance while maintaining his free will and control over his affairs, and that is a special feature of man. That is why Allah, Most High, called Islam a religion according to nature, meaning thereby man's receipt of such knowledge from Allah which will disclose to him the paths leading to that perfection which is the purpose of his creation.

If Allah has bestowed guidance upon those faculties of man which are not under his control and also to all creation – a guidance which is found to be inherent in their nature – there is no reason why man should not have been provided guidance for those faculties and organs which work under his will and intention. Hence, the guidance that was vouchsafed to man through revelation and inspiration was absolutely in accordance with nature. Anyone who follows this guidance acts according to nature and in response to the call of the Creator and thus becomes a bright argument for the perfect attributes of Allah by becoming heir to the highest perfection and by attaining the purpose of his creation. He thus engages in glorification of Allah through the language of his deeds and his progress.

Thus, the command given in this chapter is for both types of glorification – by words as well as through the language of his condition and deeds. Verbal glorification contains a hint that one's doctrine, both on the tongue as well as in the heart, should be such in respect of Allah's Unity and His attributes, that any type of polytheism or any type of defect or blemish cannot find its way into the divine attributes. By glorification through the language of deeds is meant that one's deeds

should be such that one can attain one's purpose of creation. Thus, by attaining one's natural and lofty perfection, one should become a clear argument in favour of Allah's Holiness. The divine guidance that was essential for this glorification was given to man in its complete form through the Holy Qur'an.

*And Who brings forth herbage,
Then makes it dried up, dust-covered.*

This is an analogy to impress upon man that if anything does not attain to its purpose of creation, its creation becomes meaningless and void, and its entity becomes worthy of hatred reserved for dingy heaps of dirt fit only to be discarded or burnt. When the green fodder grows out of the earth, how pretty and endearing it is! The purpose of its creation is that animals should feed on it. If eaten by animals, though apparently annihilated, it has fulfilled the purpose of its creation and it has become a part of the body of the next higher order of life, and thus has progressed from a lower category to a higher category. But if this purpose of creation is not fulfilled, and if it does not serve as fodder for animals, then its end would be that it would be dumped or burnt after becoming dark garbage. Thus, if a man dies trying to attain the purpose of his creation, this would not amount to his annihilation. Nay, it means a transformation to a higher life. That is why it has been said about the martyrs: *And speak not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay (they are) alive but you perceive not (2:154).*

In short, if a man achieves his purpose of creation, though he may have to accept death in doing so, it is a means of progress and perfection for him, and this sets up an argument for the holiness of his Lord. But if he does not achieve the purpose of his creation, though he may stay in this world a long time, his status is not more than that of a bundle of blackened garbage, which deserves contempt and which is of no use and is ready for dumping and burning.

So a perfect rendering of *tasbih* (glorification of Allah) is only achieved

when one proclaims by word and deed that there is no defect or blemish in Allah's *tauhid* or in His attributes and fully complies with Allah's guidance and thus achieves the purpose of his creation, however great the sacrifices he may have to make to do so.

For this, it was essential that the guidance should be so conveyed to man that he might not forget it, and so that it should be preserved with him forever, because on this guidance depends the acceptance of his *tasbih*.

That is why Allah, Most High, says:

We shall make thee recite so thou shalt not forget -Except what Allah please. Surely He knows the manifest, and what is hidden.

As stated above, it was essential that the guidance, upon which depended man's progress and perfection and his *tasbih* of Allah, the Most High, be so taught to him that he should not forget it. That is why Allah, the High, has said here: *We shall make thee recite so thou shalt not forget.*

When Allah, Most High, made the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) recite, it was so well preserved in his heart and mind that he never forgot it.

Some consider that the *seen* (s) in the word *sa-nuqriuka* is placed here for emphasis. That is, *We will certainly make thee recite....* In any case, the connotation of both renderings is the same; that is, *You shall never forget the revelation that We have sent down*, because when Allah is the Teacher, how can anyone forget His teachings?

Even though the Holy Prophet was a human being and every human being is given to forgetting, and no doubt the Holy Prophet also forgot other matters, nevertheless, the sign of Allah's teaching was that whatever he learnt from Allah, Most High, he never forgot. At times

a chapter comprising twenty *rukus* (sections) would be revealed to him all at once (and the subject matter of these chapters is full of arguments in favour of prophethood and *tauhid*, and is very abstruse), yet he never forgot even a single word. Then again, the period of revelation of a chapter was spread sometimes over many years, and when a verse came down, he would get it written in its proper place under divine guidance, and when another verse came down, he would have it placed elsewhere. He himself did not know to read or to write, nor did he have a notebook at home in which memoranda could be recorded. He always recited the Qur'an from memory, yet whenever he recited it, whether in *salah* (prayer) or otherwise, he never made a mistake. He used to recite the Qur'an from various places during the prayers but there was never a change in the text or the order of the Qur'an. The details of the religion, which mostly consisted of the exegesis of the Qur'an, as also thousands of points of Law, he kept teaching the people, yet he never forgot even the smallest point of Law, and never made contradictory explanations of these at different times. Nowadays, even authors forget what they have written, but he never forgot. This is a clear and vivid indication that Allah was his Teacher, and it is also a miracle of great magnificence before which the human intellect bows its head, because historical events cannot be denied.

The expression, *except what Allah please*, does not at all mean that he sometimes used to forget some portion, because this would render the text meaningless and would read: "You do not forget what We teach you but you forget out of it what Allah please." If Allah wants something to be forgotten, why does He teach it? Hence, this meaning is absurd and wrong. The preposition *illa* (except) here is exclusive and the expression means: "Whatever Allah teaches you, you cannot forget, otherwise, you forget many things just like other human beings."

By using the phrase "What Allah please", Allah has indicated that "your forgetfulness as a human being also has a purpose under the divine plan." In other words, whatever he learnt from Allah as a mes-

senger, whether the Qur'an or other details of religion, he never forgot, but as a human being, whenever he forgot, there was Allah's plan in it and some divine wisdom behind it.

One aspect of such wisdom of Allah is that his not forgetting the divine revelation and other details of the Law thus becomes a grand miracle, because if it was that he never forgot anything, it could be construed that his mental make-up was such that it was impossible for him to forget. But his not forgetting the divine revelation and other details of the Law as a messenger of Allah and his forgetting some things in daily life highlight a clear difference between the two – the supernatural power and the limitations of humanity.

Secondly, forgetting as a human being was beneficial for humanity, because concessions in divine Law were thus granted for human weaknesses. For example, the Holy Prophet laid down the number of *rakahs* (cycles) in prayer under divine instruction and he never forgot anything about this point, never telling anybody that the *rakahs* (cycles) in the afternoon prayer were three instead of the prescribed four. This was his messengership. But see how his human condition worked. Whilst leading the prayer service, the Holy Prophet once made a mistake. Instead of four, he read two *rakahs* (cycles), and when his companions pointed this out to him, he read two more *rakahs* (cycles) and then performed *sajdah sahw* (prostration of forgetfulness). Now, had the Holy Prophet not committed this inadvertent error because of human weakness, the *ummah* would have been in some difficulty, because as human beings they were bound to make such mistakes and for this a procedure for rectification was essential. Thus, under a divine plan, the Holy Prophet made a mistake out of his human condition and then an antidote for this situation was provided in the *Shari'ah*. Thus, what is meant here is that "Whatever Allah makes you recite, you will never forget it whilst teaching others, or whilst setting an example through action."

Just as he retained the Qur'anic words in his memory, so was the teaching of the Qur'an also preserved in his memory. And so, too,

were his deeds that were always according to the Qur'an, as also the explanations of religion that he gave. Sometimes he forgot because of his human condition, but never in the propagation of the divine word or in matters of messengership, but rather in the matters that he had in common with other human beings.

There are two very subtle points in the verse: *Surely He knows what is manifest and what is hidden*. One is the above miraculous sign set up by Allah, that whatever the Holy Prophet learnt from Allah, he never forgot. This sign encompasses both types of revelation – the manifest revelation, that is, the Qur'an, which he would recite to the people, and the hidden revelation which was an inspiration coming to his heart secretly, and under the instruction of which he would explain the Holy Qur'an and would himself act upon it. The teacher of both types of revelation was Allah, Most High, and the sign which had been set up to prove that the revelation was from Allah was his not forgetting it. Now, obviously, if not forgetting the manifest revelation is a sign of it being from Allah, then not forgetting the details of the *Shari'ah*, both scholastically and practically, should be an argument in favour of this silent inspiration also being from Allah, an inspiration through which Allah taught the Holy Prophet the details of the religion.

Hence, what Allah is saying here is that: Allah, Who knows about the manifest revelation, that is, the Qur'an that was recited to the Holy Prophet, also knows about the hidden revelation through which all the details of the *Shari'ah* were revealed, and He testifies on the basis of this knowledge, that whatever the Holy Prophet was made to recite by Allah, was never forgotten by him. Hence, this guidance is well protected and worthy of implementation and worthy of being followed.

The second subtle point here is that man is not aware of all his needs, whether manifest or hidden. To guide him according to all these needs and teaching is a work that only Allah can do, for He is the Creator of human nature and He is aware of every human capability and faculty,

whether hidden or manifest, and He can point out the ways for their purification and evolution.

Hence it was essential that Allah, Himself, should give education and teaching to the Holy Prophet for the guidance of mankind, and in such a way that there should be no possibility of forgetfulness and error in it. Otherwise man, because of his limited and deficient knowledge, cannot understand his needs, nor can he propose the correct ways for their guidance.

And We shall make thy way smooth to a state of ease.

By *yusra* (ease) is meant a good deed, because it results in convenience and comfort. That is, "You are striving to do a good deed in the form of receiving divine guidance from Allah, Most High, and conveying it to the people, so We will help you in this mission and provide facilities and conveniences for you and would remove the difficulties that are in the way."

The truth of the matter is that if a deed is good and a man wants to do it, Allah, the Most High, definitely provides conveniences and facilities and helps him, and if there are any difficulties in the way, He certainly removes them. This is something that has been experienced by all spiritual personages.

If a man does not pay attention to good works, that is his misfortune, otherwise it is reported in the *Hadith* that if a man comes towards Allah by one hand's span, Allah advances towards him by yards, and whoever comes to Him walking, He advances towards him running. Let man take a first step sincerely in some good work and Allah will Himself come to his aid.

So remind, reminding indeed profits.

No force is to be used whilst admonishing others towards guidance, so the preacher should not get tired and frustrated and should keep

doing his duty of reminding people of religious truths.

He who fears will mind.

Whoever fears Allah and dreads the day when he will be called to account before Allah for his actions will certainly heed and benefit from this admonition.

And the most unfortunate one will avoid it.

The classification of *sa'id* (fortunate) and *shaqi* (wretched) is based on one's deeds and is not based on birth. No one is created fortunate or wretched from the very beginning. Nay, people become inmates of heaven or hell as a result of their deeds; an inmate of paradise is fortunate and an inmate of hell is wretched. In short, good fortune and wretchedness are the outcome of one's deeds. The same applies here. The wretched and the unfortunate run away from admonition (who can be more unfortunate than one who turns away from a sublime teaching like the Holy Qur'an?) and such wretchedness is the outcome of one's misdeeds and lack of fear of Allah's reckoning.

By bringing *the wretched* in juxtaposition to *the one who fears* in the previous verse, Allah has made it clear that whoever fears Him and takes to heart the admonition contained in the Qur'an is fortunate. On the other hand, whoever does not fear Allah and turns away from this Reminder is wretched and unfortunate. It is reported in the *Hadith* that in response to an enquiry by Allah, the angels responded that there was a gathering of people in such and such a place where they were remembering Allah's name, and sitting among them was a *shaqi* (wretched and unfortunate person), to which Allah, the Most High said: "Anyone sitting in such a gathering cannot be a *shaqi*." That is, if a man is sitting in such a righteous gathering, how then can he be a *shaqi*? Only he who avoids such a gathering is fit to be called *shaqi*.

Who will burn in the great Fire.

That is, such a person has been called unfortunate because his end would be bad, because he would enter the Fire, and it is a huge fire.

There are diverse types of fires in the world but in Allah's sight, the fire that is kindled in a man's heart as a fire of hell due to his passions and low desires is the biggest fire of them all. Though it is not felt so strongly in this life, it will be felt intensely in the Hereafter.

Then therein he will neither live nor die.

No better description can be offered of the punishment of being in Hell, that is, neither will one die so that the punishment comes to an end, nor will that life be such as could be called a proper life. In other words, it will be a life of such pain and misery that death will be better than such a life. But neither will death come, nor will such a life be worth calling a life that one can desire.

He indeed is successful who purifies himself.

That is, success in life and in religion depends on self-purification, a purification which helps man evolve spiritually, and the way to achieve self-purification is through *tasbih* (glorification of the Lord), which is mentioned in the next verse.

And remembers the name of his Lord, then prays.

The method of remembering the Lord has been described in the beginning of this chapter, that is, *Engage in the tasbih (glorification) of the Lord, the Most Exalted*. Thus, if anyone engages in celebrating the glory of the Lord, both in words and through his works, and acts upon His guidance in order to achieve the purport of his creation, his step advances daily on the road to self-purification. As he continues to extol Allah's Holiness and Perfection through his words and deeds, the Lord also continuously keeps on granting him self-purification and perfection. The result of engaging in the *tasbih* of Allah is man's own self-purification, and celebrating the *tasbih* by mentioning His

attribute of Exaltedness, exalts man in his self-purification. But man is weak, and for attaining the purpose of his creation he needs to seek help from the Lord, hence the need for prayer, so that he may bow before the Lord and beseech Him for help and for guidance on the right path. That is why the *Surah Fatihah* is considered the kernel of the entire *salah* (prayer). By intoning the prayer: *Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.... Guide us on the right path*, one seeks guidance towards the path by treading on which one attains one's purpose of creation and one also fulfils one's obligation to celebrate the *tasbih* of the Lord. That is why when one is in prostration during *salah*, a posture symbolising the extreme humbleness and servitude of man, one engages in the same *tasbih* which has been mentioned in this chapter and which is: *Glory be to Allah, the Most Exalted*. In other words, whilst extolling His *tasbih*, he beseeches Allah's help in total submission and in all sincerity and humility, for the opportunity to carry out the practical *tasbih*, a *tasbih* he had prayed for when reciting *Surah Fatihah*.

But, you prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

In these verses, Allah has pinpointed the real disease – that the real reason for wretchedness and heedlessness towards Allah's guidance is the priority one gives to worldly affairs and desires, although every wise person knows that every ease and every pleasure of life is temporary and finite. Hence, to abandon the Hereafter which is much better and perpetual for this finite and perishable life is folly and wretchedness of the highest degree.

The *Mujaddid* of these times, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, made a very correct diagnosis of and prescribed the best treatment for the disease afflicting mankind at the present time by including the salient clause: "I shall give precedence to my Faith over my worldly affairs," in the pledge of fealty. A nation that stands up to pronounce *tasbih* worldwide must observe this, that is, it must give priority to the Faith over

all worldly affairs.

Surely this is in the earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

The same teaching was given in the scriptures of the earlier prophets, that: *He indeed is successful who purifies himself.* Man can only achieve success through self-purification and self-purification is the outcome of Allah's *tasbih*. In other words, it has always been the teaching of all the prophets that man should not limit his vision only to this world's life. Nay, he should also keep an eye on the purpose of his creation, that is, the Hereafter, where he will find a new life, and for success there, it is essential that he should carry out his self-purification through extolling the *tasbih* of his Lord, both in words as well as through deeds.

Moses and Abraham have been specially mentioned here because Moses was a prophet recognised by the Israelites and was their leader, and Abraham was the Patriarch of both the Israelites and the Ishmaelites. Therefore, when these two nations were especially addressed, to mention the teachings of their master-prophets carries a special effect. But the statement has not been limited to these two only. Nay, by saying that this is the teaching of *all the old scriptures* the message has been widened and the argument is brought home to all the nations of the world, because it is not for a wise man to reject the unanimous testimony and teaching of all the recognised righteous persons of the world.

**AL-GHASHIYAH (THE OVERWHELMING
EVENT)**

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Merciful.*

*Has there come to thee the news of the
Overwhelming Event?*

*Faces on that day will be downcast,
Labouring, toiling,*

Entering burning Fire,

Made to drink from a boiling spring.

They will have no food but of thorns,

Neither nourishing nor satisfying hunger.

Faces that day will be happy,

Glad for their striving,

In a lofty Garden,

Wherein thou wilt hear no vain talk.

Therein is a fountain flowing.

Therein are thrones raised high,

And drinking-cups ready placed,

And cushions set in rows,

And carpets spread out.

*See they not the camels, how they are
created?*

And the heaven, how it is raised high?

And the mountains, how they are fixed?

And the earth, how it is spread out?

So remind. Thou art only one to remind.

Thou art not a watcher over them -

But whoever turns back and disbelieves ,

*Allah will chastise him with the greatest
chastisement.*

Surely to Us is their return.

Then it is for Us to call them to account.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 مَسَلْنَا أُنسُكَ حَمَلًا يَهُتُ
 أَلَيْسَ بِشَيْءٍ
 وَمَجْرُوهٌ يَكْرَهُ سَيْدُو شَأْنَهُمْ
 عَالِيَةً تَأْتِيهِمْ
 تَطْلُبُ مَا رَأَى سَائِرَةً
 تَطْلُبُ مِنْ عَيْنِ أَرْبَابِهِمْ
 أَلَيْسَ كَلْعُوطًا مَرًّا لِعَامٍ مِنْهُمْ
 وَلَا يَتِيمُونَ وَلَا يَتِيمُونَ مِنْ جَمْعِهِمْ
 وَمَجْرُوهٌ يَكْرَهُ سَيْدُو تَأْتِيهِمْ
 يَتِيمُهُمْ أَرْبَابُهُمْ
 فِي جَمْعِهِمْ عَالِيَةً
 فِي تَطْلُبُ مَا رَأَى سَائِرَةً
 فِيضًا عَيْنِ جَاهٍ نَهْمًا
 فِيضًا مَرًّا مَرًّا مَرًّا
 وَأَرْبَابٌ مَرًّا مَرًّا
 وَتَكْرِيمًا مِنْ مَصْبُورَةٍ
 وَرَأَى سَائِرَةً
 أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبْرِيمَ
 خَلَقْتَنِي
 وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ
 وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ
 نُصِبَتْ
 وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ
 فَذَكِّرْ مَنْ أُنشِئْتَ مِنْ كَرِيمٍ
 لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَوِّرٍ
 إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ
 فَصَبَّأْ بِهِ اللَّهُ الْفَكَارَ
 الْإِكْبَارَ
 إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا أُنشُرُوكُمْ
 ثُمَّ نُنَادِي عَنِ النَّارِ أَنْهُمُ

This chapter was revealed in Makkah and such a strong connection exists between this and the previous chapter, *Al-'Ala* (The Most High), and so important are the topics with which they deal that our Holy Prophet (*sas*) used to read them in many Friday congregational prayers

and many times he read them in the two *'Id* prayers. His idea was that when a large gathering of people was assembled it was the opportune time to instil in their minds the subject matter of these chapters. In the chapter, *Al 'Ala* (The Most High), we are given the command to glorify Allah and it further states that the perfection of this praise can be achieved through this very chapter, so that we should act according to the guidance given to us by Allah and thus fulfil the purpose for which we were created. In this chapter (*Al-Ghashiyah*) we are told that we have to account for our deeds and so we should try to fashion our behaviour on the pattern of the guidance which Allah has given us in the Holy Qur'an. Then if our deeds are good and are firmly based on this Divine guidance, we will achieve the object of our existence and our future life will be a happy one. If not, we will be ruined.

The Day of Resurrection has been referred to by several different names in the Holy Qur'an. For example, it is called *As-Sa'ah* (The Hour), *Al-Qari'ah* (The Calamity), *Al-Haqqah* (The Sure Truth), *As-Sakkhah* (The Deafening Cry) and *Al-Akhirah* (The Hereafter). However, in every place where a particular name has been given, it is done so because it contains a special significance and refers to a peculiar condition which is in total conformity with the occasion and the conditions. Here the name *Al-Ghashiyah* (The Overwhelming Event) is given, so here, too, we should keep in mind that special significance which it is intended for us to examine. The Day of Resurrection is called *the event that covers everything*. Why is this so? we may ask. To understand this we must keep in mind an important principle of the Holy Qur'an. Whatever theme or thesis it wants us to concentrate on in a particular chapter it places in the beginning of the chapter. It then gives us different kinds of evidence and all kinds of illustrations to support the theme. Then the same subject is brought back in the end to close off the chapter.

This analogy from the world of music will enlighten us. Music, which is considered to be the most organised system in the world, is composed on the same principle as that of the Holy Qur'an. When a singer intends to sing a *rag* (a musical mode) he opens with the tunes that

are peculiar to this tune. Then he ascends and descends accordingly and after all his fluctuations he finishes off with the very tune with which he started the musical mode.

So, as regards order and system, music is unparalleled. But a person who is ignorant of musical composition will not understand its delicate system and will consider the various fluctuations of the singer's song as a disorganised rendition and may even laugh at it. However, an expert in music who understands the intricacies of the musical arrangements will experience an ecstasy of the soul from the same rendition.

Similarly, a person who is deficient in knowledge and understanding of the subtle order and system underlying the arrangement of the Qur'anic verses may be misled and, Allah forbid! he may consider it a jumbled mass. On the other hand, a person who has knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and is aware of the strong connection that runs through the verses of the Holy Qur'an, will appreciate the fact that the superb composition of the Holy Qur'an greatly exceeds that of the best musical arrangement and will derive the greatest pleasure from the Holy Qur'an. In short, such is the affinity that exists between the beginning and the end of each chapter that one can say that either one serves as an explanation of the other.

In the beginning of this chapter, the word *Al-Ghashiyah*, meaning "a fearful event", is employed, and this is explained in the end by the sentence, *Then it is for Us to call them to account*. In other words, accountability for our actions will have to be given by everyone and no one shall escape its ambit. Indeed, there is no greater difficulty or trial than having to give account for our actions.

Civil servants in various government departments can bear witness to the trying ordeal which they experience when government officers or auditors come to inspect their work and their books. So heavy does this burden of accountability rest on the heart and mind of the workers that it is difficult for some to sleep during these days even though

the examination of these worldly auditors does not encompass every single action of theirs for they examine a page or two here and there and their knowledge is not total. In fact, they can even be deceived. On the other hand, look at how searching and complete will be Allah's examination of man's deeds - nothing will be hidden from Him and for every action an account will have to be given together with the intention that motivated each deed, even the secrets from the innermost recesses of the heart. If man should avail himself of Allah's mercy and forgiveness, he can surmount this hurdle, otherwise poor man has no resting-place except in Allah. There can be no greater *ghashiyah* (all-encompassing event) than this.

Someone once saw the Caliph 'Umar in a dream twelve years after his ('Umar's) death. He was all drenched in perspiration and when asked the reason for this he replied: "I have just finished giving account." Thus, having to give account is a very frightful affair.

Allah, Most High, asks us: *What do you understand by the Overwhelming Event?* But He does not give us the definition of this word. Instead, He presents to us the impact and the consequences of this Event so that from these we can understand for ourselves what those scenes will be like.

Let us now look closely at this description in the following verses:

*Faces on that day will be downcast
Labouring, toiling*

This description tells us that Hell is also a jail in the Hereafter and the description of the condition of the guilty ones can be clearly seen in a small measure in the prisons of this world. The first impression that any observer can see in the faces of the prisoners is the sign of disgrace. However high or noble a man may be, as soon as he enters prison to serve a sentence, one can discern the stamp of humiliation writ large on his face. Furthermore, from dawn to dusk he is forced into hard labour. However, his exertion bears no fruit for him except

that in the evening he collapses in utter fatigue. In other words, in jail he labours and toils but he receives no recompense but distress and fatigue whereas when he is out of prison he does the same work but here he enjoys the fruits of his labour.

Similarly, in the prison of the Hereafter the faces of the inmates will be stamped with disgrace and humiliation. As a corrective measure, a prisoner will be forced to labour there as a punishment but he will obtain no reward for his hard work except great grief and fatigue. If he were to do this work in this world of his own free will, then he would receive his just due but in the prison of the Hereafter he will have to do the same work by force but the difference is that he will not benefit from it there.

The truth is that the Hereafter is a representation of this world. Whatever condition man was invisibly fashioning for himself here will be clearly visible there. All those who had placed their whole life in the prison of their lusts and desires and had become their slaves will find this hidden prison highly visible in the next life in the form of a jail. Indeed, this humiliation of those who are prisoners of their low desires and ambitions can be easily perceived in this very life by those who have knowledge and possess insight into human nature.

Entering burning fire

It is a fact that those who placed themselves in the prison of their base passions and low desires will find that those very passions were indeed a fire in their hearts. So, if in the Hereafter this prison is not of fire, what else is it? It is evident, therefore, that the fire of his prison on earth accompanies the wrongdoer into the next life.

Made to drink from a boiling spring

The efforts to fulfil the lusts and desires of this world can never bring coolness and contentment to the heart of man. For, whatever object he seeks to acquire in order to bring him peace and happiness and

which he considers as a means of quenching the thirst of this worldly life of his - that very thing, when he gets it, becomes like boiling water which increases his restlessness and anguish instead of becoming the much anticipated source of his peace and tranquillity. Instead of giving peace it only stokes the fire of the worldly-minded and this will appear to him in the Hereafter like boiling water which neither quenches thirst nor brings coolness and contentment.

*They will have no food but of thorns
Neither nourishing nor satisfying hunger*

Food benefits us in two ways. Firstly, it is digested in the stomach and becomes part of the body and provides nourishment for it. Secondly, when it fills the stomach, it assuages the pangs of hunger. If any food is heavy or is inferior in quality and is not digested, or if it is not very nutritious, then the result at least will be that the burning pangs of hunger will be cooled.

However, the Holy Qur'an says that in the next life the sustenance that the guilty will receive will be like thorns which will not provide any nourishment for human growth, neither will it cool the fiery pangs of hunger. This, indeed, is a fitting description of the state of a seeker after this world's life, and this will be fully manifested in the next life.

Thus, the prison of Hell is really a representation of the consequences of man's subservience to his low passions and base desires. And the fire of Hell is, in fact, a manifestation of that fire which rises in the hearts of the worldly-minded on account of these same vile passions. There, the boiling water and thorns are really the repercussions of the lust for this world's transient pleasures which can never extinguish the yearning of man's inner self nor provide tranquillity and coolness for his soul; neither can it satisfy man's hunger and so bring an end to his chasing after sensual pleasures, nor can it bring comfort to the soul of man so that he may be happy in the Hereafter.

Faces that day will be happy

Glad for their striving

These are they who have passed the test. If you look at the face of a successful student you can see how happy and joyful he is. There is no one who can prevent the liveliness, joy and ecstasy from appearing on his face when he succeeds in his labour and begins to reap the reward of his harvest. This is a sight that all can readily behold even at a single glance. As these people did not become slaves of their passions and desires in this life, therefore, as befits free people, their deeds will bear their own fruits in the Hereafter. It is indeed an established fact that if the result of one's striving is success according to one's expectation, then joy and bliss will replace the fatigue of hard work, and just as such a person has pleased Allah in this world, so, too, will Allah please him in the next life. He will not enter Hell but will be an inhabitant of Paradise for Allah will reward him for his actions with a garden which he himself helped to create through his own good deeds.

In a lofty garden

Those who had transformed the fire of their passions and desires into a verdant garden in this life through the water of Allah's grace and the seeds of their own good works will see their garden in the form of a paradise in the next life, and the higher the heaven, the greater the evidence of their spiritual progress and their exalted position. In his *Masnavi*, Maulana Rumi composed a poem from a saying of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in which he wrote that when the inhabitants of paradise approach the door of Heaven they will say to the angels: "We were told that we would have to cross over Hell before we reached Heaven, but on our way here we didn't see any sign of Hell."

The angels will ask: "Did you see some gardens on your way here?"

On receiving the reply that they had seen four gardens, the angels will then explain: "Those gardens were indeed Hell, but for you who had converted your fiery passions and desires into a garden in your earthly

life they appeared like gardens, but to the inmates of Hell those gardens are really fire.”

Maulana Rumi then went on to explain the meaning of those gardens which he said represented four passions which a righteous person had overcome in this worldly life, namely: greed, sexual passions, anger and envy.

Wherein thou wilt hear no vain talk

There are some things which are harmful to us and others that are beneficial. But there is a certain thing which, while it brings no harm, neither brings any benefit to us, and that thing is *lughv* (vain discourse or absurd talk). In the following verse, the Holy Qur'an tells us that success for the believer comes when he avoids absurdities: *And those who shun what is vain* (23:3), because the believer protects himself from those pursuits which bring no benefit to him.

In fact, everyone considers it a personal duty to avoid harmful things, but the believer goes further by shunning even those activities which do not profit him. In short, every second of his life sees him engaged in good works. Therefore, those who avoided vain discourse in this life will be kept far from it in the next life.

Therein is a fountain flowing

This spring contains the water which irrigates man's actions which are in accordance with the commands of Allah and it is so full of coolness and satisfaction that it is from this spring that the soul of man attains the noble position of *nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (soul that is at rest) and thus he inherits eternal happiness, for a new life - a heavenly one - is given to him.

*Therein are thrones raised high
And drinking-cups ready placed
And cushions set in rows*

And carpets spread out

These four verses portray a picture of the honour that will be granted to the inmates of Paradise by their Lord. When people occupy lofty thrones either in a court or in an assembly, it indicates the exalted status which the king or the host bestows on them in full view of his guests. The beautiful glasses and earthen tumblers and such-like eating and drinking utensils signify the love that the king or the host has for his guests, whilst the large pillows, etc. are symbols of the comfort and repose which the king or the host wishes to provide for his guests. The carpets are signs of the joy and happiness which the king or the host has in his heart for his guests who respond to his invitation.

Here the Holy Qur'an mentions four different things which the inhabitants of Paradise will receive in exchange for their high moral and spiritual qualities:

1. Lofty thrones - these signify honour in the court of Allah.
2. Earthen tumblers - these are symbols of Allah's love for His righteous servants.
3. Large pillows - these stand for the manifestation of Allah's happiness and pleasure when He contemplates His obedient servants.
4. Carpets - these stand for the manifestation of Allah's happiness and pleasure when He contemplates His obedient servants.

These four kinds of reward are, in fact, the result of upholding four great principles according to which the inmate of paradise spent his life in this earthly sojourn; and these four principles are the very essence of religion which is called *Islam*. These four essential principles of religion are explained in the following four verses.

*See they not the camels, how they are created?
And the heaven, how it is raised high?*

*And the mountains, how they are fixed?
And the earth, how it is spread out?*

The *Shari'ah* (Law) of Islam is divided into two parts:

1. Kindness to the creation of Allah. That is, to be kind and sympathetic to Allah's creation and to make sacrifices for their sake.
2. Respect for the commands of Allah. That is, to show such perfect obedience to Him and to develop so strong a connection with Him that it becomes easy for us to give up everything in the world besides Him.

Similarly, the decrees of Allah are divided into two parts:

1. Sadness.
2. Happiness, which man experiences alternately from time to time.

Now the above four verses deal with these topics one by one. The first two verses address the two principles of the *Shari'ah* whilst in the next two verses the two conditions of man relating to the decrees of Allah are depicted in the book of nature, for Allah, in this way, wants us to understand and grasp the essential nature of religion. For in these four scenes from nature He has given us guidance relating to the four topics given above so that we should learn from them because if these four principles do not permeate our inner selves we can never be regarded as perfect followers of our religion, Islam. The most effective way to explain the fundamentals of religion is through the observation of the book of nature from which the greatest of philosophers, or the most primitive of mankind, can equally grasp the basic truths of religion.

Let us hold for a moment the following picture in our imagination. Arabia is a large desert which extends as far as the eye can see and on one side there stands a large barren chain of arid mountains. Now let

us picture a primitive Arab standing in this bare, sandy waste. He has just dismounted from his camel and is cut off from the whole world. No creature can he see, neither bird nor beast nor man nor even any vegetation. In front of him he can see just four things: his camel standing near him, the sky high above him, that great barren mountain range and that desert stretching as far as he can see. In these four things, the Holy Qur'an is teaching him the basic principles of his religion, for, from the book of nature, he is being taught the nature of his religion.

It is as if Allah is telling him (and by extension, all of us): "O man, the first principle of religion, that is, Islam, is kindness to the creation of Allah, and you can learn this from the example of this camel. Look at his hard work and sacrifice, how day and night he carries the loads of other people and never grows tired. He bears their burdens across remote deserts where it is impossible for either man or animal to enter alone. Those whose loads he carries enjoy the good things of life whilst he has to be contented with thorny bushes for sustenance; they drink water whilst for several days and sometimes weeks he has nothing to drink, but when his owners run out of food and drink, they slaughter him, and besides having his flesh to eat they find water in his abdomen in a water-bag which Allah in His infinite mercy has placed there and they refresh themselves with it, thus saving their lives. Can you find a better model of silent sacrifice and hard work than in the example of this animal? Then, from another point of view, look at how hundreds of camels walk peacefully in a straight line over long distances without fighting among themselves. Thus, O man, learn from this animal standing in front of you the first principle of the religion of nature, Islam, that is, kindness to the creatures of Allah. Bear the burden of others with difficulty and pain to places where others do not have the strength to reach and with pain to yourself give relief to others without tiring. Go hungry yourself but give others their fill to eat and if it should happen that you have to sacrifice your life in the service and welfare of people, do not hesitate even for a moment. When working in a group, like the camel, participate in silent determination and with strong resolution, mutual sympathy and unity. In other words, learn half of the religion of nature from this animal.

In order to learn the second half of religion, that is, union with Allah and reverential obedience to His commands, turn your eyes, O man, to the sky and see how high it is built above you. Therefore, in obedience to Allah's commands and in forming an unbreakable bond with Him, that is, cutting off yourself from everything else besides Him, try to excel in perfection and excellence in the same measure as the sky rises high above the earth and is free from all that it contains. Therefore, you, too, in your ascent towards Allah should rise high like the sky, above all low desires and passions and, far from being a creature of the earth, you should soar high in the sky. Always remember that a person who is more inclined to earthly pleasures can never achieve full belief in the Oneness of Allah nor effect a perfect union with Him.

After perfecting the teachings of the Law, Allah draws attention to the two conditions that emanate from His decrees. He deals firstly with sorrows and advises mankind thus:

1. "If you have to face pain and difficulties, then stand up to them as firmly as the mountains. However tempestuous the winds and waves of hardships and calamities, never yield an inch but remain unshakeable as the mountains and never swerve from your position and principles. In other words, in times of sorrow, learn patience and steadfastness from the example of the mountains.
2. Secondly, if happiness and luxuries and wealth should come your way, then become humble like the earth and instead of exhibiting pride and niggardliness try hard to cultivate the qualities of humility, meekness, forbearance, generosity and munificence as is displayed by the earth which lies flat and low as far as the eye can see. Indeed, day and night, it is trampled by the feet of friend and foe, yet it never withholds its favours from any - rich or poor, friend or enemy all find rest in its bosom as they make use of its food grains, fruit, vegeta-

tion, water, air and everything else it has to offer. Therefore, in times of happiness and success learn the virtue of gratitude from the earth. Your humility and lowliness, your courtesy and generosity, your magnanimity and selflessness should be based on the pattern of the earth.”

In short, these four above-mentioned principles which constitute the foundation of religion will be bestowed on the believer in the next life as rewards for his striving. The beauty of this is that these four principles of religion are so simple and so evident in the book of nature that even a primitive person in a desolate wilderness can learn them from his surroundings. Further, if someone does not profit from the teachings of the messenger of Allah, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), and in spite of being vouchsafed the subtle points of religion, he still remains heedless, then he has no one but himself to blame for his ill-fortune.

Therefore, the Holy Qur'an commands:

So remind. Thou art only one to remind.

That is, in spite of the fact that the Holy Prophet is reminding people of the religion of nature which, in fact, exists both in man's inner-self as well as in the book of nature, if they reject, then the Holy Qur'an says in the following verses:

*Thou art not a watcher over them
But whoever turns back and disbelieves
Allah will chastise him with the greatest chastisement*

The Holy Prophet (*sas*) is told that his duty is to warn people and convey the message of Allah to them; he is not to compel them. If any should turn away and deny the truth, Allah Himself will mete out punishment to him for his actions.

Surely to Us is their return

Then it is for Us to call them to account

These verses refer to the promise of accountability mentioned in the beginning of the chapter in the word *Al-Ghashiyah*, which means *the event that covers everything* from which no one can escape. Allah, Most High, tells the Holy Prophet (*sas*) to teach the religion to people and if they do not accept it, then there is no blame on him for ultimately they all have to return to Allah and He, Himself, will be the One Who will take account of their deeds. To those who believe or spread the propaganda that Islam was spread at the point of the sword, there is in these verses a clear refutation in this shattering reply.

AL-FAJR (THE DAYBREAK)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By the daybreak!

And the ten nights!

And the even and the odd!

And the night when it departs!

Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding.

Has thou not considered how thy Lord dealt with 'Ad,

(Of) Iram having lofty buildings,

The like of which were not created in the land;

And (with) Thamud, who hewed out rocks in the valley

And (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts,

Who exceeded the limits in the cities,

And made great mischief therein?

So thy Lord poured on them a portion of chastisement.

Surely thy Lord is ever Watchful.

As for man, when his Lord tries him, then gives him honour and favours him, he says: My Lord honours me.

But when He tries him, then straitens to him his subsistence, he says: My Lord has disgraced me.

Nay, but you honour not the orphan,

Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor,

And you devour heritage, devouring all,

And you love wealth with exceeding love.

Nay, when the earth is made to crumble to pieces,

And thy Lord comes with the angels,

ranks on ranks;

And hell is made to appear that day. On that day man will be mindful, and of what use will being mindful be then?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْفَجْرِ

وَلَيْلٍ إِسْتَمْرًا

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَجِيءُ

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَجِيءُ

مَلْفُ فِي ذَلِكَ تَشْكُرُ كَذَى حُجُجِهِمْ

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ قَدَرْنَا مَرْجَمًا

مُرْمَدًا آيَاتِ الْيَوْمِ

الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَخْلُقْنَا وَرَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَلِيَّا

وَسَمِينٌ وَالَّذِينَ جَاءُوا الضُّفْرَ

بِالْوَادِ

وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْدَادِ

الَّذِينَ طَغَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ

فَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا الضَّرَبَ

نَحْنُ عَلَيْهِمْ مُرْتَكِبُونَ سَوَاءٌ عَذَابٌ

لَنْ نُرِيَنَّكَ لِيَالِ الْيَوْمِ

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ

فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ

وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ

فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ

وَلَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا لَعْنَةُ رَبِّكَ

وَلَا تَحْسَبْنَهُ عَلَىٰ حَكِيمٍ

وَتَاكَلُونَ النَّارَ النَّارَاتِ

لِئَالٍ

وَيَحْمِلُونَ الْعَمَالَ حَتَّىٰ يَجِئَا

كَلْبًا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَكْمَامُ وَرَوَّحَاتُهُ

وَجَاءَ زُرْقًا وَالسَّمَاءُ صَفْصَفًا

وَجَاءَ بِرُؤْيُوسِهِمْ فِي النَّارِ

وَأَنْ لَّهُ الْيَوْمِ

He will say: O would that I had sent
 before for (this) my life!
 But none can punish as He will punish on
 that day.
 And none can bind as He will bind on
 that day.
 O soul that art rest,
 Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-
 pleasing,
 So enter among My servants,
 And enter My Garden.

يَقُولُ يَلْبِسُهُ فَاذْنَبْتُ لِيحْيَانِي ۝
 تَبَيَّنَ مَجْدُكَ يَا رَبِّ عَدَاةً اِيَّاهُ ۝
 وَلَا يُرِيدُونَ وَفَاةً اَحَدًا ۝
 يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الطَّمِيحَةُ ۝
 اذْهَبِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً
 مَُّرْضِيَةً ۝
 فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ۝
 وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي ۝

This chapter was revealed in Makkah. In the last chapter, Al-Ghashiyah (The Overwhelming Event), great emphasis was laid on this topic - the religion of nature and working according to its dictates and the result of such actions was plainly delineated. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) was told to advise and exhort mankind for there cannot be any compulsion in matters of religion. Instead, his duty was to encourage others and remind them of the natural religion, that is, Islam. Nevertheless, his rejecters and objectors could not bear to hear the truth that was being propagated by the Holy Prophet and his companions. However, the Holy Prophet never resorted to compulsion to force others to accept this truth but his opponents never balked at using force in their desire to prevent him from carrying out his work of propagation. As a result, in order to preach the religion, the Holy Prophet and his companions were forced to make extraordinary exertion which, in Islamic terminology, is called *jihad fi sabil-lil-Lah* (struggle in the way of Allah). That is, in order to preserve and disseminate the truth it is necessary to endure all kinds of difficulties as well as to make all kinds of sacrifices of wealth and life and to draw strength from worship and supplication to Allah, Most High. In addition to these things, in the time of the Holy Prophet, there was, and indeed in any other age there is another kind of *jihad* (struggle) that is mandatory on the believer and that is to fight against one's own rebellious self. In order to conquer the base passions and evil urges of this *self that com-*

mands evil, the believer has to undergo all kinds of trials and make every kind of sacrifice and above all, he has to resort to worship and supplication, which are his chief weapons. Therefore, the believer must always keep in mind the struggle against his own inner self mentioned in this chapter, *Al-Fajr* (The Daybreak), and ponder over the struggle carried out in the time of the Holy Prophet and the guidance provided by him to his followers as well as the good news he gave them concerning their eventual success. It has also been explained here that the methods adopted by one believer who wages a war against his own inner self and becomes successful can be utilised by any other striver in the way of Allah to make him, too, successful whether against his own inner self or against unbelievers. These are the paths which, if taken by man, will help him to traverse all the spiritual stages in his journey towards closeness to Allah and pleasing Him. Following these paths will also make him a recipient of the status *nafs-ul-mutma 'innah* (soul at rest) and he will become one of Allah's cherished servants who will inherit the kingdom of Heaven.

By the daybreak!

And the ten nights!

And the even and the odd!

And the night when it departs!

Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding.

The oaths of Allah point to hidden pieces of evidence which are called into play in order to place strong emphasis on a particular point. *Al-Hijr* is that thing which prevents a person from becoming a slave to greed and lust. That is why the intellect of man is metaphorically called *hijr* for it is supposed to control our emotions and guide them. Thus, the literal meaning of *hijr* (*hijr* comes from *hajara* which means to separate one's self from, to leave off, to abstain from, to quit) is that element which restrains a man from following the temptations of greed and lust. And the meaning of the verse above, *Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding*, is that there is a very important piece of evidence in this statement for those people who protect themselves from the evil prompting of their base self which excites greed and

sexual impropriety. Let us now look at the evidence presented in the following verses:

By the dawn.

The dawn is used as evidence of the beginning of success or happiness or the dawn of the day of *'Id*.

The ten nights refers to the last ten nights of the month of Ramadhan, including the Night of Majesty on which the Holy Qur'an was revealed and during which the Holy Prophet (*sas*) used to keep awake and engage in extra prayer. It can also mean the first ten nights of the month of Dhul Hijj in which the Pilgrimage and its ritual take place and in which special prayers are offered.

By the even and the odd.

These two references have very deep meanings. They refer to the prayer in the latter part of the night, called the *tahajjud*, which is read in even numbers, that is, in two's, and after ten *rakahs* (cycles) are read in this manner, one *rakah* (*witr* or "odd") is read and this makes all the even *rakahs* "odd". However, by the use of the words *even* and *odd*, the true meaning of which appears to be shrouded in mystery, what is really meant is this: the creation of Allah is regarded as "even" as the Holy Qur'an itself says: *And of everything We have created pairs that you may mind* (51:49). In other words, the creation is considered "even" and the Creator is called "Odd" or "One" as is recorded in the *hadith*: "Allah is One and He loves oneness."

Therefore, by the use of "even" and "odd" is meant that Allah created His creatures so that everyone should unite and become pairs, that is, among human beings there should exist co-operation, unity, sympathy and kindness exactly according to the pleasure of Allah for that is the true purpose of man's creation. On the other hand, the outstanding characteristic of the Creator is that He is *Witr* or One, that is, His creatures must never accept any other teaching except the principle

of the Oneness of their Maker. It is by the perfection of this principle that the “even” will become “odd” or one, that is, all will accept one authority, for Allah is One, and in order for His servants to perfect their obedience, love and belief in His Oneness they should form a strong connection with Him so that the “odd” may become “even”. In other words, the servants must become inseparable from their Master.

It can be seen from this that man’s spiritual advancement and his perfection depend on two factors. Firstly, there should be among human beings such amity and love that in spite of being “even” or “pairs” they will become one in their mutual affection and harmony. Secondly, Allah is One but His servants should forge such a powerful connection with Him, that He, in spite of being “odd” will gradually become “even”. This is what is called the station of intercession and in the prayer in the latter part of the night called the *tahajjud*, which contains ten even *rakahs* and one odd *rakah* in the end, the underlying objective is that man should never allow his attention to be diverted even for a second from the above-mentioned significance of “even” and “odd”, for in this “even” and “odd” lies the ultimate reality of the purpose of his creation as well as his progress towards perfection.

The verse: *By the night when it departs*, refers to the last part of the night when it is drawing to an end, specifically the last third of the night when the excellence and the acceptance of prayers are particularly emphasised in the *Hadith*.

The connection between *the dawn* and the *ten nights* is that Allah has fixed the dawn of ‘*Id* after the ten nights of extra devotion for, after the special worship in the last ten nights of Ramadhan and the rigorous efforts and the performance of the duty of fasting, comes the dawn of ‘*Id-ul-Fitr* which brings the message of happiness. Similarly, after the extra worship in the first ten nights of the pilgrimage and the strenuous devotion and supplication and the performance of the duty of the pilgrimage comes the dawn of ‘*Id-ul-Adha* which, too, brings

with it a message of joy and happiness.

For Muslims, there are two *'Id* festivals and both of them take place only after the performance of a compulsory duty which calls for stringent devotions. The dawn of *'Id-ul-Fitr* comes after the fast in the month of Ramadhan and the very strict exertions in the last ten nights of the month. Similarly, the dawn of *'Id-ul-Adha* comes after the performance of the pilgrimage and the extra devotions and supplications in the first ten nights of that period. It can be observed, therefore, that the *'Id* of a Muslim falls on the day when he completes the performance of his duty and is free of extra obligations. From this we can see that neither day of *'Id* is held in order to commemorate the birth or the death of anyone, nor to celebrate the joy of some military victory, nor to mourn over some sorrowful event.

Thus, a person who strives hard to subjugate his passions of greed and lust will discover all these spiritual truths as evidence when, during the last ten nights of Ramadhan and the first ten nights of Dhul Hijj, he struggles against his inner self and forsakes his bed at night to pray. And when he begins to grasp the reality of these matters in the *tahajjud* prayer, then he worships Allah with total devotion in the "even" and "odd" (*rakahs*) and he keeps uppermost in his mind this important point - that if a strong connection is created between his sympathy and kindness to mankind and his obedience to Allah and belief in His Oneness - then He will obtain clear evidence that, as a result of his exertions, Allah will certainly and inevitably grant him from Himself a dawn of joy and happiness.

Now, if the idea enters the mind that as the opposing forces of unbelief are so mighty it is impossible for us to put an end to the dark night of misguidance and error, then take heart from the fact that, in the past, great powers and mighty nations came head to head with the religion of Allah, and what happened? They were all beaten back and destroyed. So, today, when we have the greatest of all truths in the form of the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), can the enemy forces of the world ever prevail?

The Holy Qur'an now gives us some examples of past peoples who fought against truth.

*Has thou not considered how thy Lord dealt with 'Ad,
(Of) Iram having lofty buildings,
The like of which were not created in the land.*

There were two ancient Arabian tribes the first of which was called the first 'Ad and the second was called 'Ad of Iram or the second 'Ad. But Iram was also the name of the grandfather of the first 'Ad and their capital city was also called Iram. Probably it was this grandfather who had founded that city. The term *dhatul 'imad* (having lofty columns) was used in reference to them for several reasons:

1. They were of strong body and tall in stature. *'Imad* means "columns" and this word was used to emphasise their strength as if, as it were, they were tall and broad as columns.
2. As signs of their military victories and power they used to build tall columns just as the kings and emperors of India used to build tall monuments, for example, the memorial columns of Ashok and Feroze Shah which are still present in Delhi.
3. This tribe lived in the south of Arabia and flourished in the region of Hadramaut and used to build tall buildings. Modern researches have established the fact that the civilisation of Egypt pre-dated that of India, but older than the civilisation of Egypt was that of Yaman. Recent archaeological discoveries in that region have unearthed a plaque on which the name of the Prophet Hud is written together with some incidents relating to his life. This plaque has silenced those Christian priests who had denied the historicity of the Prophet Hud and has confirmed the truth of the Holy Qur'an which was the first book to make mention of Hud. In short, these people possessed in their

time such a mighty and advanced civilisation that the Holy Qur'an itself testifies to it in the above verse: *The like of which (buildings and cities) were not created anywhere else in the world.*

Look how cultivated an aesthetic sense the Muslim kings possessed that the whole of this chapter, *Al-Fajr* (The Daybreak), is written on the door of the Taj Mahal at Agra in beautiful mosaic style. And this was done just because of this verse: *The like of which was not created in the land.* The underlying idea behind putting this verse on the door of the Taj Mahal was to demonstrate to the world that in point of exquisite beauty and elegance the Taj Mahal would be unrivalled today as Iram was in its time. And we all know that the Taj Mahal is considered as one of the seven wonders of the world.

And (with) Thamud, who hewed out rocks in the valley

This tribe lived in the northern region of the Hejaz in a very rocky area which they populated and for strength and fortification, these people built houses for themselves by hewing out rocks and mountains. Evidence of their civilisation has existed for centuries for these houses hewn out of the rocks are still extant. In fact, quite recently a marvellous city made out of red stone was discovered. Pictures of this city and its history were recently published in *The Times* of India.

Houses hewn out of rocks are very strong. In Aden, there is a dry, rocky mountain in the sea and the English have cut through it and built a fort in the heart of this rocky mountain. If any foreign warship should attempt to pass through there without their permission then the large cannons hidden in the interior of the rock could be used to destroy them.

And (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts (or tent pegs)

Pharaoh was the title of the kings of Egypt. The vast number of his army has been described as *autad* (tent pegs) because when a large

army is encamped in an area all that can be seen is a massive conglomeration of horses and tent poles.

Here, three nations have been mentioned. The first was the tribe of 'Ad who lived to the south of Makkah; the second was the people of Thamud who settled to the north of Makkah; and the third reference was to Pharoah who was an opponent of the prophet of the Children of Israel, the law-bearing Prophet, Moses, to whom the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) claimed a resemblance. And in speaking of these three, the Holy Qur'an has mentioned all the major powers and resources at man's command. These are:

1. The large stature and physical strength of the people.
2. The huge and massive buildings, fortresses and monuments to commemorate their victories in war.
3. The construction of large, powerful buildings carved out of stone.
4. The possession of mighty armies.

However, in spite of possessing all those advantages, when they rebelled against Allah and opposed the truth, the result was that all their supposedly invincible resources availed them naught. Therefore, the Holy Qur'an states:

*Who exceeded the limits in the cities
And made great mischief therein?*

Two things are mentioned here - they spread corruption in the land because of their transgression and cruelty and their disobedience to Allah, and secondly, they were very rebellious in their opposition to the truth.

So thy Lord poured on them a portion of chastisement.

Just as when some rogues are causing a disturbance somewhere and an administrative officer comes and flogs and chases them away, simi-

larly, Allah administers a flogging on those who oppose His messengers and sow corruption in the land so that they are defeated and put to ignominious flight and none remains. Therefore, even today, the Holy Qur'an affirms:

Surely thy Lord is ever Watchful.

Nothing is hidden from the Lord, Most High, and just as the general of an army watches from a look-out and as soon as an opportunity arises he falls on the enemy forces and destroys them, so, too, Allah is always on the alert. He is fully aware of the mischief of the evildoers and when the opportune time comes, such will be His seizure of them in the midst of their wickedness that they will not be able to move.

As for man, when his Lord tries him, then gives him honour and favours him, he says: My Lord honours me.

But when He tries him, then straitens to him his subsistence, he says: My Lord has disgraced me.

In these two verses, the Holy Qur'an has solved the question behind the disparity in prosperity and straightened circumstances, and wealth and poverty in the world. Whenever people are intoxicated with riches and power, they do not like to listen to any advice or preaching from anyone. The religion of the poorer classes, especially, holds no attraction for them. On the other hand, pride in the possession of wealth and worldly status creates in them such an inflated attitude of themselves that they begin to think, or at least they give off this feeling, that Allah is happy and pleased with them and so He has so blessed them with His favours that wherever they go power and wealth run towards them.

In this connection, we relate a very interesting incident. Many years ago in the time of the late Maulana Nur-ud-Din, the first successor to the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and just after the Balkan War, a delegation of Christian priests went to Lahore and began a series of lectures. Their main point was

that through the grace of God, the Messiah Jesus, the Christian Empire was successful and was predominant all over the world whereas the condition of Muslims was so wretched that even their only Sultanate, that of Turkey, had suffered destruction. On hearing of this, Maulana Nur-ud-Din sent a delegation of Ahmadis to them with the advice that they should support the Christian priests when they spoke the truth but they must refute whatever false allegations they may make. They should also convey to them the message that the reason for Christian domination which they gave was not the true one. Instead, the true reason is contained in an incident recorded in the Gospel, which for them is an authentic book. The incident he reminded them of was that for forty consecutive days Jesus, the Messiah, was tempted by Satan who transported him over jungles and mountains. At last he carried him to the top of a mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. He then said to Jesus: "If you bow to me, all these kingdoms shall be yours."

Whereupon Jesus replied: "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written in the former Scriptures that you must make prostration to God alone. Therefore, it is not fitting for me to bow to you."

Jesus, the Messiah, refused to bow to Satan and rejected the kingdom of the world. But Christians saw that the result of his action was that for his whole life he suffered poverty and indigence. They thought, therefore, that it was not wise to follow him in this matter so they prostrated before Satan and received in return worldly kingdoms. In other words, the fact that they inherited all the kingdoms of the world was, according to the Gospel, because they had bowed down to Satan. The Christian priests could not give a reply to this message and a few days later they fled the city.

In short, in two verses the Holy Qur'an has solved this riddle which the Gospel could not. It says that abundance of wealth and poverty are but two trials. In other words, trials continue to come from Allah for the purpose of testing the character of His servants. Therefore, to consider abundance of riches and honour as signs that Allah is pleased

with us and more than that, He is conferring honour on us because of his diverse favours, is a dangerous error. Similarly, to consider penury and indigence as evidence of Allah's anger or His contempt in that he is depriving us of wealth and riches is also a very grave mistake. These two conditions befall man as a form of trial. Look how beautifully 'Umar Faruq (*ra*) expressed this sentiment when he said: "In times of difficulty and straitened circumstances, we show patience, but when we are tried by opulence and prosperity we are unable to practise restraint." He applied this statement to himself in all humility with the result that both in poverty and in prosperity he became a peerless example of fortitude. Unfortunately, however, his statement fitted the later Muslims so closely that the words that came from his mouth turned out to be a prophecy regarding their behaviour for when kingdoms and riches came to the lot of Muslims, they failed to upkeep their religion as their predecessors had done.

In short, prosperity and indigence are two conditions of trial for man. Until Allah, Himself, tells us that favours, success, power or wealth have come to us because of our good deeds and are blessings given to us as a reward for our actions; or, if we suffer disgrace and abasement and Allah does not tell us beforehand that we will suffer such treatment as punishment for our wrongful behaviour, then for any individual or nation to attribute wealth and power to the pleasure of Allah, or poverty and disgrace to the anger of Allah, is a serious mistake and indeed an absurd position.

Therefore, the opponents of Islam should not regard their wealth and authority as indications that Allah is pleased with them and so He will not punish them. The Holy Qur'an emphatically denies this belief and promises them retribution instead, for Allah's pleasure is won through good works and high morals of which they are devoid. So, to consider their prosperity as proof that Allah is pleased with and is honouring them is an egregious error. Wealth by itself does not necessarily constitute a sign of Allah's approval.

Nay, but you honour not the orphan

*Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor
And you devour heritage, devouring all
And you love wealth with exceeding love*

In these four verses the Holy Qur'an explains why wealth alone is not necessarily a sign of Allah's pleasure as it lists four grave short-comings in the behaviour of materialistic-minded people. It accuses them of not honouring the orphan and not encouraging one another to feed the poor. These two words, *yatim* (orphan) and *miskin* (poor), need some clarification. *Yatim* means one who is left alone in the world and his condition is such that he cannot look after himself and has to depend on others. That is, he does not yet have the ability to work and provide for his own livelihood and those who provided sustenance for him and cared for him before are no longer alive. Therefore, a person whose father is dead is called an orphan (*yatim*).

Miskin (poor) comes from *sakana* (to be quiet, to rest) and it means a work which was in progress has now suddenly come to a standstill. It is applied to a person who has the knowledge and expertise to work for his living and care for himself but has lost the means or tools for doing so. Therefore, one who has been deprived of the resources for earning his daily bread is called a *miskin* (needy).

No society in the world can ever establish a foundation of prosperity and claim honour for itself until the people apply themselves diligently to find means to ameliorate the condition of these two classes in their midst - the orphan and the poor. It is because of neglect of these two groups that prosperity and honour depart from a community. If people were to support and maintain these two sections of the society, then they will suffer no fear of losing their riches and well-being nor their honour and renown. Look how beautifully the Holy Qur'an discloses the manner of sustaining them:

1. **The orphan.** The orphan can be fostered in two ways: he can either be treated honourably or humiliatingly. That is why the command is given here to honour the orphans. In

other words, their rights should be safeguarded and their upbringing be such that they do not suffer abasement. The Holy Qur'an emphasises that every orphan, whether of rich or poor parentage, should be accorded respect - his right should be protected and in his upbringing, education and training, due consideration should be given to his status so that he may never be allowed to look down on himself with contempt nor to develop low habits. Thus, he can become a useful member of the society. As regards the upbringing of this kind of orphan, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is reported to have said: "I and the one who takes responsibility for an orphan, whether of his own kin or of others, will be in paradise thus" and he pointed his forefinger and middle finger with a slight space between them. (*Bukhari*)

2. **The poor.** Here by *feeding the poor* does not only mean giving them food to eat but the command is really to urge one another to find means of livelihood (a job or occupation) for the needy ones. It is indeed an act of virtue to feed the needy but the word *ta'am* (food) does not refer only to cooked food but also means a source of livelihood and here it carries both meanings, hence the command to *encourage one another to feed the poor*.

The underlying meaning is that until a society or nation gets together and through mutual consultation devises a system that will help its poorer section to obtain a source of livelihood, that society or nation is in danger of losing its affluence and honour. If a nation wishes to maintain its position of prosperity and honour, then, in order to improve the welfare of its distressed section, it is mandatory for the people of that nation through planning and consultation to set up a national institution that will make provision for the livelihood of the poor among them. And is it not the purpose of the *zakah* (poor-rate) and the *bait-ul-mal* (public treasury) to collect taxes from the wealthy and place them in a central body, and for the sake of ameliorating the

plight of the orphan and the needy, to set up an institution that will provide the means of their upbringing and education in a dignified manner?

If such a treasury should exist and Muslims should entrust their *zakah* (poor-rate) to a central authority and spend it on deserving cases, then in a matter of days the condition of the Muslim nation will improve and instead of hardship it will enjoy ease, and from abjection it will rise to eminence.

In the verses above, the verse, *Nay, but you do not honour the orphan*, goes with, *And you devour heritage, devouring all*; and, *Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor*, relates to, *And you love wealth with exceeding love*, to highlight the fact that disgrace is bound to befall a nation which not only dishonours orphans but denies them a due share in their inheritance; and instead of providing the means of livelihood for the needy, they love wealth with an inordinate love and are guilty of niggardliness. These people are not only contemptible in the eyes of Allah but in this very life their end will surely be one of humiliation and ruin.

In short, in the above verses, Allah's main objective is to make man understand that when he is tried by abundant wealth he should not fall prey to pride and self-conceit. Further, he should not consider his riches as proof of God's honour to him for that thought can very well lead to his destruction. On the other hand, if a man is tried by straitened circumstances he should never entertain the idea that he is predestined to live a life of penury and abasement for this idea is a great hindrance to human progress and advancement. Poverty is not necessarily a sign of degradation. The real signs of dishonour are those base morals and vile actions of which man is guilty. The moral, therefore, is that man should not exult in his wealth nor should Muslims surrender to abject despondency because of their poverty. Instead, they should develop high moral qualities which are the essence of genuine honour.

*Nay, when the earth is made to crumble to pieces
And thy Lord comes with the angels, ranks on ranks.*

A simple minded person thinks that no one is seeing his evil deeds nor are his wicked actions witnessed by anyone. But Allah says that He and His angels are close at hand, but He is invisible for between Him and an evil person there is an intervening veil of worldly and material means. A time will certainly come when this veil will be lifted and all mundane expedients will be dissipated and Allah will emerge from on high and seize the evil one in the midst of his mischief. For example, take the case of a thief who is stealing fruits from a garden and thinks that no one is seeing him, but the owner and his servants are observing him from a hiding-place and as soon as the thief begins to move away with the stolen fruits, they emerge from their hiding-place or from behind the cover of the trees and catch him red-handed with the stolen loot. Similar is the example of man and his Lord.

This worldly screen between man and Allah is rent on three occasions:

1. The first occurs at the time of death and this is called the Minor Resurrection.
2. The second time when the veil is removed is in the life of a prophet when his followers reap the reward of success whilst the unbelievers reap a harvest of humiliation and destruction. In reference to this the Holy Qur'an states in another verse: *But Allah came to them from a place they expected not and cast terror into their hearts...* (59:2). The unbelievers in their pride and reliance on their worldly power desire to obliterate the believers but they themselves suffer the same defeat, abasement and destruction that they planned for the believers; for the hand of Allah becomes visible and He, together with His angels, come to assist the faithful and to punish the unbelievers from whence they perceive not. For example, Pharaoh pursued

the Children of Israel in order to capture them but he, himself, was captured and was drowned in the sea. The unbelievers of Makkah, too, set off towards Madinah to wipe out the Muslims, but they, also, suffered an inglorious defeat at Badr at the hands of a handful of Muslims. The treaty of Hudaibiyah ostensibly strengthened the hand of the unbelievers against the Muslims but that very seemingly one-sided treaty was the cause of the fall of Makkah and the permanent defeat of the unbelievers. The lifting of this screen is called the Middle Resurrection.

3. The third occasion when the veil will be lifted will be on the Day of Resurrection when all hidden things will be made manifest. That is called the Great Resurrection.

And hell is made to appear that day. On that day man will be mindful, and of what use will being mindful be then?

The Holy Qur'an says that when the worldly veil is torn apart, and the servant is seized and brought before his Lord in order to give an account of his bad deeds, and the hell which he was fashioning with own hands is brought before his eyes, then he will come to his senses. But then his repentance and realisation will be futile just as it is for a student who idles away his time and does not do well in his examinations and so fails outright. To cry tears of repentance when the results are published is useless.

He will say: O would that I had sent before for (this) my life!

In this verse, the Holy Qur'an points out to us that the true life is the life of the Hereafter. So, wise is the one who prepares beforehand for that life which is the real one.

*But none can punish as He will punish on that day.
And none can bind as He will bind on that day.*

Everything that Allah has created is unique. There is no limit to His favours. His punishment ought to be the same and so, too, His seizure should be such that no one can approach its totality. Man can evade the capture of man and even escape it outright; man's punishment, too, may be tainted by errors and flaws. But no one can elude the grasp of Allah nor get away from it. His punishment is eminently suited to the crime and in perfection it is unrivalled. Therefore, it will be an act of wisdom for man to try to avoid the punishment of Allah. How ironical it is that even a wise man tries to escape from the punishment of worldly judges and sometimes even succeeds, yet he cares not for Allah's punishment although His seizure is so comprehensive that no one can escape it. The purpose of this announcement is to advise man that he should try to endure every difficulty on earth, but he should try to save himself from Allah's punishment and for the sake of this he should bear all the punishment of worldly judges if he has to, for their punishment is nothing compared to Allah's.

*O soul that art rest,
Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing
So enter among My servants,
And enter My Garden.*

The plight of the unbelievers when the veil of worldly resources is lifted has already been described. The focus now is on the condition of the believers who at night engaged themselves in worship and struggled to defeat their lower self and who, in times of error and misguidance, were concerned with propagating the religion and fighting in the way of Allah, all the while strenuously striving to develop high moral and spiritual excellence. As a result, they were awarded that exalted rank called *nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (soul at rest).

The Holy Qur'an has given us three stages in the development of the human soul. The first is called *nafs-ul-ammarah* (the spirit that commands evil). At this stage, the lower self of man is wont to command evil and under the instigation of his passions and desires he commits evil deeds without even feeling ashamed.

The second stage is that of *nafs-ul-lawwamah* (the accusing spirit). At this level there is a continuous war between man and Satan. Man desires to save himself from evil and from the wicked promptings of Satan as well as his own animal passions and instincts. Sometimes he is successful and saves himself from evil but sometimes in the face of satanic impulses he finds himself powerless to do so and does commit a sin, whereupon his inner self or his conscience duly blames him.

The third level is that of *nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (the soul at rest) at which stage the war between Satan and man comes to an end. Satan finally suffers a permanent defeat as was the case of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) when he said: "My *jinn* (that is, Satan) has become a Muslim." In this condition, deeds of righteousness begin to flow from man freely and spontaneously as if it has become second nature to him to do good.

The meaning of *the soul at rest* has been explained by Allah Himself in the words, *well-pleased, well-pleasing*. *Well-pleased* means that the servant in his life on earth had cheerfully accepted the decrees of Allah and had been obedient to the *Shari'ah* (Law), and *well-pleasing* indicates that the devotee has won the pleasure of his Lord through obedience to His commands and resignation to His decrees. How deserving of envy is the state of peace and tranquillity of this servant who was always well-pleased with every command and action of Allah and with whose word and deed Allah, too, was correspondingly pleased. The following is a further elucidation of these two expressions mentioned above.

Radiyah (well-pleased) means to be pleased with the commands of Allah and His decrees. Man is happy when he gets what he likes. When a person reaches the position of *soul at rest* he observes the dictates of the Law, that is, the commands and prohibitions of Allah, without any difficulty. Even more, his obedience creates a feeling of joy and delight in his heart and so disobedience is impossible for him for this will cause him pain and agony. This is the station of *'ubudiyyat*

(servitude) which is the ultimate point of man's perfection. At this stage, obedience becomes second nature and brings into being its own paradise. This is why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) said: "Prayer is the coolness of my eyes," and Sayyid Abdul Qadir Jilani explains that when this stage is reached, getting a reward for prayer is no longer the object of man's worship, for now prayer itself becomes a source of pleasure for him so he seeks no other reward. The reward for prayer is contained in the prayer itself, so if at this point the summons from Allah comes to him: *Enter among My servants*, it will indeed be most appropriate for him.

Similarly, whatever Allah decrees for His servant, for example, alternating conditions of happiness and sadness, of delight and agony, is borne with cheerful resignation by the one who has reached the stage of "soul at rest".

One praise-worthy reaction to sorrow and pain is that in spite of a heavy burden on a person's soul, man does not lament or weep over Allah's decrees but silently endures all that comes his way. This is called the station of resignation which every Muslim should try to acquire. However, there is a higher response which is called the station of pleasure and this is the preserve of the "soul at rest". At this stage, the believer enjoys a feeling of delight and comfort from the sorrow and pain which he suffers because he feels that Allah's will has been fulfilled. The Sufis have written that when Allah allows something to happen according to our wishes, we ought to be happy over it, but not so much as when Allah decides that a matter should take place according to His pleasure and we have to abandon our own desire in preference to His will.

Thus, it is written in the *Hadith* that if a servant of Allah made supplications that were not answered according to his wishes and Allah instead decreed according to His will with which the servant was pleased, the magnitude of the reward for resignation which the servant will receive on the Day of Resurrection will be such that he will wish that all his supplications had remained unanswered.

Someone once asked the saint, Rabiah of Basra, whether she ever felt sadness, to which she replied: “Yes, when there is no sadness in my heart.” It is natural for man to feel sadness under certain circumstances, but in the midst of the pain, if a person experiences pleasure at the thought that this is the will of his Lord and so becomes pleased with his Lord’s pleasure, he indeed attains a most elevated state in which his soul enjoys peace and tranquillity. This state is called Heaven and if at this juncture he is told: *Enter My Garden*, then how deserving it will be for him.

Mardi’ah (well-pleasing) refers to those who have gained the favour and approbation of Allah. And how can this be obtained? There are two ways open to man: obedience to the laws of Allah and cheerful resignation to, and acceptance of His decrees. Therefore, if a servant fulfils these two conditions and is happy and content with them, then in return his Lord will respond to him in like manner. One should consider, therefore, how fortunate is the person who has won the pleasure of his Lord. In this everyday world, when a person receives a certificate of commendation from a ruler whose tenure even is transient, he can hardly contain himself for joy. So just think for a moment how unimaginably happy will be that person who receives a mark of approbation from the Best of all rulers, the Lord of the worlds! Here *well-pleased* is placed before *well-pleasing* because the former is the response of the servant whilst the latter is the consequence, for, indeed, it is a servant’s conduct that attracts the pleasure of Allah, Most High.

To be pleased with one’s Lord in this world is such a difficult task that very few are those who achieve this. If a servant accepts the commands of his Lord and, moreover, is pleased with them, then how can he be disobedient? But if every day a servant grumbles over the decrees of his Lord, and if he suffers a slight pain and something happens against his desire and expectation, he loses his temper and abandons his beliefs and his religion and exceeds the bounds in ingratitude, then it will be impossible for him to be pleased with his Lord.

Thus it can be seen that to remain pleased with Allah without the least complaint is indeed a very difficult goal to achieve. That is why the *Hadith* tells us that if every day a person sincerely recites certain expressions, Allah will be pleased with him on the Day of Resurrection. These words are: “I am satisfied with Allah as my Lord, Muhammad (*sas*) as His Messenger and Islam as my religion.”

The root of all difficulties is that the wisdom underlying the commands of Allah and the consequences of acting according to them are hidden from man and so he stumbles along the way. Thus, to be pleased with one’s Lord is the highest point in belief in the Unseen and it is for this reason that Allah’s favour and pleasure in return are the highest and most unsurpassable of all bounties. There is no doubt that a recipient of such magnanimity has displayed his servitude to Allah to the best of his ability and, together with calmness and contentment of the soul, he has become an inheritor of paradise. Thus to receive the invitation, *So enter among My servants, and enter My Garden*, is eminently fitting for such a servant.

Two further points for consideration

Firstly, the Holy Qur’an has confirmed the error of the philosophy of pantheism for, according to the Holy Qur’an, the highest stage of man’s perfection is that of ‘*ubdiyyat* (servitude) and not that of becoming a sort of Creator, however much he may discover and control some of the forces of nature. This is supported by the verse, *Enter among My servants and enter My Garden*, from which we can see that the strongest bond between man and his Lord is that of total submission. His progress towards the status of slave of Allah increases in proportion to his obedience just as his *fana fil-lah* (self-effacement in Allah), that is, his union with Him, becomes stronger as he treads further on the path of submission, for there is no other path available by which man can unite with Allah except that of obedience. That is why the station of greatest honour for man in the Court of his Lord is that of slave of Allah as this verse of the Holy Qur’an testifies:

I have not created the jinn and the men except that they may

become My slaves (51:56).

This explains why the most honourable title conferred on the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) was that of “slave of Allah”. This is confirmed firstly by the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

If you are in doubt as to that which We revealed to our ‘abd (slave) (2:23)

and secondly by this testimony:

I bear witness that Muhamamad is the ‘abd (slave) of Allah.

Without being a slave he could not have become an apostle. Just as man’s highest rank in relationship to Allah is that of slave, so, too, in relation to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) man’s greatest rank is that of *ummati* (follower). And the more our obedience to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) increases, in the same measure does our status of follower rise. In other words, self-obliteration in the Holy Prophet (*fana-fir-rasul*) is another name for *ummatiyyat* (perfect discipleship) and this is corroborated by the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

Say, if you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you (3:30).

In other words, the more we become disciples of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), that is, *ummatis* (followers), the more will Allah love us.

The second point is that from this verse, *Return to thy Lord*, it seems that just after death, in the state of *barzakh*, the blessings of Paradise begin to come into operation. However, those who have attained the state of “soul at rest” and have advanced to the stage of ‘*ubudiyyat* (servitude) begin to experience the sweetness of Paradise right here on earth, for the verse, *Enter among My servants, and enter My Garden*, indicates to us that becoming a slave and entering the Garden take place simultaneously. That is, whoever becomes a slave enters Paradise straightaway.

CHAPTER 90

AL-BALAD (THE CITY)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Nay, I call to witness this City!

And thou wilt be made free from obligation in this City -

And the begetter and he whom he begot!
We have certainly created man to face difficulties.

Does he think that no one has power over him?

He will say: I have wasted much wealth.

Does he think no one sees him?

Have We not given him two eyes,

And a tongue and two lips,

And pointed out to him the two conspicuous ways?

But he attempts not the uphill road;

And what will make thee comprehend what the uphill road is?

(It is) to free a slave.

Or to feed in a day of hunger

An orphan closely related,

Or the poor man lying in the dust.

Then he is of those who believe and exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to mercy.

These are people of the right hand.

And those who disbelieve in Our messages, they are the people of the left hand.

On them is Fire closed over.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا أُقْسِرُ بِهِمْ أَلْبَدُ ۝

وَأَنْتَ جَلُّ عِزِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝

وَاللَّهُ وَرَثَةُ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ۝

أَفَحَسِبَ أَنْ تَنْفَعَهُ عَيْنَاكَ ۝

بِعُيُونِنَا لَنْ نَرَاهُ إِلَّا عَدُوًّا ۝

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ ۝

وَلِسَانًا وَشَفْهَتَيْنِ ۝

وَعَدَنًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ۝

فَلَا فَضْلَ الْعُتْبَةِ ۝

مِمَّا أَوْزَكْتَنَا الْعُتْبَةَ ۝

فَلَنْ نَرَاهُ إِلَّا عَدُوًّا ۝

أَوْ لَطْمَ عُرْفٍ يَؤُودِي سُنْبُوتِهِ ۝

يَتَّبِعُنَا وَمَنْ أَكْفَرُ مِنْهُمْ ۝

أَوْ يَسْكُنُونَ فِي الْأَمْثَلِ يُؤْتُونَ ۝

لَهُمْ كَانِ مِنَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ الْأَمْثَالَ وَالْوَالِدَاتُ ۝

بِالضَّرِيرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ ۝

أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ ۝

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَصْحَابُ ۝

الشَّمَالِ ۝

عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُوقَدَةٌ ۝

This chapter is a Makkan revelation. In the last chapter, *Al-Fajr* (The Daybreak), the good news was given that struggle in the way of Allah would ultimately bring success. In this chapter, *The City*, we are reminded that without strenuous exertion, not even a great man can

achieve the fulfilment of his objectives. That is why the command was given to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) that he should strive hard and never give up, as victory was sure to come, for he had undertaken to propagate a message which contained the essential principles of freedom and equality for mankind.

*Nay, I call to witness this City!
And thou wilt be made free from obligation in this City -
And the begetter and he whom he begot!
We have certainly created man to face difficulties.*

It has already been mentioned several times before that Allah uses oaths as a form of evidence and also to emphasise strongly a particular matter. The particle *la* (not) negates the idea that may arise in the heart of anyone that Allah's apostle wished to achieve success in his mission without hard, uphill work. The Holy Qur'an states that that notion is a false one and cites as evidence the city of Makkah. The definite article *al* (the) in *Al-Balad* (The City) points to a special characteristic and that peculiarity is the sacredness of Makkah. The Holy Qur'an states that this city is sacred and is known as the abode of peace where every living thing is safe and protected from harm so much so that even to cut down a tree is forbidden. But as regards the Holy Prophet, it says, *You are free from obligation in this city*, that is, the inhabitants do not extend the same rules of sanctity to you.

In this, there is a reference to two different conditions: one, regarding the experiences the Holy Prophet was undergoing at that time in Makkah, and the other, to the changed condition that the Holy Prophet was going to enjoy in the future.

Whilst Makkah was a city in which every living thing was safe and even a tree could not be cut down, yet for him there was no peace there. He was being made to suffer every kind of distress and persecution and there were plans afoot to take his life. In other words, although that city was a sanctuary and a house of peace for the whole world, for him there was no peace and no protection. The unbelievers

had violated the sanctity of that city and were bent on persecuting him. However, the result of all that would be that one day he would enter that very city in the garb of a conqueror. *Hillum* comes from *halla* which means “to be exempt from treating something as sacred” as well as “to enter a certain place as a conqueror”. So the time would come when he would be free from obligation to that city and if he wished he could punish his bloodthirsty enemies. And how beautifully that prophecy was fulfilled when Makkah was conquered! Like a victorious general, the Holy Prophet marched into that very city where previously he could enjoy no peace and his life was always in danger. At that time, if he wanted, he could have wreaked full vengeance on his enemies. But his nature was so merciful that he forgave them all.

The second piece of evidence in support of the sanctity of this city is given in the verse, *And the begetter and he whom he begot*, that is, father and son. But who are meant by father and son here? They can only be those two who had a strong historical relationship with this city and they are Prophet Abraham and his son, Prophet Ishmael, who founded this city and because of whom it became a sanctuary.

The Holy Qur'an then says, *We have created man to face difficulties*, that is, as long as man is alive he cannot escape strenuous efforts and hard work, but it is important that his pain and toil be such that he advances from stage to stage in his upward climb. As a result, the Holy Prophet is told to take as evidence the example of this city, Makkah, which lay before his eyes and which holds so eminent and sacred a position in the world today. The Holy Prophet should cast his attention to the example of its famous founder and his son - how, after so many sacrifices in the way of Allah they became so worthy of His regard that He blessed them with honour in this world and the next that today, the whole world bows down to them in acknowledgement of their glory. Further, in addition to their high renown, look at how the dignity of this city is universally accepted and consider also how the sacrifices of this father and son entailed so much labour and hardship.

There is no need to go into details concerning the persecution Prophet Abraham had to undergo at the hands of Nimrod and the extreme difficulties he had to endure. However, the sacrifices he had to make for the city of Makkah alone are beyond compare. In his old age his first born son, Ishmael, was the delight of his eyes. Then out of the blue came the command from Allah to leave him and his mother, Lady Hagar, all by themselves in the sandy desert of the Hejaz which was about fifteen hundred miles from their home. That was the place where the Ka'bah, the first house erected for the worship of Allah, was built. Only the foundations remained, so the first sacrifice for Prophet Abraham was to rebuild Allah's house and to populate the city of Makkah.

We must remember that he was commanded to leave his wife and son in a place where there was no town, no habitation, no food and no people and further, he was to leave them there forever. O Abraham! Peace be on you. How marvellous was his faith in Allah that he displayed not the slightest hesitation in complying with this order. When they reached this frightful and desolate place, Lady Hagar was aghast. There she stood with the baby in her arms with no sight of house or shelter. Leaving them with a little food and water, Prophet Abraham, in keeping with Allah's decree, was about to depart when Lady Hagar inquired, "In whose care are you entrusting us?"

To which he replied, "In Allah's hands."

She then said, "You may go now. I am pleased with Allah. He will never suffer harm to come to us."

Their supply of food and water was soon exhausted. She herself bore it stoically but the child was in severe distress for want of water. She looked frantically all around but there was no water to be seen. Close to her were two hills, Safa and Marwah. She quickly climbed up one of them and scanned the distance but still no sign of people or water was visible. She descended this hill and decided to climb the other but

the child was lost from her sight on the slope so that made her run. With great speed she ascended the other hill, but still there was not even a hint of water anywhere.

The idea came to her that she should climb the first hill again and take another look. Perhaps she might see something this time. She had to run down the slope again because from there the child was out of her sight. But still from the top of the first hill she could see no water. Hope and terror in her heart drove her to run and climb those hills several times to look for signs of water but she had no luck. At last, totally exhausted, she returned and sat down beside the child who was lying flat on the ground, and in the throes of burning thirst, was rubbing his heels on the ground. She could not bear to see him in this state of suffering, so throwing herself down at the threshold of Allah's mercy, her soul flowed like water in supplication to Him.

Now, it is the way of Allah that when a servant casts himself down at His feet in total helplessness, He then grants him blessings from His unbounded reservoir of mercy. Lady Hagar's lamentations caused the spring of Allah's mercy to gush forth and in a vision it appeared to her that an angel came and struck the ground in front of her at which a spring of water started to flow. When she opened her eyes she saw that from the place where the baby was rubbing his heels the sand had shifted and water was beginning to seep through to the surface. She quickly dug out more of the sand, whereupon water started to burst out and spout out strongly. She immediately gathered stones from all around her and made a bank around the mouth of the spring, thus preventing it from overflowing.

The Holy Prophet (*sas*) is reported to have said that man is created weak. Lady Hagar's blocking around the mouth of the spring resulted in the water subsiding and becoming a well. Otherwise, in response to her and Ishmael's predicament, so forcefully did the mercy of Allah gush forth that if Lady Hagar had not stopped the flow of water, then, like Allah's mercy, it would have flowed there like a river forever.

One who is drawn close to Allah is subject to account for the slightest infraction. Even Lady Hagar, a lady who was so uniquely reliant on Allah, laid herself open to account for stopping the flow of the water. In the eyes of worldly-minded people, her action would be considered a wise one, but according to the high and demanding standard of complete reliance on Allah, she made a mistake.

So now, she got water. The Almighty now had to make provision for her food. Caravans were the norm in Arabia in those days and as water was extremely scarce in that country, they used to halt wherever they found it. In this area (around Makkah) there was no water so caravans would not stay there. But this time, as Providence would have it, a caravan was passing through there and seeing water bubbling up from a spring they pitched tent. When they found out that a lady and her child were staying there, they considered it a very great blessing and requested her to continue to remain there and look after the water. They built a shelter for her and made arrangements for her daily sustenance. So now she got a home and the owners of the caravan provided her with more than sufficient food. They then spread the news throughout Arabia that a most wonderful spring had been discovered in a certain place with the result that all passing caravans would encamp there and provide for Lady Hagar who now started to enjoy a life of great ease and comfort.

But this was not the end of her sacrifices. The city of Makkah started to expand from the foundation of that house which was built for Lady Hagar and Ishmael. But for raising the foundation of the Ka'bah another sacrifice, greater than the first, was needed. The laying of the foundation of the Ka'bah called for the sacrifice of the child himself. In addition, it was the will of Allah that the father, too, should be part of this severe trial.

When Ishmael had grown into a young man, Prophet Abraham was directed by Allah to make a short visit to his wife and son in order to see for himself how beautifully He had protected them and provided sustenance for them. Prophet Abraham complied and was astonished

at what he saw. When he looked at the young man who was his son, his heart overflowed with joy, and rightly so, for how noble and righteous he was! Little did he suspect that another trial was just around the corner.

He saw in a dream that he was slaughtering his son. Now, a prophet's dream is considered a command of the Almighty, so he apprised his son of the dream and asked him his opinion. This was the reply of the young man - one that is unparalleled in the history of the world: *O my father, do as thou art commanded; if Allah please, thou wilt find me patient (37:102).*

Can we find in world history a greater example of filial obedience and willing acceptance of the command of Allah to perform such a singular and unprecedented act of sacrifice?

Men have been known to sacrifice for country, nation, family and self because all these form part and parcel of their social ties and obligations and some benefit accrue to them for their sacrifice. But nowadays, who sacrifices for the sake of Allah, especially when it seems that, far from receiving any worldly benefit, total loss seems to be in store?

Father and son both got ready for the sacrifice: the son lay down on the ground and offered his neck to the knife, while the father, acting under the command of Allah, stood ready to cut the neck of his son. He held the knife in his hand but every true father knows that the knife that has to cut the neck of a son must first cut the heartstrings of the father himself. O Allah! O Allah! What faith he possessed! He was about to lay the knife to the most powerful of all natural bonds of love and affection, but in the nick of time the mercy of Allah withheld Prophet Abraham's hand saying: The trial is over. Your sacrifice has been accepted.

The deeper significance of putting the knife to the neck of the son is that in order to develop true love for Allah and unswerving obedience

to Him we must first cut off relations with all that is beside Him. He who was prepared to slaughter his own son had, in fact, severed allegiance from everything else except Allah, for nothing is more beloved than a son, especially one who is the first born of a man very advanced in years. We must remember that at that time Ishaq (Isaac) was not yet born.

After the trial of the sacrifice, the command came to raise the foundation of the Ka'bah and it was due to the great honour paid to this father and his son that the city of Makkah also became a highly revered place.

However close to Allah and beloved of Him a person may be, without difficulty and hard effort he can make no headway in life. So here, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is told that he is the spiritual father of his community and they are his spiritual sons. It is true that they enjoy no peace in this city, yet it is necessary for them to undergo all kinds of hardship and even to make sacrifices in order to progress. As a matter of fact, until he and his community are prepared to make every kind of sacrifice as Prophets Abraham and Ishmael did, they cannot expect success in their mission. However, the day will come, Allah reassures him, when he will enter this very city as a conqueror and once again, this sanctuary will be purified of idols and be freed from the clutches of the idolaters. It will then become a house for the worship of one God and will be an abode of peace till the Day of Resurrection. But before he can reap success, sacrifices like those of that father and son, Prophets Abraham and Ishmael, will have to be made.

Does he think that no one has power over him?

This verse addresses those who are persecuting the Holy Prophet in the sanctuary of the Ka'bah and asks them whether they think no one has power over them. If they are of that opinion, then they are in great error for the time will come when regretfully:

He will say: I have wasted much wealth.

That is, those people who are spending countless money on their opposition to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and who think that no one has any authority over them will one day rue their actions. They will experience bitter regret at their failure and will lament the huge amount of money they wasted in a vain effort to destroy the Holy Prophet (*sas*). How clear a prophecy is this and how true it proved! Today, those people who are spreading enormous wealth in their fight against Islam should heed this warning of the Almighty.

Does he think no one sees him?

In other words, this verse is telling us that actions determine the consequences of an affair. In great error is the person who strays from the path and oppresses others and tries hard to be victorious through deceit, wickedness, aggression and violence. Allah reminds him that He is Seer of everything and no evil or aggression is hidden from Him and He will requite the wrongdoers for their mischief. However, it is the mind-set of the transgressor that he believes that Allah is not witnessing his evil action.

*Have We not given him two eyes,
And a tongue and two lips,
And pointed out to him the two conspicuous ways?*

When a person is travelling, there are three prerequisites to enable him to reach his destination and this is so whether it pertains to this life or the next. In this world, if we have to journey to a particular place and we do not know the way, there are three means of getting information. Firstly, we can seek the way for ourselves either by means of our physical eyes or our intellectual or conjectural eyes. Secondly, we can seek information from one who knows the way so as to become more certain. Thirdly, the Government ought to build a highway to the desired goal and if there are side roads that lead away from the destination, then, for the sake of guidance to travellers, there should be some public announcement or written signs as we find today at

road crossings, where sign posts are put up with the names of roads and their destinations written on them.

Thus, it is the duty of the traveller to use his eyes and his intellect to find the way himself, or to seek information from one who knows the way. So, when he sees a government highway and reads the sign informing him of the different roads and their destinations, then it is incumbent on him to make use of this guidance to help him choose the correct way to his goal, whether the way is difficult or arduous or not.

So here, Allah, Most High, has pointed out the same three methods for the spiritual journey of man or his travel along the road of religion. Firstly, man should employ his powers of observation and innate intelligence to discover the paths that will lead him to his Lord; secondly, for greater conviction, he should seek knowledge from God-fearing and wise and experienced people, and thirdly, when Allah sends His guidance through a messenger who, under direction from his Lord, clearly differentiates between the right way and the wrong way, and an unequivocal announcement comes from Allah pointing out the path of rectitude, then man should choose this way however difficult it may be.

Najd means high ground or a road built on a higher level. Here a highway is meant and it is called "high" because the difference between the road to goodness and the one to evil is easily discerned just as a road on a higher level can be seen by all. What a beautiful analogy has Allah used to establish the need for Divine revelation and the equally wonderful way He has explained the deep affinity between intellect, information-gathering and revelation from the Almighty!

So when the Holy Qur'an was revealed to the world, the proclamation of guidance was given in the words: *I, Allah, am the Best Knower. This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide for those who keep their duty* (2:1-2).

Concerning this straight and true path, Allah, by means of this announcement, compensated for man's deficiency of intellect and knowledge and pointed out to him the surest way to reach his destination as is borne out by the verse: *These are on a right course from their Lord, and these it is who are successful (2:5).*

So that road which carries man to his goal is one that is filled with abundant blessings. This is why those who tread this path are called in a later verse of this chapter, *people of the right hand*, or people who are walking on the way to blessings. On the other hand, those who oppose the truth are referred to as *people of the left hand* or those who are heading for misfortune.

It is common knowledge that an unambitious person likes the downhill road for the uphill one appears to him to be too demanding. As the path of error is the downhill one or the one that leads to degradation, therefore, the weak-minded lover of ease who shrinks from difficulties, quickly chooses this path which ultimately leads him away from the true goal of life and so he destroys himself. And as the way of guidance or the way to the true destination is the uphill road or the road of progress and advancement, this weak-spirited lover of comfort is afraid to attempt it, even though for him this is the best and most successful way which can lead him to self-actualisation, if only he decides to take it.

*But he attempts not the uphill road;
And what will make thee comprehend what the uphill road is?*

This form of expression is employed to emphasise the importance of a point. The way to climb that uphill road for which the Holy Qur'an came to teach man is explained by the Holy Qur'an itself in the next few verses as it enumerates one by one what the uphill road entails.

(It is) to free a slave.

In other words, the first step in the uphill road towards human progress

and perfection is called “emancipation” in Islamic terminology. How great a calumny have these people committed when they say that Islam has not made provisions for the complete liberation of slaves. The Holy Qur’an has pointed out the two paths open to man: the path of guidance and the path of transgression. It has also emphasised the point that the first step on the road of guidance is to free slaves not only from one kind of slavery but to free mankind in general from every conceivable kind of slavery which can be divided into ten classes.

1. Physical slavery which has been very prevalent throughout the history of the world. In other words, it is the physical enslavement of man by man.
2. Slavery to false deities, or polytheism.
3. Racial slavery - discrimination between black and white, tribe and nation or superior and inferior.
4. Mental bondage or the blind following of religious scholars and so-called spiritual leaders.
5. Slavery to customs.
6. Slavery to ignorance and superstition.
7. Political slavery or the tyranny of dictatorship.
8. Economic slavery - the exploitation of workers by the capitalists as well as the curse of usury.
9. Social slavery - the oppression of women by men.
10. Slavery to self - slavery to one’s base emotions and passions.

These ten types of slavery readily come to mind but the list is not exhaustive for further research may uncover other kinds. The Holy Qur’an has commanded us to free all these kinds of slaves and our Holy Prophet (*sas*), through his noble example, demonstrated to us how to free every class of slaves. If, after him, people should resort to any one of these types of slavery, then neither the Holy Qur’an nor the Holy Prophet (*sas*) could be held accountable, for as the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is told in another part of the Holy Qur’an: *So remind. Thou art only to remind. Thou art not a warder over them* (88:21-22).

In other words, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was not responsible for the deeds of others for he was not a keeper over them. His duty was only *a clear deliverance of the message*.

It is astonishing, therefore, to hear so many Muslim religious scholars and jurists sing the praises of freedom in Islam whilst at the same time they connive at slavery and even justify it in everyday life. If the truth be told, they have subjugated the minds of the public to their way of thinking and they themselves have become slaves of their low desires.

The Holy Qur'an gives us some other steps on the uphill road:

*Or to feed in a day of hunger
An orphan closely related,
Or the poor man lying in the dust.*

After freedom, the next step is Islamic equality and the methods mentioned in these verses are eminently practical ones. We all know that in *salah* (formal prayer), big and small, rich and poor, all stand shoulder to shoulder on equal terms. In addition, during the Pilgrimage, pilgrims, all dressed in the same garb and facing the same conditions, remain on the plain of 'Arafat in a demonstration of equality that Islam came to establish on earth.

However, from a practical, everyday point of view, the methods advocated in the above verses are not to be met with anywhere else for they teach us how to uplift the downtrodden classes of society and establish them on a footing of equality in society. Therefore, the Holy Qur'an tells us that arrangements must be made to ensure the livelihood of these two groups, the orphans and the needy. The sustenance of the orphans must be taken care of, and the condition of the needy must be improved so that they may become useful and equal members of the society. This is what constitutes equality in Islam.

Unfortunately, many of our religious scholars have fallen into error

concerning the meaning of these verses. One misconception is to interpret *it'am* (food) to mean the feeding of a few young students in a mosque or giving food to a few poor people and then feel we have fulfilled our duty to them. But that opinion is not correct. Here *it'am* means making provisions for their daily livelihood, for feeding someone for one day is not a permanent solution to his needs. So, here, the meaning of *feeding on a day of hunger* is to make lasting arrangements for removing the hunger of the orphans and this can only be done by making provisions in such a way that their condition of hunger is totally eradicated.

Similarly, some religious scholars have taken the words *an orphan closely related* to mean a close relative of the orphan as if human sympathy in Islam is confined to family and tribe. This is a big slur on the teaching of universality in Islam.

To illustrate the condition of the needy, the expression *lying in the dust* is used, that is, a person who has fallen from a position of honour and is now in a fallen state as if he were *lying in the dust* and so needs a helping hand. His condition is purposely used as an example in order to create a feeling of sympathy in the hearts of Muslims.

Similarly, the expression *closely related* is chosen to explain the condition of the orphan. In other words, there is a close relationship between him and every individual in the nation. That is, the orphan is the close relative of every Muslim. A particular child is the child of his father and a relative of his close family. However, an orphan is the child of a whole nation and so every Muslim male is his father, religiously speaking. This is how the Holy Prophet (*sas*) interpreted it in practice as the following incident exemplifies.

It was the day of *'Id* and hundreds of Muslims were going to Madinah to perform the *'Id* prayer. They carried along their children who were all dressed in beautiful clothes and some of them were even enjoying a ride on the backs of their fathers. At the corner of a street stood a child. He was an orphan. He was standing there looking wistfully at

the faces of all the passers-by when there came along that person who was sent as a mercy to the whole world, that is, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). His eyes fell on the sad face of the child and drawing close to him he asked: "Why are you standing here so disconsolately?"

The boy replied: "I have no one to carry me to the place of the *'Id* prayer for my father is dead."

The Prophet's heart was filled with sorrow. He immediately took him up in his arms telling him: "I'm your father and I shall take you there." And this he did with the child in his arms. This is an instance of pure and noble behaviour which our eyes long to see today. That, too, is part of the uphill road which the Holy Qur'an wants us to climb and that, also, is equality which is the second stage in the ascent of the uphill road and it comes after the first stage, the extirpation of all kinds of slavery.

Then he is of those who believe and exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to mercy.

Here, a question comes to mind: As the Holy Qur'an brought faith to the world, faith, therefore, should have been mentioned first. What then is the reason for speaking of faith after freedom and equality? The reply is: It is true that the foundation upon which a way of life or a religion is established is faith. If there are no guiding principles, on what shall people act? However, the reason faith is mentioned after freedom and equality is that, until man's actions are based on the precepts of freedom and equality, his claim to faith is useless. Thus, his entire struggle should be selfless and must be performed only for the pleasure of Allah and through deep faith in Him.

But the Holy Qur'an is not satisfied with a person making the uphill climb all by himself. It says that he should help others, too, to do the same. Although the ascent calls for extraordinary strength, the distinctive mark of faith, which instils courage and bravery in man, is

that a strong person should try to take weaker people with him in his climb to the top of the mountain. This is why the Holy Qur'an says: ...and exhort one another to patience and exhort one another to mercy.

Here, we must remember that the believer must himself follow the advice he gives to others and must not behave like one of those mentioned in the verse, *O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do (yourself)?* (61:2), for then he will make himself deserving of Allah's displeasure.

So, the two virtues which he must himself practise and which he strongly has to encourage others to inculcate, are patience and mercy or sympathy. It is a fact that all the duties we owe to Allah and to our fellow-men are performed through these two virtues. For example, through patience we fulfil our obligations to Allah in that all the commands of Allah must be observed with patience and steadfastness. That is, whatever commands and prohibitions we find in the *Shari'ah* (Law), we must uphold with great fortitude and there must be no regression in our obedience.

As regards the decrees of Allah, that is, in happiness and sorrow, tranquillity and distress, in short, in whatever befalls us from Allah, we must always be pleased with Him and there must be no defect in our faith and trust in Him.

Through patience we also fulfil our duties to others by giving them their just dues without the slightest diminution. In fact, however badly an opposing party may treat us we must never swerve from our high principles and retaliate, neither should we fall from our high moral standards. We should also bear the persecution of people with patience and never fall short in our duties and obligations to others.

By means of *marhamah* (mercy) we perform our duties to Allah by showing sympathy and compassion to the weak and downtrodden as the following *hadith* beautifully explains:

The Holy Prophet (sas) once said: “On the day of Judgement, Allah will address a particular individual: *O Son of Adam! I was sick but you did not attend to Me.* Bewildered, this individual will say: ‘How is that possible? You are after all the Supreme Lord of all the worlds (and cannot fall sick).’ Allah will reply: *Do you not remember that so and so among My servants was ill and lying close to you and you did not turn to him in sympathy? If you had but gone near him, you would have found Me beside him.*

In a like manner, Allah will address another individual: *O Son of Adam! I had asked you for a piece of bread; but you would not give it to Me.* The individual will submit: ‘How is that possible? Can Allah feel hunger and need bread?’ Allah will reply: *So and so among My servants in a moment of hunger had asked you for bread, and did you not refuse to give it to him? If you had given him food, you would have found Me beside him.*

Similarly, Allah will turn to yet another and address him: *O Son of Adam! I was thirsty and I asked you for a cup of water, but you did not give it to me.* The individual will cry out: ‘How is that possible? How can Allah feel thirsty?’ Allah will reply: *So and so of My servants was thirsty and asked you for water, but you did not give it to him. If you had given it to him, you would have found Me beside him” (Muslim).*

Therefore, exhibiting mercy and compassion to the weak and the helpless forms a part of our obligation to Allah, Himself. Through mercy, we also fulfil our duties to our fellow human beings by treating everyone in society, whether friend or foe, rich or poor, with equal regard and affection and also by giving kindly assistance to anyone in distress. In short, through patience and compassion we fulfil our duties both to Allah and to our fellow-men in every way.

However, Allah's command goes further as it directs us not only to act righteously ourselves but also to exhort others to do the same. It is quite evident that if a person resolutely obeys the commands and prohibitions of Allah, and calmly accepts whatever circumstances may come to him from Allah, and displays the greatest of restraint and forbearance under persecution from others, and if he strongly advises others to do likewise, there is no doubt that that person has liberated himself forever from the bondage of animal passions because he has reached that stage where he has subjugated all his base emotions.

Therefore, *freeing a slave* is the highest point in his journey and this he has attained by displaying patience. And if through the motivation of mercy he shows kindness and sympathy not only to the poor, the needy, the orphans and the dispossessed, but also to every individual in the society, then where can we find a better standard-bearer of Islamic equality than him? Similarly, if everyone in a community exhorts and encourages others to patience and compassion, then there can be no other community as united, strong, honourable and dynamic as this one.

We can plainly see, then, that the Holy Qur'an wants us to climb the uphill road of freedom, equality, faith, patience and compassion for these are principles of righteous conduct which are impossible to surpass. Further, we must not only practise them ourselves but we must advise and encourage others along the same path. That is, we must not climb the hill alone but must exhort others to make the ascent and also help them on the way. Can anyone imagine better principles for individual and national advancement than these?

These are people of the right hand

These people chose the road to the right, that is, the road of blessings, which resulted in good fortune for them.

And those who disbelieve in Our messages, they are the people of the left hand.

As for these, they did not make use of Allah's guidance and preferred the road to the left, that is, the bad and unlucky road which led to disappointment and evil.

On them is Fire closed over.

That is, they are thrown into a pit of fire and the opening has been closed over them. This is the fire of desires which blazed in them during their stay on earth. If a person disregards the straight path given to us in the Holy Qur'an - a path which leads to all-round progress and advancement - and chooses the way of degeneracy, then day by day, and step by step, he is inexorably drawn into the heat of passions. It is a proven fact that once a person is caught in the fire of greed, lust and base emotions, it is difficult for him to extricate himself. It is as if a never-ending chain of desires and passions has closed the door of his escape. For example, if a person becomes enamoured of money and day and night his mind is engrossed in devising means of acquiring it, then it becomes impossible for him to get out of this net. The same goes for intoxication, gambling, adultery, litigation and so one. In short, it becomes increasingly difficult for man to free himself from the net of worldly desires and ambitions in which he is ensnared. This description of a fire which engulfs man on all sides and from which there is no escape is really the consequences of his own evil deeds for which he is being punished. So the inner condition he created for himself by his own actions in this life will become visible to him in the life after death.

CHAPTER 91

AS-SHAMS (THE SUN)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By the sun and his brightness!

And the moon when she borrows light from him!

And the day when it exposes it to view!

And the night when it draws a veil over it!

And the heaven and its make!

And the earth and its extension!

And the soul and its perfection!

So He reveals to it its way of evil and its way of good!

He is indeed successful who causes it to grow,

And he indeed fails who buries it.

Thamud rejected (the truth) in their inordinacy,

When the basest of them broke forth with mischief—

So Allah's messenger said to them: (Leave alone) Allah's she-camel, and (give) her (to) drink.

But they called him a liar and slaughtered her. So their Lord destroyed them for their sin and levelled them (with the ground);

And He fears not its consequence.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاهَا

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا تَجَافَى

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا تَجَنَّى

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَى

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا خَلَى

وَالنَّفْسِ وَوَمَا سُخَّرَى

فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَهَا

وَلَهُ الْكَلِمَةُ الْآخِرَةُ

وَقَدْ خَابَ مِنْ دُونِهَا

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَهَا رَيْبَاتُهَا

وَإِذَا الْبُيُوتُ تَأْتَبَعُنَا

فَتَأْتِي الْكُفْرَةَ نَافِعَاتُهَا

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَافِلَةٌ

مِمَّا أُتِيَ

لِللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَمَلَهَا فَسُودَّتْ

وَجْهًا وَرُحْمًا يُرْتَدُّ إِلَيْهَا

رُجُومًا وَيَوْمَ يُسْأَلُ سَأَلًا

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا

This chapter was revealed in Makkah. In the last chapter, *Al Balad* (The City), mention was made of the message and the efforts required to propagate it. This chapter speaks of the bearer of the message informing us that he was the perfect soul and that he was the embodiment of the perfections and excellences that an ideal soul should possess. It promises success to those who follow him and it warns his opponents of destruction. Further, perfect souls are compared to Al-

lah's she-camel. Whoever tries to slaughter her will himself meet with annihilation.

The conclusion in verses 9 and 10 above i.e. *He is indeed successful who causes it to grow, And he indeed fails who buries it* tells us that the different matters the first six verses deal with provide various categories of evidence concerning the perfection of the human soul.

We shall consider them more closely. Verses one and two describe the perfect soul, that is, they manifest the perfect knowledge of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). In other words, just like the sun, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is the source of heavenly knowledge and light and he was created by Allah for the express purpose of bestowing these bounties on the whole world. However, while on the one hand, his light of guidance and knowledge is compared with the sun which distributes its favours without prejudice on the whole world, on the other hand, he is likened to the moon for he borrows this light of guidance and knowledge from Allah, Himself, and this is so because of his complete submission to Allah and his perfect obedience to His commands. In other words, this light that he sheds on others is really a reflection of Allah's light.

So, from one side he is imparting divine light like the sun, and from the other, like the moon, he is borrowing it. He is giving knowledge to mankind on the one hand whilst on the other, he is receiving it from his Creator, so he is a teacher and at the same time he is a student.

The next two verses, *And the day when it exposes it to view! And the night when it draws a veil over it!*, make clear the perfection of his actions. By day, we can witness the benefits of the sunlight which makes it possible for us to engage in strenuous effort which is the root of all progress. Similarly, like the day, the perfect soul makes such efforts and attains such an elevated position through his actions that the blessings of his knowledge begin to be seen as clearly as the sunlight. This is the knowledge which he has acquired from the Divine storehouse and from which he has obtained all kinds of progress which accrue from hard labour.

On the other hand, intrinsic to worldly striving is a kind of restlessness and anxiety. Look at Europe today, how it has become a centre for industrious work, but this has led to an absence of calmness and contentment in people. Instead, their hearts are buffeted by waves of restlessness, impatience and anxiety and in order to calm their troubled minds, day and night, they indulge in all kinds of diversions like drinking, gambling and seeking pleasure and merriment between the sexes. But in spite of all this, the fire in their hearts does not abate; instead it flares up even more. On the other hand, when the labour of the perfect soul reaches its climax, this produces in the heart a state of peace and contentment and for us an indication of this is the night when it envelops everything in its embrace.

Just as the night brings with it a natural condition of peace and quietude and all restlessness and perturbation are enwrapped in a shroud of sleep and darkness, and peace and calmness reign supreme, in the same way the perfect soul inherently possesses complete tranquillity, contentment and peace of heart which all go hand in hand with his untiring labour for the sake of his Lord.

After this, the next two verses, *And the heaven and its make! And the earth and its extension!*, depict the Holy Prophet's perfect connection with Allah and his deep affection for the creation of Allah. In other words, the perfect soul, through his complete obedience to Allah and his bond with Him creates within himself a glorious position similar to that of the heavens. That is, through obeying Allah and attaining His pleasure, he has conquered the base passions and evil promptings of worldly life so completely and so elevated have his moral and spiritual qualities risen that he, as it were, has reached the sky in height with the result that he is no longer a citizen of this world but is now an inhabitant of heaven. This is the ultimate in closeness to Allah and cutting off everything else in preference to Him.

On the other hand, in his kindness to the creation of Allah he behaves with such humility, courtesy, meekness, generosity and selflessness

that he has assumed the qualities of the earth, and in munificence and self-abnegation he gives liberally like the earth, to all, without discrimination.

So, whatever apparently mutually contradictory attributes are visible in the universe - the giving of light by the sun and the borrowing of it by the moon, the struggle by day and resting by night, the majestic elevation of the heavens and the extensiveness and humility of the earth - are all contained in the perfect soul which is a universe in miniature and a manifest compendium of all these attributes to the highest degree possible. In other words, all these qualities are found in the most perfect form in the Holy Prophet (*sas*). However, every person, according to his own level of perfection or according to his own capacity, partakes of these qualities. Moreover, Allah, Most High, has sent down His revelation to man to help him to develop these natural talents and capabilities and from His own perfect knowledge, He has vouchsafed guidance for him to attain righteousness and to shun evil so that he may not stumble but that he may advance to the highest position possible.

So, firstly, man is blessed with natural aptitudes and talents in such away that whatever virtues everything in the universe possesses individually, are all found together in the human soul. Secondly, for the continued growth of these powers and capabilities, Allah has provided irrigation in the form of revelation so that man may attain the zenith of perfection. Accordingly, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is a compendium of all excellences as this verse of the Holy Qur'an, *Successful is he who purifies it*, testifies. In other words, both in this world and the Hereafter he has achieved success and felicity and has become the recipient of the perfect attributes mentioned in the previous verses.

On the contrary, those who did not nurture their natural potentialities but instead buried them in vice and iniquity, have become failures. So whatever teaching the Holy Prophet brought contained guidance for human growth and development towards perfection and his noble

personality is a standing testimony of all perfect attributes. Therefore, whoever becomes a follower of this perfect soul will be successful and whoever becomes an opponent will suffer disappointment and destruction as the people of Thamud were totally destroyed because of their opposition to their prophet, Salih.

Thamud rejected the truth in their inordinacy.

The tribe of Thamud lived to the north of the Hejaz. An appreciation of their civilisation, power and style of government can be gleaned from those remains that are being excavated today. They made houses out of stone and even hewed out habitations from large blocks of rock and indications of their power and glory can be gauged from their city of red stone, pictures of which have been published in contemporary newspapers.

When the basest of them broke forth with mischief -

There can be no more pitiable a plight than that of national leaders who lead their people astray. These errant leaders always stand in opposition to the truth because they suffer a blow to their pride and vanity when their false teachings are exposed.

So Allah's messenger said to them: (Leave alone) Allah's she-camel, and (give) her (to) drink.

Love for extraordinary and miraculous occurrences have forced many of our religious leaders to concoct all kinds of fanciful stories concerning this she-camel. Some put forward a strange tale that this camel came out miraculously from a big rock. Allah alone knows where they got this story from for there is no mention of it in the Holy Qur'an.

The truth is that among the tribe of Thamud there was a custom where very wealthy or high-ranking people of the nation used to set loose an animal bearing their name. This beast had freedom to eat and drink wherever it wished and could even attack people with impunity. No

one had the power to kill that animal or to seize it or even lay a hand on it. To slaughter or capture it was tantamount to sending a message to the owner implying that the attacker had no regard for the owner of the animal and was even prepared to do battle with him. This would prompt the master to get ready for battle so as to punish the offender with due punishment in order to demonstrate and preserve his authority and prestige, or to die in the attempt. If he remained alive without having been able to exact retribution, then that signalled the end of his power and rank.

Even today, Hindus allow their fat, young bulls to roam about freely. No Muslim has the power to lay a hand on them. In fact, even though these young, robust oxen move freely around and even cause damage to people, no Muslim has the temerity to slaughter and eat them, nor can he, in order to prevent loss to himself, break their legs or confine them in an enclosure. In fact, this is a concrete demonstration of Hindu power.

The author was once stationed at Gujarat where a saintly person by the name of Karam Ilahi was in seclusion. One of his bulls too, used to wander freely all over the place and would enter the hospital garden and break the flowerpots and destroy the trees. Nevertheless, in spite of my order to them, no hospital worker would dare touch that animal, so terrified were they at the thought of a dreadful calamity befalling them if they were to do anything to that holy man's bull. In short, this custom was an undisputed sign of power among the people of Thamud.

Now, it has always been the way of Allah to show a miracle or demonstrate a sign of His power in a manner which is an accordance with the established custom of a people, in order to bring to a culmination the series of arguments presented to them before. To the people of Thamud, Prophet Salih was a weak and helpless person whilst they were a powerful community who considered him of no consequence. Nine tribes among them hatched a plot to kill Prophet Salih and his family during the night, as the Holy Qur'an mentions in the verse,

They said: Swear to one another by Allah that we shall attack him and his family by night (27:49).

It is at times like these that Allah deems it opportune to show a miracle and so He presented the sign of the she-camel to the people of Thamud, telling them that that was His she-camel. In other words, in order to demonstrate His power, He chose a miracle that would fit in with their own customs. In this, there was a subtle point - that is, the perfect soul of Allah's messenger, Prophet Salih, was in fact regarded as Allah's she-camel on which Allah was riding and on him divine light and glory were sent down. All his moving about, his speaking and his working were carried out in accordance with the command of Allah in the same way as a she-camel's moving about and resting are under the direction of its master. Similarly, the Prophet's water is really the Divine guidance which he brings from Allah. This water provides eternal life to the human soul. Therefore, whoever desires to destroy Allah's messenger and the guidance he has brought indeed fights against Allah, Himself.

This was the manner Allah chose to make the people of Thamud understand His message for, in the light of their tradition, this was the ideal way of getting through to them. This example was also a warning to the Makkans reminding them that the Holy Prophet (*sas*), like prophet Salih, was a she-camel of Allah and if they attempted to harm him in any way Allah would not sit quietly by. Instead, He would certainly destroy them as He did to the tribe of Thamud.

But they called him a liar and slaughtered her...

The people of Thamud were a very proud tribe and considered Thamud's appointed she-camel, not as that of an all-powerful deity, but as that of an insignificant person. In that country water was very scarce so they used to build reservoirs to collect it during the rainy season. Therefore, in no way were they going to allow Prophet Salih's she-camel free access to the water especially since their refusal to accept his message had reached the ultimate limit. Therefore, they

killed the she-camel which Allah had presented as a sign to them. In other words, by doing this, they dared the God of Prophet Salih to do whatever He pleased to them if indeed Salih was a true messenger of His and the she-camel was really His. So, in keeping with the custom of their country they met the fate which is meted out to a weak person who is bold enough to challenge a powerful opponent.

So their Lord destroyed them for their sin and levelled them with the (ground).

That was the result of their battle against Allah and their belying the message of His apostle.

And He fears not its consequence.

Allah cared not for the repercussions of His decree because to remove evil people from the world is not a harmful thing but a beneficial act. In giving the example of Thamud, Allah was sending a message to the Makkans telling them that He knew that nine of their tribes, too, were plotting to kill the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) at night just as the nine tribes of Thamud had devised the same conspiracy to kill Prophet Salih. He warned them that the perfect soul, Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), was His she-camel. Whoever among them wanted to kill the she-camel of Allah would themselves suffer destruction. So He advised them to refrain from laying hand on him else they would suffer the same fate as that of the people of Thamud.

Indeed, this challenge of Allah is as alive today as it was in the past. Those who desire to obliterate the name of the Holy Prophet and his message, that is, the Holy Qur'an, will, if Allah pleases, themselves become frustrated losers and will ultimately be destroyed, for a perfect soul is a she-camel of Allah and to attack him is to run the risk of extirpation.

AL-LAIL (THE NIGHT)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By the night when it draws a veil!

And the day when it shines!

And the creating of the male and the female! -

Your striving is surely (for) diverse (ends).

Then as for him who gives and keeps his duty,

And accepts what is good

We facilitate for him (the way to) ease.

And as for him who is niggardly and considers himself self-sufficient,

And rejects what is good -

We facilitate for him (the way to) distress,

And his wealth will not avail him when he perishes.

Surely Ours is to show the way.

And surely Ours is the Hereafter and the former.

So I warn you of the Fire that flames.

None will enter it but the most unfortunate,

Who rejects (the truth) and turns (his) back.

And away from it shall be kept the most faithful to duty,

Who gives his wealth, purifying himself.

And none has with him any boon for a reward,

Except the seeking of the pleasure of his Lord, the Most High.

And he will soon be well pleased.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَجَىٰ

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَرَفُهَا

وَالنَّفْسِ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا

فَالصَّهَابُ مَغْرِبٌ لَهَا

فَتَدْرَأُهَا كَالسَّهَابِ

وَقَدْ حَاطَبَ مِنْ دَشِيمِهَا

لَدَابَّتْ تَنْمُودُ بِطَوَّافٍ

إِذَا بَعِثَ أَشْقَاهَا

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ

وَسُقَاهَا

فَكُلُّوا مِنْهَا وَتَقَرُّوْهَا

فَلَمَّا مَدَّ عَلَيْهِمْ

رُءُوسَهُمْ يَدَّ يَدَهُمْ

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا

This chapter is a Makkan revelation. The last chapter, *Ash-Shams* (The Sun), dealt with the moral and spiritual excellence that the human soul can acquire. In addition, it gave a clear description of the destruction that attends those who oppose a perfected soul. The present

chapter tells us that in order to obtain those qualities of perfection enumerated in chapter 91, The Sun, there are two essential prerequisites: forging a strong bond with Allah, and developing the qualities of righteousness and the spirit of sacrifice.

*By the night when it draws a veil!
And the day when it shines!
And the creating of the male and the female! -
Your striving is surely (for) diverse (ends).*

The diverse needs of man's strivings naturally produce different results and here, two kinds of evidence are put forward in support of this statement. They are the evidence of the night and the day, and that of the male and the female.

The reason for presenting these two kinds of testimony is to demonstrate the fact that whatever a person attaches himself to will lead to a particular result. For example, we all know that the earth revolves around the sun and that part of it which does not face the sun receives no light and so the darkness of night falls on it. On the other hand, that part which faces the sun makes a connection, as it were, with light and so daylight falls on it.

Similarly, the union between male and female gives birth to new life. If this union is not effected there is no new creation. In the same way, if the human soul (which is considered female) is not partnered with a male, no new life is produced. The male casts his influence and the female receives it. Therefore, everything that exercises an influence on the human soul is figuratively regarded as masculine whilst the human soul is considered feminine.

So, too, the quality of life of the human soul depends on the kind of male with whom it forms an alliance. If, like the night, the human soul chooses darkness and unites with Satan, the source of darkness, then inevitably darkness will overspread it with the result that the peculiarities of darkness will be born in it. Then alertness of mind will be

replaced by heedlessness, while effort and hard work will give way to inertia and stagnation, and the light of discrimination between good and evil will surrender to the darkness of misguidance and error.

In the same way, if it forms a strong connection with Allah, Who is the Source of all heavenly and spiritual light, then it will become as bright as the day and it will exhibit the characteristics of light. It is a fact, therefore, that the consequences of our striving hinge on whether we choose light or darkness. The ways by which these two kinds of attachment are formed are described in the following verses:

*Then as for him who gives and keeps his duty,
And accepts what is good
We facilitate for him (the way to) ease*

These are the methods of forming a union with Allah: the first is '*ata* (giving in the way of Allah), that is, sacrifice of person and property, or any other thing, in the way of Allah. The second is *taqwa* (piety), that is, guarding and upholding the Divinely-ordained duties we owe to Allah and also to His creation. The third is *accepting what is good*, that is, Islam, which is the supreme good that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) brought to the world. It is called *al husna* (goodness) because everything it teaches leads to exquisite goodness and beauty of character. Further, it has no blemish nor imperfection. Thus *accepting what is good* means accepting Islam. This is placed third in the order (after sacrifice and piety) because the Holy Qur'an wants to emphasise the point that mere verbal acceptance of Islam is not proof of one's sincerity. It has to be accompanied by piety and sacrifice or, in other words, profession of faith must be verified by deeds.

Thus, if sacrifice and righteousness are the hallmarks of a person's conduct, then his affirmation of faith reaches the highest level and it can be deservedly said of him that he has indeed accepted the religion. Although sacrifice and piety and difficulties are inseparably linked and the way to Allah seems arduous, yet this is the only way available to man to enjoy spiritual blessings and favours. As fire is latent in flint

so, too, comfort, ease, peace and happiness are concealed in the cloak of difficulties.

*And as for him who is niggardly and considers himself self-sufficient,
And rejects what is good -
We facilitate for him (the way to) distress.*

That is, although man can evade the difficulties inherent in this path, the result, however, is not a happy one, for it brings hardship, straitened circumstances, difficulties and sorrow.

Bukhl (niggardliness) means not spending one's money or faculties or other resources appropriately. For example, a need may arise for spending in the way of Allah but an individual withholds his hand. By doing so, he ostensibly escapes the sacrifice and self-denial required for ascending the steep uphill road and suffers no decrease in his money. However, he has really chosen the very path that leads to pain, misery and hardship. Any individual or nation that chooses the route of niggardliness and egoism and rejects the way of sacrifice and high morals must eventually suffer perdition.

Istighna literally means "self-sufficiency" but here it bears different connotations, that is, firstly, not having the slightest thought of sacrificing or spending in the way of Allah and secondly, not showing any inclination for *taqwa* (righteousness) or, in other words, demonstrating a total indifference to the limits of Allah which establish the duties we owe to Allah and also to our fellow human beings. Therefore, *bukhl* (stinginess) and *istighna* (feeling of self-sufficiency or egotism) mean an absence of self-abnegation and piety or rather a deliberate renunciation of both these noble qualities.

After this, the next verse gives us another peculiarity of the one who contradicts religion: *And rejects what is al-husna (good)*, that is, he rejects Islam. In other words, included among the believers of Islam is the person whose behaviour contradicts the tenets of the religion.

When a person's actions go against the teachings of a religion, it means that he neither gives up anything for his religion nor does he display the qualities of piety. Thus, in the same category fall both the person who denies Islam and rejects its teachings by word of mouth, and the one whose actions run contrary to the principles of the religion. In other words, this person is a denier of Islam by virtue of his practical behaviour.

The next verse, *We shall facilitate for him (the way to) distress*, refers to the person who holds money dear to his heart and wilfully obeys his own low desires and thinks he is very fortunate in that he has chosen the road to comfort and happiness. Little does he know that he has opted for a path that brings misery and calamity.

Those who verbally claim to be adherents of Islam but avoid the road of self-denial and piety should do some serious self-examination and reflect on whether their avarice and egotism have not placed them in the same class as those who deny religion.

And his wealth will not avail him when he perishes.

This verse tells us that miserliness is the road to ruin. Ironically, the miser will give his life but will not spend his money although he eventually has to leave it behind. He does not realise that his accumulated wealth cannot save him from perdition. In fact, any nation that does not practise the virtue of sacrifice ultimately suffers destruction. Thus, wise is the man who perceives that there is no merit in amassing wealth for its own sake for if it cannot save man from perishing, then wealth that is not put to good use is more worthless than broken pieces of glass. The best way to spend one's resources is to sacrifice for the sake of Allah for this opens the door to man's success.

Surely Ours is to show the way.

That is, Allah does not compel anyone. He has clearly shown the way to man. The decision is man's: he may choose the virtues of sacrifice

and piety and so attain the goal of peace and comfort, or he may adopt the weaknesses of avarice and self-conceit and so end up in misery and agony.

And surely Ours is the Hereafter and the former.

Assurance is given that whoever spends in the way of Allah will be beautifully rewarded not only in the Hereafter but in this life, too. It is true that the life after death belongs to Allah, but we must understand that His power extends over this life also, so man should never have any fears concerning the consequences of his piety and self-denial, and he should expunge from his heart any satanic suggestions that the Hereafter is far away and that sacrifice and righteous conduct will bring only misery and hardship in this world's life. This verse categorically denies these evil insinuations of Satan and emphasises the fact that no place or time is outside the ambit of Divine control. If Allah recompenses man in the next life, He also rewards him in this life, too.

We have at hand the example of the Holy Prophet's companions who walked along the difficult but rewarding path of sacrifice and piety. So much did Allah confer on them in this life that many a time they were worried by the fear that perhaps they were getting all their rewards in this world with nothing left for the next life. Take the example of the companions of the Suffa. They were a group from among those who fled with the Holy Prophet (*sas*) from Makkah to Madinah. They had neither house nor shelter and a thatched-roof shed was built for them in the courtyard of the Prophet's mosque. The pain of hunger and hardship dogged their life and they passed many days without a morsel of food. Many a time they did not even have clothes to wear and were forced to wrap themselves with the prayer mats from the mosque. Once, a certain companion of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) found in the jungle a discarded sheet of cloth which was cut in two and given to two men to cover themselves.

But look how liberally and bounteously Allah bestowed His gifts on

them in this very life! Not much later after their period of destitution, one member of the group approached another member and asked him for some horses. He replied that as he himself had pressing need of horses just at that time, he could spare him only a few hundred. In other words, so many horses he came to own that he could have lent his friend many more if he himself did not need them for his present work.

Other examples of this kind abound but one can judge from the following two incidents the magnitude of the enrichment of the Holy Prophet's companions.

Hazrat Abu Bakr's sacrifice for Islam surpassed that of all the companions with the result that he became the first Caliph after the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and the first Head of State in Islam. When he was elected caliph, even his father could not believe it.

Immediately after the Holy Prophet (*sas*) died the whole of Arabia was thrown into turmoil and the fire of rebellion raged in every corner of the country. Islam was indeed experiencing a most precarious period in its young life. At this time a certain person left Madinah and went to Makkah where he happened to meet Abu Qahafah, Abu Bakr's father who at that time was ninety years of age, very experienced and wise. But he had not yet accepted Islam. He now inquired of the Madinite the state of Islam, now that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) had passed away. The Madinite replied:

“*Qama rajuhun*,” that is, A man has been elected as leader.

Abu Qahafah asked: “Who is that man?”

The Madinite replied: “The son of Abu Qahafah,” that is, Abu Bakr.

Abu Qahafah did not immediately understand that it was his own son, so he again questioned: “Which son of Abu Qahafah?”

The Madinite answered: “Your son.”

The elderly Abu Qahafah was overwhelmed with astonishment. He placed his head on his knees and remained so far a while. Then he raised his head and asked: “What about the Banu Hashim?” This was the tribe of the Holy Prophet’s family.

“They have all sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr,” came the reply.

On hearing this, the elderly gentleman was more amazed and he bowed his head again. A little while later he looked up and inquired: “What about the Banu Ummayah?” These were very intelligent people, wealthy and adept at politics.

On learning that they, too, had pledged loyalty to his son, the father’s amazement increased. He bent his head again for a while, then lifted it and once more inquired: “What about the *Ansars* (Helpers) of Madinah?” (The *Ansars* were those Madinites who sheltered the Holy Prophet and his companions when they fled from Makkah to Madinah.) On hearing that they, too, had taken the oath of allegiance at the hand of Abu Bakr, the father’s amazement was beyond imagination.

Shortly afterwards, he shook himself, stood up and left exclaiming: “*Al Islamu haqq*,” that is, Islam is indeed the true religion. So many obstacles were removed from my son’s path and he has now become the successor of the Holy Prophet (*sas*).”

A greater testimony of truth, freedom, equality and the fulfilment of promises is impossible to find.

The second incident comes from the life of the second Caliph of Islam, Hazrat ‘Umar. Once during his caliphate he had completed the rites of the Pilgrimage and was on the way home. With him was a multitude of seven hundred thousand pilgrims among whom were hundreds of companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). Some distance away from Makkah they came to an acacia tree and Hazrat ‘Umar

went and stood under it. He stood there in deep thought looking at the tree. It was a very hot day and the people who were standing under the fierce sun began to suffer greatly from the heat. Finally a companion by the name of Hazrat Hudhaifah bin al Imam approached the Caliph and asked him what he was staring at so intently under that tree whilst the people were becoming distressed by the burning sun. This was his touching reply:

“I am thinking at what we were and what Islam has done to us - how it has elevated us to the pinnacle of human advancement. There was a time in my childhood days when I used to graze camels here and through carelessness I lost one. For this piece of negligence my father gave me a sound flogging under this very tree. Look at what my condition was then and consider it today - the whole of Arabia and Iran, Rome, Syria, Egypt, and Africa all tremble in fear and awe of our majesty. How did we get all these things except through the bounties and blessings of Islam?”

In short, those who practise selfless dedication and piety in the way of Allah will be given magnanimously from His grace not only in the Hereafter but also in this life. So it is wrong to think that if we sacrifice in this life and develop high moral conduct we shall become poor, or to harbour the thought that in this modern world moral scruples are out of place.

*So I warn you of the Fire that flames,
None will enter it but the most unfortunate,
Who rejects (the truth) and turns (his) back.
And away from it shall be kept the most faithful to duty,
Who gives his wealth, purifying himself.*

These verses give us a description of ‘*usra* (ease) and *yusra* (distress), a perfect manifestation of which will be witnessed on the Day of Resurrection. The Holy Qur’an tells us that he who chose the way of miserliness and indifference and denied Islam in his heart and by his

actions will enter a blazing fire as a direct result of his stinginess and unconcern for the religion. His condition will be a most wretched one because Allah had made plain to him the path of ease, that is, happiness and peace, but this unfortunate one had repudiated it and turned his back on it and so brought this calamity on himself with his own hands.

On the other hand, far removed from this fire will be the one who was a truly pious person. A description of a genuinely God-fearing person is given by Allah, Himself, as a person who spends his wealth in the way of Allah for the sake of self-purification and improvement. *Tazkiyyah* (purification) means nurturing one's latent talents and spiritual potential by means of cleanliness, purity, charity and goodness. These verses also inform us that the sincerely God-conscious person is he in whose heart there is a yearning to nourish all his God-given and pure qualities, and who spends freely of what he loves most without the slightest reluctance in order to attain his objective. His only intention is to purify his soul and cause it to grow. There is not the least desire in him for name and fame nor does he act for the sake of show.

*And none has with him any boon for a reward,
Except the seeking of the pleasure of his Lord, the Most High.*

We are told that no one possesses any particular goodness in life for which he is entitled by right to a reward from Allah, for, in fact, everything is a favour granted by Allah as this couplet by the poet, Mirza Ghalib, so elegantly explains:

The very life we enjoy is a gift from Him.
The truth is we have not adequately thanked Him.

The truth is we have not adequately thanked Him by completely fulfilling our duty to Him.

So, if we do not spend our Divinely-given gifts in order to seek the

pleasure of our Lord, how can we rightly make a claim for recompense? Whatever has been given to us are all gifts from Allah - wealth, power, honour, rank, knowledge, life, beautiful talents, are all bestowed on us by Allah, so to exult over them is absurd. These are all blessings from Allah and we can earn no reward for them unless they are used solely in His way. Further, there must be no ulterior motive in us to seek reputation, popularity, or worldly gain, neither must they be used to repay others for favours rendered to us. Instead, they must be expended only to win the pleasure of Allah. Only then will these blessings assist us to reach the goal for which we yearn. If that is done, then the next verse promises:

And he will soon be well pleased.

That is, he will rejoice in the pleasure of Allah. if a person strives hard to win the approval of Allah, then in return Allah will not be niggardly in His love for him. Is the happiness a servant experiences when his Lord is pleased with him something to be sneezed at? As for those who seek their Lord's pleasure, their Lord makes them happy and contented in every way and even gives them clear proofs of His approbation. For example, He was satisfied with the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and so He made them happy in this world and in the Hereafter.

NOTE

In the verse, *Except to seek the pleasure of his Lord, Most High*, there are two subtle points to be understood. The first is that by saying, *Your Lord Most High*, attention is drawn to the fact that Allah is the Highest of the highest and so to seek the pleasure of anyone else besides Him is to pursue a course of degradation. Therefore, to try to please the One Who is Most High is the highest goal in life and if man keeps that objective uppermost in his mind he will never suffer abasement nor disgrace but instead he will achieve eminence and attain perfection. Not to seek the pleasure of one's Lord, the Most High, and the Best of all judges and instead to run hither and thither using vile means to satisfy low motives is the worst form of stupidity and

more than that, it is contrary to the belief in one God.

The second point worthy of notice is that the believer aims to please only his Lord. Paradise is not the desired goal. In fact, the process of winning Allah's pleasure and being successful in the attempt constitute the paradise of a true Muslim. Gardens and streams are blessings which are the concomitants of Paradise but these are earned only through the pleasure of Allah. So to the believer, endeavouring to gain gardens and streams is not priority. Instead, trying to win the approval of his Lord is his sole objective. Gardens and streams are an entertainment from Allah to His servant who has spent a lifetime seeking to please Him as we learn from this verse of the Holy Qur'an:

As for those who believe and do good deeds, for them are Gardens of Paradise, an entertainment (18:107).

CHAPTER 93

AD-DUHA

(THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE DAY)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By the brightness of the day!

And the night when it is still! –

Thy Lord has not forsaken thee, nor is He displeased.

And surely the latter state is better for thee than the former.

And soon will thy Lord give thee so that thou wilt be well pleased.

Did He not find thee an orphan and give (thee) shelter?

And find thee searching, so He showed the way?

And find thee in want, so He enriched thee?

Therefore the orphan, oppress not.

And him who asks, chide not.

And the favour of thy Lord, proclaim.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالضُّحَىٰ

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَنْ جَاوَىٰ

وَالْأَخْرَجَكَ خَالِدًا مِنْ الْأَرْحَىٰ

وَلَسَوْنَ يَنْصَلِبُكَ رَبُّكَ نَكَرًا مُخْتَلَىٰ

أَلَمْ نَجِدَكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ

وَوَدَّعَكَ عَلِيًّا لَمَّا كَانَتْ هُدًى

وَوَدَّعَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَكْنَعَهُ

فَأَمَّا السَّائِرَ فَأَلَّا نَفْعَهُ

وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا نَنْهَهُ

وَأَمَّا يَنْعَمَدَكَ فَمَحَدًا تُؤْتَىٰ

This chapter is one of the earliest revelations and was revealed at Makkah. In it we are told that as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas) was *par excellence* the perfect embodiment of all good deeds, therefore Allah, Most High, promised to make him happy and intimated that the stream of His blessings would continue to flow abundantly.

The chapter begins thus:

By the brightness of the day,

And the night when it is still,

Thy Lord has not forsaken thee, nor is He displeased.

These verses greatly consoled the heart of the Holy Prophet (sas) for

sometimes the greatest benefactors of mankind, when faced with great trials and precarious circumstances would often be assailed by doubts, thinking that perhaps Allah had withdrawn His help from them. For example, when the Jews seized Prophet Jesus and nailed him to the Cross and he could see no escape from crucifixion which the Torah itself had deemed an accursed death, then the following words involuntarily escaped from his lips: "My Lord! My Lord! Why hast Thou forsaken me?"

Similarly, when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) went to Taif to preach the message of Islam and was stoned and chased by the wicked people there, he ran for two or three miles and then sat down in a garden and offered this supplication to the Almighty: "O Allah! If Thou art not displeased with me, then all these persecutions are easy for me to bear." In short, such dangerous and uncertain circumstances come into being that it begins to appear as if Allah has forsaken His servant while the seeming domination and mastery of the enemies give rise to the fear that perhaps Allah is angry at him, and so he makes no effort to prevent the evils and persecution of the enemies but leaves them to their own devices. And such occurrences did come about in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). In fact, his whole sojourn at Makkah was filled with tribulations and such, too, were the travails at the Battle of Uhud and the Truce of Hudaibiyah. But besides this, as the Holy Prophet is a living prophet in that his period of prophethood extends till the Day of Judgement, then this same kind of uncertain times had to befall his *ummah* (community), too, and they have! So today, too, in these troubled circumstances, there is a creeping fear in the hearts of Muslims as they wonder whether Allah has withdrawn his support for the religion of Islam. These verses furnish a reply to these misgivings and difficulties.

There are two possible reasons why help is taken away from an affair: either there is no need for it again and so it is abandoned, or the Master has become incensed with whom he was supporting and so has withdrawn His assistance and given it to someone else. Accordingly, the comfort that Allah gives here covers these two reasons.

Allah promises that however delicate an age may come over Islam, whether in his lifetime or after, until the Day of Judgement, the Holy Prophet must never entertain the thought that Allah has forsaken Islam because He thinks it has become redundant, nor must he feel that Allah is angry at him; neither must the Holy Prophet think that the pathways to Allah's pleasure have been vouchsafed to another religion besides Islam. We must observe here that the name *Islam* is synonymous with the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), for a denial of assistance to Islam is tantamount to the non-existence of succour to the Holy Prophet, and this is so because the Holy Prophet's entire life was devoted to one cause and one cause only – to establish the religion of Islam. Allah, Most High, gives the assurance that however dangerous a period may beset Islam, the Holy Prophet must not imagine that Allah will forsake him nor be angry at him. The enemies were given free rein to commit all the evils they could. Allah consoled the Holy Prophet with the promise that however turbulent the times that may confront Islam, He will never deny His help to the religion nor be displeased with the Holy Prophet, but He points out that, in accordance with the laws of nature, these times are bound to come, as He says: *We bring these days to men by turns* (3:139).

If we cast a glance at the law of man's nature, too, we will observe that if man does not get rest and sleep at night, he will not be in a proper condition to face the exertions of the next day. No wise person ever objects to Allah's creation of the night for, if the daytime is perpetual, how can work be done?

Knowledgeable people know that if night does not come and man does not replenish his powers in the embrace of night, then he will not be prepared for labour the next day. Hence, it is imperative that before each day's work one must enjoy the tranquillity of night. Similarly, before any fresh progress or new initiative, it was necessary for the Prophet's mission, that is, Islam, to undergo that troubling period of calamities that would serve to mould the character of his people and prepare them to make additional exertions.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century and Promised Messiah, used to say that we should be grateful to the unbelieving Arabs for, had they not raised every conceivable kind of objection and offered every manner of opposition, we would not have seen the wondrous knowledge and wisdom of the Holy Qur'an, nor would we have witnessed the unique moral excellence of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*).

The late Hazrat Maulana Nur-ud-Din, too, was of the opinion that if an enemy objects to a particular verse of the Holy Qur'an, then that verse does in reality contain a hidden treasure-chest of knowledge and wisdom. But this cannot be discovered until the spade of objection is applied to it.

Thus, if all kinds of insecure and frightful times did not befall the Prophet's mission, it would have been impossible for Islam to make progress. Every vicissitude in life offers an opportunity for new advancement. Every period of rest or decline serves as a preamble to additional labour and development. It is a proven fact that the fulfilment of Allah's aid and assistance is clearly seen when these delicate times present themselves.

And surely the latter state is better for thee than the former.

In this verse, Allah, Most High, says that not only will He never deprive Islam of help in perilous times, nor will He ever become indignant, but more than that, He assures the Holy Prophet that the period after danger and trials will be more profitable for him than the calamitous times. In other words, his mission will grow from strength to strength so that every later hour will be more prosperous than the preceding one. Of course, it is possible for a Muslim nation to fall from hereditary or political grace and even to be destroyed, but it cannot happen that Allah will desert the Holy Prophet and his mission (Islam).

If a nation calling itself *Muslim* earns the wrath of Allah through its own misconduct and ceases to act according to the laws of Islam, then its consequent perdition follows the law of nature. However, Islam can never be obliterated. If one nation dies, then another will take its place, as the Holy Qur'an says: *He will bring in your place a people other than you* (9:39).

And soon will thy Lord give thee so that thou wilt be well pleased.

That is, the religion of Islam shall continue to grow by leaps and bounds. The Holy Prophet's pleasure in this world was to see people reach that stage of advancement which he wished for them and on the Day of Judgement his desire would be to see people forgiven of their sins and see them attain salvation. The Holy Prophet is reported to have said in a *hadith* that he will never be happy if there is even one follower of his in Hell.

So, besides the Hereafter, these verses also bring very glad tidings concerning this world by announcing that Islam will continue to gain ground. And although this is a very tenuous period for the religion, which is besieged on all sides by enemies who are bent on eradicating it, yet Allah, Most High, has promised that after the darkness of this night, the time of the spread of celestial light will surely come and then the grandeur and majesty of the Holy Prophet will radiate throughout the world with greater intensity than in former days. Already the signs of this are becoming evident as the beauty of Islamic principles begins to captivate the hearts of people in Christian countries so much so that Bernard Shaw, an atheist philosopher, was forced to admit that if the Holy Prophet were to return to life, then all the problems of the world would be solved under his dictatorship. This is nothing to shout about for it is only the beginning. How splendid the sequel will be has been clearly enunciated in these verses.

After this, Allah, Most High, makes mention of the Prophet's past life in order to disclose to him that Allah had undertaken his care and help

from the very beginning. He is now a prophet of Allah and so lives under the wings of his Lord's love and assistance. In other words, it is as if Allah, Most High, is addressing the Holy Prophet like this: "From the time of your birth when you were not even a prophet until the present time, I have always protected and assisted you. I helped you through every difficulty and fulfilled every need of yours and blessed your efforts with steady progress and improved your condition immeasurably. Do you think that I will cut off the flow of My patronage and protection to you in the future?"

*Did He not find thee an orphan and give thee shelter?
And find thee searching, so He showed the way?
And find thee in want so He enriched thee?*

Before commenting on these verses, it is necessary to point out here that the explanation given to the verse *Wa wajadka dallan fa hada* by some of our *Maulvis*, (they say it means: "We (Allah) found thee (the Holy Prophet) in error and then guided thee"), is completely wrong. It is true that *dall* means *on the wrong path*, but that is not the only meaning. It also signifies the following: *wandering in search of* and *lost in love for*, as the Holy Qur'an itself says in relation to the Prophet Jacob: *Innaka fi dalalatikal qadim* (You are still lost in your old infatuation). Here, the reference is to the Prophet Jacob's great love for his son, Prophet Joseph. Similarly, we find the expression in the Arabic language: *Dallal ma'u fil labani* (The water is lost in the milk). However, one can still question why we felt obliged to reject the meaning of *dall* here as *on the wrong path*, and select the other two meanings above. The Holy Qur'an itself furnishes another outstanding support for the chosen interpretations when it says: *Ma dalla sahibukum wa ma ghawa* (Your companion (i.e. the Holy Prophet) errs not nor does he deviate – 53:2).

Again, consider the cry of the Holy Prophet when his people wanted him to change the Holy Qur'an: *I have lived among you a lifetime before this* (10:16). In other words, he asked them: "Tell me, what mistake have I made in my whole lifetime?"

If a book should unambiguously proclaim to the world that the Holy Prophet, who lived day and night before the eyes of his people and committed no error, and should even go so far as to challenge them to produce even a solitary instance of deviation on the Prophet's part, then how can that same book contradict itself by asserting: *You (the Holy Prophet) were going astray (wrongly guided) and then We guided thee (to the right path)?*" This explanation is totally erroneous and the true significance of this verse is: "You were wandering in search of Me or you were lost in love for Me so I guided you to your desired destination." In other words, you have found your Beloved, that is, Allah, and you have been successful in gaining His approval.

In the three verses above, Allah has mentioned the three conditions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). Firstly, the period of childhood in which he was orphaned and had lost the love and tender care of both father and mother. However, Allah, Himself, had taken him under His care and protection, and ample proof of that is the nature of the Prophet's upbringing. Although he was left all alone in the world and generally speaking, in such a condition the instilling of good habits and morals into orphans is destroyed, yet this was not the case with the Holy Prophet for it appears that Allah took upon Himself the responsibility of shaping his conduct and virtues. So, far from being destroyed, so exalted was his development that there is no parallel to it in the world.

Another point mentioned here is that in that centre of idol-worship, in that cradle of ignorance, vice and immorality, in that capital where the voice of the worship of one God was silent, for our Holy Prophet to entertain in his heart the love and longing for Allah and to engage in worship and religious discipline in the mountain caves is such an amazing and astonishing event that it clearly bespeaks the all-absorbing power and influence of Divinity.

In addition, Allah never allowed this lover of truth to stumble, but guided him, Himself, to the cherished goal, and illumined his life through His Friendship.

Allah, Most High, then speaks of the Prophet's inner development and spiritual perfection after his period of adolescence. Referring then to his worldly difficulties, He says that He found him in need but gave him in abundance. In other words, He freed him from anxiety for worldly subsistence and made him a wealthy man through trade. Added to this, his marriage to Lady Khadijah ensured his financial stability and made him so free of worry over the necessities of life that he was able to devote undivided attention to what he cherished most – to forge a bond with his Creator and to show kindness to His creatures.

If we ponder deeply we shall see that concerning man there are three difficulties which can befall him, and if these are lifted, then he can count himself as being extraordinarily fortunate. These are: proper nurturing and upbringing in infancy; the development of high morals and the entrenchment of Divine worship after adolescence; and the removal of financial strain that brings about a condition of enjoyment and ease.

The Holy Prophet (*sas*) suffered from all these constraints to the greatest degree – in childhood he became an orphan and was thus deprived of the best support a child can have, that is, his parents; after adolescence he was forced to exist in a milieu of polytheism and depravity; later on he had to endure the most stringent financial exigencies for he owned neither capital nor property.

Nevertheless, the solution of these hardships provides an undisguised testimony to the fact that from the very beginning his nurture and providence lay in the lap of the Almighty. In his orphaned state, the nurture and upbringing he received served to develop his natural capabilities and morals to the highest limit; after adolescence, contrary to the prevailing societal norms, he was imbued with the belief in one God, and was granted deep divine knowledge and fervent love for the Almighty to the highest degree; he possessed neither wealth nor estate, yet his condition was transformed from penury to ease. All these constitute indubitable proof of Divine help and providence.

However, this is only one aspect of these blessings. There is another side to them and that is the spiritual side. We have explained many times before that *yatim* (orphan) refers to a person who is all alone in the world with not even a single companion or friend. So the verse: *Did He not find thee an orphan and give (thee) shelter?* alludes to the Holy Prophet's condition when, all by himself, he was trying to establish the belief in one God and to inculcate divine knowledge, righteousness and goodness in his people. But he had neither friend nor helper nor companion in his task, neither did he possess any means to fulfil that yearning of his heart. Then Allah came to his assistance and appointed him a prophet, and taking him under His wing He stood up for him and shielded him from danger when he was all alone in the world with no friend nor helper.

The verse: *And find thee wandering in search, so He showed thee the way?* points to the fact that when the world was completely lost in error and transgression and the Holy Prophet could find no avenue through which he could spread guidance, Allah, Most High, through divine revelation, opened a way for him so that he could propagate the truth and guidance to the world and establish the unity of Allah.

And find thee in want and enriched thee?

This verse reminds the Holy Prophet that he was uneducated and illiterate but the magnitude of his task demanded a high level of knowledge and wisdom. Yet, although he was bereft of education, Allah bestowed on him in abundance knowledge and wisdom, proof and arguments to enable him to overcome all false creeds. In regard to this benefit, the Holy Qur'an says elsewhere: *And whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good (2:269).*

In short, Allah's Providence took care of him in every contingency. Starting from his birth, whatever hardships came in his way, Allah was there to support him with His help and protection, even performing miracles to remove the difficulties. When he became an orphan,

Allah nurtured and nourished him in the lap of His Providence. After adolescence, when there arose the need for guidance in faith and divine knowledge, then Allah enabled him to cross successfully every spiritual stage, one after the other, and he was then able to achieve every object he desired.

When financial exigencies cropped up, Allah changed his condition from need and indigence to ease and plenty. When his heart burned for the reformation of the world, Allah stood close to him in his loneliness and helplessness and conferring upon him the mantle of the seal of prophethood, He became His shield and protector. When there was no visible means of lifting the veil of the intense darkness of ignorance and polytheism and no earthly method of bestowing reformation and guidance, then Allah bestowed the gift of divine revelation on him. When for this stupendous task the necessity for knowledge, wisdom and material resources presented itself, He granted him unlimited knowledge and gave him abundance in place of every kind of indigence. Indeed, every succeeding condition was superior to the preceding one. After every difficulty, when ease made its appearance, it did so bearing gifts a thousand-fold greater than in earlier times.

So we can repose our faith in Allah's promises for the future also – that trials and tribulations are necessities in life and there is no preventing their eventuality. However, after every period of calamity and degeneration, there will come a time which will be infinitely more productive for the Holy Prophet (*sas*) for Allah will never forsake him nor be angry at him.

In short, when such are Allah's attributes of love and fidelity, then man must also generate these celestial virtues within him and colour himself with these colours. In other words, whatever blessings we hope and expect from Allah, we in our turn should confer the same on others so that it may become a means of attracting more favours and more heavenly blessings.

Therefore, the orphan oppress not.

Whoever does not treat an orphan harshly but deals kindly with him will find Allah with him in his own period of loneliness and helplessness and even more, Allah will take him under His Own care.

And him who asks, chide not.

This verse, too, makes it evident that *dall* really means *searching for the love of Allah* and *seeking and asking for a path of guidance for mankind* and so does not mean *lost in error*. In other words, the word *sa'il* (seeker) is synonymous with *dall* (wandering in search). Thus, if we do not reprove a person who asks, then Allah, too, will not reject our requests and He will even grace us with a place in His court.

And the favour of thy Lord proclaim.

Whoever proclaims the favour of his Lord receives two benefits. Firstly, when good things come his way he, unlike others, does not fall prey to boastfulness, pride and self-conceit. Instead, he never forgets his Lord and so keeps on strengthening that bond of love between himself and his Creator and Cherisher.

Furthermore, he feels compassion for the needy just as he feels for himself and his heart is stirred with a great yearning to improve their condition. It is an accepted fact that if a person colours himself with a particular attribute of Allah and thereby showers beneficence on mankind in accordance with that attribute, then that very attribute of Allah is impressed on the servant. For example, if a person fulfils the needs of the indigent then Allah in turn will fulfil the needs of that person. This is mentioned in the *Hadith* and it is in reference to this that the celebrated poet, Hali, wrote the following couplet:

If you are kind to those on earth,
Allah in the High Heavens will be kind to you.

The second benefit that accrues from *proclaiming the favours of Al-*

lah is that if a person is given the wealth of knowledge and wisdom, he will find this wealth itself increasing. In other words, his own knowledge will grow and others, too, will receive lavishly of this treasure of knowledge and wisdom and when they hear the wonderful bounties of Allah being proclaimed, that will generate in their hearts an enthusiasm for forging a connection with Allah.

In the previous three verses, Allah has demanded the demonstration of three moral characteristics in man in return for the bestowal by Him of three kinds of benevolence and favours on him so that he may become qualified for an increase in grace and bounty from Allah.

When, through his quality of *Rahmaniyyat*, Allah confers so many gratuitous gifts on man, then why should man not make use of these bounties in order to acquire more blessings that would flow in consequence of Allah's attribute of *Rahmaniyyat*?

The explanation of these three cherished favours has already been mentioned above. However, hidden in them are allusions to three deep and subtle points. In the verse: *Therefore, the orphan, oppress not*, Allah makes the following point to the rejecters: "Do not treat the Holy Prophet (*sas*) harshly because you think that he is a defenceless orphan. He is an orphan who is under the protection of Allah. So do not think that he is alone."

The underlying message in the next verse: *And him who asks, chide not*, is that the Holy Prophet is "begging Allah to give you guidance and is pleading with you to reform yourselves." So he is a petitioner who asks nothing for himself. Instead, everything he asks for is for your reformation and advancement.

Finally, the next verse, *And the favour of your Lord proclaim*, contains the subtle message: The existence of this person, that is, the Holy Prophet (*sas*), is a blessing from Allah, and the guidance he brought you, that is, the Holy Qur'an, is an incredibly marvellous gift of Allah. You should accept it with gratitude and proclaim it to others so that they, too, may receive benefit from Allah.

CHAPTER 94

AL-INSHIRAH (THE EXPANSION)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

*Have We not expanded for thee thy breast,
And removed from thee thy burden,
Which weighed down thy back,
And exalted for thee thy mention?*

Surely with difficulty is ease.

With difficulty is surely ease.

So when thou art free (from anxiety), work hard,

And make thy Lord thy exclusive object.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ ۝

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنَّاكَ وَزُرْقَكَ ۝

الَّذِي كَانَتْ تُظهِرُكَ ۝

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ ۝

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۝

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۝

فَإِذَا ضَرَجْتَ فَاصْبِرْ ۝

وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْجِعْ ۝

This chapter is an early Makkan revelation. It serves as an appendix to the last chapter, *Ad-Duha* (The Dawn), for here the same theme is continued thus highlighting the Divine promise that every future period of the Holy Prophet's life and mission will be superior to the past one, and that his religion will make headway and his name will be exalted. As a sign of future events he should consider his past life and reflect on the mighty favours of Allah which He had already miraculously bestowed on him.

The Holy Prophet therefore should be consoled with the promise that this flow of favours would not be cut off. That is, the past is proffered as strong proof of the continuation of Divine blessings in the future. Accordingly, the chapter begins thus:

*Have We not expanded for thee thy breast,
And removed from thee thy burden,
Which weighed down thy back,
And exalted for thee thy mention?*

As regards this *inshirah sadr*, that is, expansion of the heart, most of our Qur'anic commentators refer to an event that took place three

times in the life of our Holy Prophet – in his childhood, after adolescence, and at the time of his *mi'raj* (ascension), and that is the vision in which the Holy Prophet was shown that his chest was cut open and his heart was cleansed of every kind of impurity. From this, no one can deny that Allah, Most High, had cleansed the Prophet's heart of all kinds of pollution. But that event does not seem to bear any relationship to the subject matter that is discussed here.

Contraction and expansion are two conditions of the human heart. When a man has to bear a burden greater than his strength will allow, and considers a task beyond his ability, then his heart becomes tight and that state is called *inqibaz* (contraction). However, when he begins to experience ease in consequence of the weight having been lifted, and he thinks that he will carry on the job and that it will be accomplished, then his heart expands and that is known as *inshirah sadr* (expansion of the heart). The Holy Qur'an has made it clear that prophethood is an immense responsibility. To have the burden of reforming the whole world hanging around one's neck is no joking matter. To mend and ameliorate one's own conduct is in itself a gigantic task. So can one imagine the condition of this person on whose shoulders had fallen the weight of reforming the whole world?

When the Holy Prophet was given the Divine command in chapter *Hud*: *Continue then in the right way as thou art commanded, as also those who turn penitently (to Allah) with thee. And be not inordinate (O men!) - 11:112*), it had a very great effect on the Messenger of Allah. It is recorded in the *Hadith* that the heavy emphasis placed in this verse on reforming others besides himself increased the weight of the responsibility in the Holy Prophet's mind so much so that part of his beard became white and he uttered the words: "Chapter *Hud* has made me old."

When prophethood came to Prophet Moses (*as*), such was his consternation over this ponderous task that he first recommended his brother Aaron for the job saying: *He is more eloquent in speech than I* (28:34), attempting thus to avoid the responsibility. When his at-

tempt at evasion was rejected, he pleaded with Allah thus: *My Lord, expand my breast for me, and ease my affair for me, and loose the knot from my tongue, that they may understand my word. And give to me an aider from my family: Aaron, my brother (20:25-30).*

See how perturbed he was by this responsibility of prophethood, that he called it a weight or a burden for bearing which he requested an assistant in his brother, Aaron!

So, the matter here really relates to the great responsibility of prophethood on the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and his concern about reforming not only his own people but also the whole world which was deeply sunk in evil. The extent to which he would be able to fulfil that obligation in the eyes of Allah also formed part of his worries. When this burden of prophethood was placed on his back, he became greatly troubled and on returning home he told his noble wife, Lady Khadijah: "Cover me, cover me," and having related the whole experience to her, he confessed: "I am afraid that I will not be able to bear this task." Whereupon Lady Khatijah greatly consoled him and, recounting his noble qualities, she averred: "Allah will never destroy so beneficent a soul as you."

He began to feel that this affair was beyond his capabilities. He could not perceive in what way he could rescue and transform that degenerate society, nor how he would be able to account for that responsibility in the presence of the Almighty. Nevertheless, the light of Allah, the tranquillity of mind, and the Divine revelation that began to descend on him uninterruptedly filled his blessed heart with peace. All kinds of knowledge and rational arguments were disclosed to him and the immeasurable help he received from Allah for the betterment of the world (which had put a great fear in his heart before), brought about so much ease and comfort, and so many doors were opened for him, that that burden became light and his heart began to expand. In other words, he had sought no helper for the burden that was placed on his back. However, his Lord embraced him with His help and favour and Himself assisted him to remove the burden thus causing his

heart to become large with joy and so relief came to his prophetic mission.

Not only did Allah, Most High, lift his burden, but more than that, He elevated his name and caused a whole world to salute the honour of that formerly unknown and obscure person. If one should read about his early condition and ponder over his lonely, inconspicuous, helpless and forlorn circumstances and then direct one's attention to the honour and glory which Allah conferred on him in just a few years, then one's amazement will transcend all limits.

In Makkah, he was an uneducated, illiterate, helpless, destitute and unknown man. Yet Allah placed him on such a lofty pedestal of dignity and majesty that even mighty potentates considered it a privilege to show respect to him as this letter from the Caesar of Rome attests. It said in part: "I wish I were in your service and were given the task of unloosing the thongs of your sandal."

In addition to this, so sublime a treasure of knowledge and wisdom was bestowed on this unlettered man, that even sages and philosophers of great knowledge and wisdom regarded it as a signal honour to acquire knowledge from him. Indeed, the truth is that he spread throughout the world the golden principles of knowledge and wisdom which have become a fountain from which all later seekers of truth can imbibe.

Surely with difficulty is ease, with difficulty is surely ease.

These verses contain golden principles of guidance that can lift the spirit of man and strengthen his fortitude and engender in him the spirit of patience, perseverance and hard labour. This Divine promise, that after every difficulty there will come a period of ease, prevents man from becoming despondent even in the face of the greatest trial. Hazrat Ali says that the *alif lam* (that is, the definite article) is placed on '*usr* (difficulty) in order to particularise and single it out, whilst *yusr* (ease) is used in a general sense. So, the repetition of this expres-

sion not only emphasises the assertion but also points out the fact that in both verses, '*usr*' is singular because of the definite article that precedes it and '*yusr*' is dual. In other words, there is an implicit promise here that after each difficulty there will be two measures of ease. That is, the relief that follows every calamity will be two times greater than the hardship.

Besides these subtleties, there is another apparent promise in these verses that, just as the Holy Prophet experienced peace after his initial distress, that is, after the burden of prophethood and its consequent tribulations, Allah, Most High, lifted the weight and eased his distresses and there came the time when the Prophet's honour was universally acknowledged and his teaching was accepted by people. Similarly, when hard times will come over the Prophet's religion in future, and trials and tribulations will multiply, peace will descend after this storm, and difficulty will be changed into ease, and the renown of the Holy Prophet will rise higher than before.

Today, too, Islam has fallen on hard times and all kinds of filthy allegations and vicious slander have been heaped on the Holy Prophet by Christian priests and Arya Samajists and the foulest kinds of literature have been circulated against the religion. Muslim political power has been broken and no stone is left unturned in the attempt to humiliate Muslims. But Allah has promised that ease is bound to come after difficulty and that Prophet Muhammad's dignity will definitely be more exalted. Signs of this are already evident. For example, the reason behind the appointment of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the *Mujaddid* of the Age was that ease may come after hardship and that our Holy Prophet's name may become more illustrious. Therefore, one can clearly discern that through the literature of the *Mujaddid* and his disciples that that era of tranquillity is already beginning to take shape today in its own form. It is true that it is still only a seed but, Allah willing, the time will soon come when it will grow into a gigantic tree for all to behold.

This is what the *Mujaddid* meant when he spoke consolingly to

Maulana Nur-ud-Din who was in a state of depression at the time (concerning the piteous state of Islam). He relieved his mind with the following words: "Maulvi Sahib," he said, "when the moon is just born, only those gifted with excellent eye-sight can see it on the first night. No one else can. When it becomes a full moon, then the whole world sees it. In the same way, I have beheld the crescent moon of the resurgence of Islam. Allah willing, the time will come when it will shine in its full splendour for all the world to see."

It is this same idea that he expressed in poetic form in the following couplet:

A rahi hai ab to khusbu mere Yusuf ki mujhe
The scent of my Joseph is coming to me now.

Go kaho diwana lekin main karunga intezar
Even if you call me mad, I shall continue to look in expectation.

Here "Joseph" stands for the imminent rise and advance of Islam which the *Mujaddid* was eagerly awaiting just as the Prophet Jacob was longingly looking out for his son, Prophet Joseph.

Thus, Allah, Most High, is now gradually disclosing the signs of the progress of Islam and even in Europe itself, which energetically sought to destroy Islam, one can see that Islamic principles are slowly but surely beginning to captivate the hearts of people to such an extent that Bernard Shaw, the famous English playwright and a man of great insight and wisdom, predicted that the spiritual victory of Islam would be completed in a hundred years. And concerning the Holy Prophet, he made the pronouncement that if he should return to earth and assume the dictatorship of the world, then the world would be delivered from its present state of crisis.

In other words, the inevitability of ease and hardship and the exaltation of the Holy Prophet's name are Divine promises which, Allah

willing, shall be fulfilled.

*So when thou art free (from anxiety), work hard,
And make thy Lord thy exclusive object.*

Look at how confidently the Holy Qur'an has stated the coming of relief after hardship when it says that when we are free from anxiety, that is, when difficulty is replaced by peace, then we should engage ourselves in productive work. In other words, the coming of ease after distress is a certainty. However, in this world, people's condition change in consequence of their actions. Therefore, some mechanism is needed to ensure that when peace replaces hardship, it should remain permanent. Thus, this chapter has also taught us the formula for preventing the return of distress after a period of tranquillity.

It is common knowledge that when a man emerges from arduous and straitened circumstances and begins to enjoy comfort and leisure and acquires power, wealth and contentment after his distresses and discomforts, he tends to fall into indolence, easy living and inactivity and so becomes complacent and unproductive. Abandonment of work and falling into the trap of inertia and slothfulness always bring about the degradation of man and are the mother of pain and distress. This is what 'Umar Faruq warned about when he said: "When we were tried by adversity, we exhibited patience and steadfastness, but when we were tested by ease and opulence, we lost the capacity for restraint."

Those who lost that capacity were the later Muslims who, when blessed with dominion and riches, did not practise constancy in their endeavours and in their *taqwa* (God-fearingness and piety). As a result, they trod the path that led to national decadence and so created the causes for the return of hardship. Thus, there is one defect that contentment generates, and that is that man makes himself useless by forsaking creative work and falls into luxurious and voluptuous living which is the foundation of decline and travail.

Another defect which comes with easy circumstances is that man forgets the Almighty and, giving up himself to a life of luxury and pleasure, he becomes entangled in all kinds of vice and immorality which are the second foundation-stone of decadence and distress.

So, to save man from the danger of these two paths of destruction, the Holy Qur'an has laid down the following principles of guidance. Firstly, when ease comes after difficulty and there is more leisure-time at his disposal, man must not make himself unproductive, but instead he should make use of this free time to undertake more serious work so that he will make greater advancement and become the heir to serenity and comfort. Secondly, he should devote himself more and more to the remembrance of Allah so that temporal and spiritual progress may walk hand in hand. If he does these things, his condition of ease cannot decline nor vanish.

If there is a nation which does not shirk hard, purposeful work when it experiences easy circumstances and tranquil times, but instead puts its leisure time and its power to greater benefit and thus makes further advances in its pursuits, and avoiding the intoxication of power and dominion, it never forgets the Almighty but instead derives increased benefits from its power and opulence and devotes more attention to worship and to service and kindness to Allah's creation, then such a nation can never suffer decline in its ease and contentment and difficulty can never show its face. This holds good for any family or individual also.

Muslims lost their comfortable existence only when they abandoned hard work and, forgetting Allah, they fell into a life of sinfulness and impiety. The European nations followed only one aspect of this formula and today they are the embodiment of ease and luxury. In other words, their wealth and power did not make them lazy. In fact, the diligence of the European people and their consequent easy circumstances are plain as daylight.

But then let us look at the second side of the formula, which is never

to forget the Almighty. Europe has already forgotten Him and so the wise and intelligent among them are of the opinion that although their diligent application to hard work is supporting their ease and luxury, however, their forgetfulness of Allah has brought about a state in which greed for worldly things, self-idolatry and vice and immorality will ultimately dominate their lives. The consequence of this can never be good and will bring lasting hardship.

Thus, if man wants to protect himself from distress, then when he is free from worries and enjoys peace, that is, in times of *yusr* (ease) he should not forsake productive work and sit idly, but instead he should devote more time and energy to beneficial work that comes through the blessings of wealth and power, and leisure and ease, so that he may walk along the road of greater and greater advancement. In addition, he should not forget Allah, but, benefiting from the gifts of freedom and peace, he should turn more to Allah and serve His creatures with more enthusiasm for this, too, is a way of showing gratitude to Allah for His favours, and without this thankfulness, a nation cannot achieve moral and spiritual excellence. Thus, ease cannot desert such a nation that follows this path for this is the genuine formula for both worldly and religious progress.

If Muslims had worked along these lines, their period of ease would never have vanished. But the situation is not irreversible, for if even today they embark upon the above principles of success, then as surely as the night gives way to the day, their present difficulties will be transformed into ease and peace.

CHAPTER 95

AL-TIN (THE FIG)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By the fig and the olive!

And Mount Sinai!

And this City made secure! –

Certainly We created man in the best make.

Then We render him the lowest of the low,

Except those who believe and do good; so theirs is a reward never to be cut off.

So who can give the lie to thee after this about the Judgement?

Is not Allah the Best of the Judges?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 وَالْتِّينِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ
 وَطُورِ سِينِينَ
 وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ
 لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ
 ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ
 إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ
 فَمَا كُنُوا زُلَمًا بِالَّذِينَ
 لَوْلَا اللَّهُ مَا كُنَّا وَاللَّكْوِبِيُّ
 ۝

This chapter was revealed at Makkah.

In the previous chapter, *Al-Inshirah* (The Expansion), Allah, Most High, had promised the Holy Prophet (*sas*) that his reputation would become exalted. In this chapter, it is stated that man is the best of all creatures, and by nature, he possesses the highest talents and capabilities, and to get the best results, they must be used in a measured manner. If proof is needed, we should look at those people who nourish their natural potential according to the commands of Allah and who maintain their true nature on the principle of moderation and see how high they rise in life. These are the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed His favours and who walk along the straight path which is the way of the prophets and saints of Allah. Thus, those who develop their God-given aptitudes and abilities attain such a high rank that they are regarded with honour both in this world and the next, and among them, the prophets Moses (*as*) and Jesus (*as*) and the prophet Muhammad (*sas*) have been specially mentioned in this chapter and evidence of their being the best of Allah's creation has been put forward.

*By the fig and the olive!
And Mount Sinai!
And this City made secure! –
Certainly We created man in the best make.*

Tin means *fig*, and in Palestine a mountain also goes by that name. *Tur* refers to Mount Sinai.

Baladil amin means a safe town or a town in which fidelity to truth is always observed, and this refers, of course, to the city of Makkah.

It is a fact that *Tur Sina* and *baladil amin* refer to regions where prophets were raised to carry the message of Allah and so *tin* (fig) and *zaitun* (olive) necessarily refer to those countries in which prophets appeared. At the time the Holy Qur'an was revealed, and even today, the fig and the olive were fruits that were indigenous to Syria and Palestine, and in abundance and quality, they still cannot be matched by any country in the world. So if *tin* and *zaitun* can be symbolically applied to any territory where prophets were raised, then it could only refer to the region of Syria and Palestine where these fruits flourish.

However, some researchers consider *tin* and *zaitun* as two mountains in Palestine, the first of which was the refuge of Prophet Abraham (*as*) after he fled his people and the second, the place of the prophetic appointment of Prophet Jesus (*as*). If this is so, then it means that *tin* was that very mountain where Prophet Jesus used to deliver his sermons and it must be here that he delivered his famous Sermon on the Mount of which Christians are very proud. It is in this sermon that he exhorted his disciples to turn the other cheek; in other words, they must display utter humility and meekness.

Zaitun (Mount Olive) was the place to which Prophet Jesus and many other Israelite prophets often repaired for worshipping and preaching. From this we can easily conclude that perhaps *tin* and *zaitun* were parts of that mountain which has been prophetically mentioned in the Torah as *Seir* concerning which it was written:

“The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from that Paran, and he came with ten thousand saints; from His right hand went forth a fiery law for them” Deuteronomy 33:2.

The above quotation contains clear prophecies. For example, the “coming of God from Sinai” refers to the appearance of Prophet Moses (*as*); “rising from Seir” means the coming of Prophet Jesus (*as*); and “shining forth from Mount Paran” prophesies the advent of Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). Paran (or Faran) is the mountain chain that encircles the city of Makkah. The “fiery law” refers to the *Shari’ah* of the Holy Qur’an and when the Holy Prophet Muhammad conquered Makkah he did so with ten thousand of his righteous companions, thus fulfilling the prophecy: “He came with ten thousand saints.”

A question may arise in the minds of readers: Instead of mentioning the names of the prophets, why were the names of the places where they appeared used? It is one of the rules of eloquence and rhetoric that, in order to add force to a statement, sometimes the name of the place is used when the people are really meant. For example, look at what the *Mujaddid* of the Age writes concerning the martyrdom of Sahibzadah Abdul Latif:

“God has looked down contemptuously on Kabul.”

Here, Kabul does not refer to the city itself but to those people who took part in that horrendous crime.

Similarly, these four names, *tin* (fig), *zaitun* (olive), *tur sinin* (Mount Sinai) and *baladil amin* (Makkah), refer to the appearance of four great prophets to whom divine teachings were revealed and who became paragons and exemplars of the highest moral virtues. The words *tin* (fig) and *zaitun* (olive) were applied to Prophet Jesus (*as*) because he possessed a special distinction in that his teachings and character represented the beatific aspect of man’s personality which it was his

mission to develop.

On the other hand, Mount Sinai is the place where Prophet Moses (*as*) was granted the Law which contained teachings and examples geared to nurturing the glorious side of man's character.

However, Makkah is that place where the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) received the perfect guidance in the form of the Holy Qur'an which comprises teachings and examples aimed at developing both aspects of man's morals: the beatific and the glorious. In other words, his teachings did not emphasise humility and meekness alone as the Gospels did, neither did they concentrate only on stern measures as was the case with the Torah.

In contrast, in order to perfect both aspects of our character, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) taught us to use gentleness or harshness according to the demands of the situation and by his example, he depicted the beatific and the glorious aspects of human nature to the highest degree, thus proving beyond doubt that man is the best of Allah's creation.

Here, the point is worth remembering that in the prophecy of the Torah: "The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them, and He shined forth from Paran", Sinai is mentioned first because Prophet Moses (*as*) appeared first and Seir comes after because Prophet Jesus' advent was later, for here attention was paid to the chronological order of events. However, in the Holy Qur'an, the order is reversed: *Tin* (fig) and *zaitun* (olive) which form part of Seir, are placed first and Sinai after. This is because the period of Prophet Muhammad's (*sas*) beatific character in which he bore a strong resemblance to Prophet Jesus (*as*) came first in his life at Makkah, while the glorious era of his personality in which he resembled Prophet Moses (*as*) came later in his sojourn at Madinah. Therefore, the order of occurrence of the beatific and glorious aspects of his character in which he resembled Prophet Jesus (*as*) and Prophet Moses (*as*) respectively, was maintained in this chapter. So if a person wants to

look at the unfolding of the beatific aspect of our Prophet's personality, he should look to his life in Makkah and conversely, if he wants a view of his glorious manifestation, he should study his life at Madinah. In this order of narration there is a hidden prophecy, for we must remember that this chapter was revealed at Makkah.

In short, different prophets came at different times at different places and each taught a different set of moral attributes thus proving that if man really wishes to improve his inner self he can excel all created things in virtue. But our Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), in nature and example, was a compendium of all moral virtues and this proves that not only can man supersede all created beings in moral excellence but he can also become, like the Holy Prophet, a compendium of all virtues and in this way human dignity can attain the acme of perfection. Look how beautifully the poet eulogises the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*):

The beauty of Joseph, the spirit of Jesus, the white hand of Moses.

Each was resplendent beauty personified,

But you and you alone are the compendium of all beauties *par excellence*.

There is another explanation for *tin* (fig) and *zaitun* (olive), which are well-known fruits. Olive oil has two very important uses. It is eaten and it also serves as a fuel for lamps. Now, one may well ask, what relationship is there in the fig and the olive and man's being the noblest of Allah's creation? Here, we have to understand that by way of simile and analogy *tin* (fig) and *zaitun* (olive), besides their literal meaning, also bear a metaphorical and figurative meaning. And this indeed is true for in the Torah, the Prophet Moses' light and his dispensation are likened to the fig, as we read in Jeremiah Chapter 24 of this dream which the prophet relates:

“The Lord showed me, and behold, two baskets of fig were set before the temple of the Lord.... One basket had very good

figs and the other basket had very bad figs.”

Later on we are told that the “good figs” referred to the righteous from among the Children of Israel whilst by the “bad figs” are meant the evil ones from among them.

In addition, as a further argument in support of the above, we read in Matthew Chapter 21 of the well-known incident of the fig tree that the Prophet Jesus (*as*) cursed. Referring to this event, the Gospel says:

“Now in the morning, as he returned to the city, he hungered. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he came to it and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and he said unto it: ‘Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward forever.’ And immediately the fig tree withered away.”

The question arises as to how can the Messiah be angry with the fig tree for not having fruits when it was not the season for them. In fact, this was either a vision or a metaphorical narration which the literal-minded writers of the Gospel took as a real event. Here, the fig tree stands for the nation of the Children of Israel: it had leaves but no fruits. That is, on the outside, their deeds seemed beautiful, but they were really devoid of sincerity and purity. So the curse of the Messiah fell on them and that tree withered away “henceforth forever”. This meant that the chain of prophethood and spirituality was taken away from this nation. In the same way, the Holy Qur’an likens the Muhammadi dispensation to the olive tree. This similarity is mentioned in the Holy Qur’an in Chapter 24, *An-Nur (The Light)* where we read that the Muhammadi light was lit by the oil of a blessed olive tree. Thus the fig is a symbol of the Israelite people and the olive tree, the dispensation of the Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), and this symbolism is explained in the expressions *tur sina* (Mount Sinai) and *baladil amin* (Makkah), the former referring to the beginning of the Mosaic dispensation on Mount Sinai, and the latter being a reference to Makkah where the Muhammadi dispensation was founded.

So this chapter presents a comparable history of both dispensations in order to substantiate the fact that whatever divine teachings descended on Mount Sinai and at Makkah, and whatever high morals Prophet Moses (*as*) and Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) inculcated in themselves and taught their respective communities, all serve to prove, without doubt, that man can become the noblest of Allah's creation.

In any case, whether *tin* (fig) and *zaitun* (olive) metaphorically refer to the respective Mosaic and Muhammadi dispensations, or whether they signify Palestine and Syria, where Prophet Jesus appeared in his prophetic mission, it is clear that in both cases the intention was to prove the assertion: *We created man in the best make.*

The purpose of manifesting this truth is to remove from man a misconception in which he has fallen when he is confronted with the varying and often contradictory actions of human beings. For when he looks at the deeds of man – good and bad, honourable and dishonourable - because of a lack of perfect knowledge, he draws the wrong conclusion that man is predestined by his nature either to a life of goodness or evil or to greatness or abasement.

So, on account of his faulty reasoning, he cannot recognise his true nature because he becomes blinded and lost in a welter of human emotions and actions. In fact, when he observes his own actions, a great dichotomy is created in him for he sees that in man's behaviour good and evil are fighting for supremacy. If on the one hand the beautiful instincts of virtue and nobility predominate in him, on the other hand, he experiences the horror of beastly and inhuman promptings which torment him.

If, like the angels, he is motivated by feelings of love and goodness, then like wolves and bears, he is gripped in the vice of greed and selfishness and feels the urge to shed blood wantonly. He also observes that man is sometimes ruler and sometimes subject, sometimes worshipper sometimes god, sometimes learned, sometimes ignorant.

He also sees that if it is man who stands guard at night over houses so that his fellow human beings may sleep safely inside, it is man, too, who breaks into homes and steals, thus causing pain and damage to his own kind. Again, he observes that places of worship are filled with men and not angels, and bands of dacoits are not made up of bears but of children of Adam.

Thus, when he observes the diverse actions of man and the mixture of light and darkness in him, he comes to the wrong belief that if there is duality in a creature's behaviour, then that is so because of its nature. For example, if man's behaviour reflects goodness and evil, honour and abasement, then he believes that these propensities also reside in his nature. So having seen the actions of man, he makes a pronouncement concerning his nature and having observed the behaviour of a few individuals, he stereotypes the whole species. This error has led him to the wrong thought and belief that we, human beings, are not created only for goodness and evil as we observe in some people, but we are also fated to suffer abasement and humiliation as we can see in the lot of some individuals. The result of this belief was that goodness and evil were not thought to be part of every human being's nature, but instead, certain people were believed to be predestined to do good while others were inherently conditioned to do evil, and that false belief threw people into a pit of despair and lethargy. This led to the death of man's courage and determination to rise higher in life as he accepted his lot without complaint. This erroneous belief killed his initiative, and thinking that abasement and evil were really the result of his nature, he became so pessimistic and lethargic that he would make no attempt whatever to improve his condition.

Thus, to summarise this whole argument, it can be said that man fell into error in his understanding of the reality of human nature and of the origin of goodness and evil. This came about because when he contemplated the combination of good and evil and greatness and abasement in man, he came to the conclusion that these attributes were embedded in his very nature and thus committed the error of postulating the quality of man's nature from the kinds of actions he

saw in a few individuals. So this misconception led him to a misguided acceptance of his lot for he began to think that if goodness and evil were ingrained in his nature, then why should he feel guilty if goodness was absent from him, and why should he strive to change his condition.

In order to remove this destructive error from the mind of man, Allah, Most High, has announced in several verses of the Holy Qur'an that He has fashioned man's nature good and pure and created him to attain honour and dignity. This announcement is repeated here in clear and unmistakable terms in this verse of the chapter under discussion: *We have created man in the best constitution* (inner and outer).

As man in his search for the reality of his nature had fallen into error by looking at evil people and inferring from their conduct that his nature was evil, therefore Allah, Most High, has presented in this chapter the example of those people who rose high in life by establishing the purity of their nature. Indeed, it is to those people that the expressions *fig, olive, Mount Sinai and Makkah* refer. These are the ones on whom Allah has bestowed His favours – those who chose the religion of nature (Islam) and walked along the straight path, the secret of which was taught to them in the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an, the *Fatihah*, in the verse: *The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy favours*, that is, the path of the prophets, the saints, the truthful ones and the martyrs.

In short, in this chapter, Allah, Most High, in order to establish the honour and dignity, the goodness and justice of man's nature, has put before us the examples of those people who did not allow their basic constitution to degenerate but acted according to the stirrings of their inner make-up and made progress and advancement in life. And to underline this point, He asks the following questions: Why do you look at the state of those who have fallen and deduce from this that your nature is low? Instead of letting your eyes rest on those who have deteriorated, why don't you lift your gaze to those who are exalted and dignified?

Man, He continues, does not fall into abasement because his nature is bad. On the contrary, his nature is based on righteousness and justice as is evident from the fruitful endeavours of those who did not allow their pure nature to fall into degeneration, but instead developed their natural talents and hidden capabilities along the straight path and so became the inheritors of human dignity, advancement and perfection.

It is true that if man chooses the wrong path in life and corrupts his just and righteous nature, and falls into vile behaviour, then just as his nature is the highest of the high, similarly, because of his evil conduct, he makes himself become the lowest of the low to such an extent that the essence of his humanity deteriorates and he becomes worse than wild beasts. When man contemplates this depraved condition of some people, he mistakenly feels that this is due to man's inherently evil nature. But he does not realise that this evil does not originate from within but comes from outside as a result of unrighteous conduct.

So, in order to manifest this truth, Allah says:

Then we render him the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good. For them is a reward never to be cut off.

Allah says that He created man in the best make on a foundation of virtue and nobility. However, in order to nurture his inherent faculties and capabilities so that he might attain spiritual progress and perfection of his inner self for which reason he was called the *vicegerent of Allah* in another verse of the Holy Qur'an (2:30), it was necessary for Allah in His perfect and complete knowledge to show him the straight path so that he might walk along it and become the recipient of Divine gifts and so gain admission to that blessed group, that is, *those upon whom Allah has bestowed His favours*.

Thus, if man believes in the divine revelation which came down through the prophets and of which the Holy Qur'an is the most complete and authentic example, and if he obeys that revelation and acts righteously,

then his natural talents, which were created on the principle of moderation and comprise goodness and dignity, will steadily improve and he will be the embodiment of the highest morals and from this he will be able to acquire a true estimate of the essence of man's nature. For example, a seed contains the potential of a whole tree and if that seed is sown and watered it will develop and disclose to the world its true form. Similarly, the cultivation and watering of human nature, too, depends on divine revelation and obedience and submission to it. If the child drinks from this water of divine revelation, it will receive nourishment and so manifest those lofty moral qualities which will unveil to the world the true features of man's ethos.

We must bear in mind that just as a seed bears fruit, so, too, every action of man has a consequence. For example, if a person drinks poison, he will most likely die and if he commits a sin, punishment is the result. Thus every action has its sequel. So, if man's actions are patterned on Allah's religion which He has bestowed on him for the express purpose of aiding, guarding and nurturing his pure nature, then man will not allow it to go to waste. Instead, his soul will receive the correct nourishment and thus manifest its hidden greatness and righteousness. But if he deviates from the straight path, he will destroy his inborn purity and end up becoming worse than any beast on earth. So just as those talents that man has received from on high, and which comprise the most exalted qualities, are calculated to enable him to seek the loftiest peaks of goodness so that he can excel all creation in dignity and excellence to the extent that the angels will submit to him, similarly, if he misapplies those inbred powers, and takes the path of evil, he will descend to the lowest depths of degradation.

In the verse, *We render him the lowest of the low*, if Allah says that it is He Who does so, then one should not misunderstand the statement. The fact is that in the Holy Qur'an, Allah has always attributed to Himself the results of man's actions that really fall under His laws of cause and effect, for He indeed is the only Creator of laws as well as means. For example, if we close the door of a room then the room

will become dark. The closing of the door is the action and the darkness is the result. If we use our own words to explain this incident, we may say something like this: "When we closed the door, it became dark."

However, in the terminology of the Holy Qur'an, if Allah speaks of the same incident it will read like this: "When the man closed the door, We (Allah) made the room dark." In other words, if there is to be light, then the door should be kept open, and if we close the door, then darkness is the consequence. But Allah ascribes the resulting darkness to Himself because it came about in obedience to one of His laws.

To summarise, Allah says that those people who destroy the purity of their nature by unrighteous conduct fall from the pedestal of humanity. But those people who believe and choose to do good deeds, and add to the resplendence of their inner light, attain the summit of human dignity and honour. These are the blessed ones whose reward, Allah promises, *will never be cut off*.

It is very clear that this chapter emphatically asserts that man has been blessed with a pure nature from the Almighty, and if he establishes it on a firm footing of justice and moderation, he will become the deserving recipient of the highest elevation and honour, and a garden will be prepared for him.

This same point is explained in another verse of the Holy Qur'an by the expression: *Qalu bala (They (the souls) said: Yes - 7:172)*. That is, when Allah, Most High, created the souls he asked them: *Am I not your Lord?* They replied: *Yes, we bear witness (that Thou art our Lord)*, and this is compelling evidence of man's true inner nature which Allah has bestowed on him. If anyone should deny the truth of Allah's Lordship, then this rejection would not be the voice of his inner self but rather an unnatural and contrived belief which has come about through external causes.

In another place in the Holy Qur'an this pure God-given nature of man is referred to as *qalb salim* (a sound heart). Concerning Prophet Abraham (*as*) it is said: *Idha ja 'a Rabbahu bi qalbin salim* (When he went to his Lord with a sound heart, that is, a pure heart, free from pollution - 26:89). Now everyone knows that Prophet Abraham possessed such a sinless heart that not even the greatest show of pomp and glory could overawe him. In fact, it was the light of this pure heart that cried to Allah in complete submission thus: *Surely I have turned myself being upright, wholly to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth and I am not of the polytheists* (6:80).

The grand task of Allah's revelation and religion is that man should expunge from his inner self all artificial and extraneous forms of misguidance which cover the heart with rust, so that his real nature may shine forth in full resplendence.

It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'an has used the word *dhikr* (remembrance) to refer to Divine guidance, and deviation from the right path is called *nisyan* (forgetfulness). *Dhikr* has several meanings: preservation or guarding, remembrance, honour, greatness, eminence; and *nisyan* means forgetfulness, because man is apt to forget his true nature with the result that he swerves from the path of rectitude. It is for this reason that *nisyan* (forgetfulness) is called *dalalat* (deviation from the right way), and *hidayat* (guidance) is so called because it causes man to remember his real nature which he tends to forget. That is why it is called *dhikr* (remembrance). In the other meanings of *dhikr*, that is, honour and eminence, there is a subtle hint that if man remembers the forgotten purpose of his nature and acts righteously he will be rewarded with greatness and dignity.

It is this very forgetfulness that gives birth to heedlessness which the Holy Qur'an regards as the utmost limit of deviation, as it says: *They have hearts wherewith they understand not, and they have eyes wherewith they hear not. They are as cattle; nay, they are more astray. These are the heedless ones* (7:179).

And referring to *nisyan* (forgetfulness) again, the Holy Qur'an warns us: *And be not like those who forget Allah, so He makes them forget their own souls* (59:19).

Here, by forgetting their own souls is meant the forgetting of the inborn purity of their nature and the purpose of its creation. So, according to the laws of Allah, when they forgot Him, the result was that they forgot their own souls; that is, they deviated from the religion of nature.

And who can give the lie to thee after (this) about the Judgment?

If we look at what man's actions lead him to, that is, either elevation or degradation, who can deny that deeds carry their own consequences of reward and punishment? And why should we not receive requital for our actions when Allah's power encompasses the heavens and the earth? Furthermore, if obedience or disobedience to a mere earthly judge entails certain repercussions, then how much more far-reaching will be the consequences of acceptance or rejection of the laws of Allah Who is Judge *par excellence*.

Is not Allah the Best of the Judges?

According to Abu Hurairah, whenever the above verse was recited, the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) used to answer: "Indeed! And we are witnesses of it." And their assertion was based on factual evidence, for the truthfulness of Allah's claim to being the *Best of all judges* is not limited only to intellectual arguments and to what is explained in this chapter, but He has also demonstrated those arguments through the evidence of the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), thus manifesting with such clarity and purity the glory of His being the *Best of the Judges* that the companions spontaneously acquiesced. They followed the guidance of Allah with great devotion and reverence and they emulated the high morals and righteous deeds of His messenger, and by walking along the straight path they re-

moved the veils of ignorance and barbarity that shrouded their pure nature. They so nurtured their inner selves that they were transformed from wild and ignorant savages to cultured and civilised human beings, and not only did they advance in high morals, but they became veritable men of God. In short, in their own lifetime they witnessed a perfect manifestation of Allah being the *Best of the Judges* and we, too, today, can witness the same if we emulate the conduct of the noble companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*).

CHAPTER 96

AL-'ALAQ (THE CLOT)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

*Read in the name of thy Lord who creates -
Creates man from a clot,*

Read and thy Lord is most Generous,

Who taught by the pen,

Taught man what he knew not.

Nay, man is surely inordinate,

Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient.

Surely to thy Lord is the return.

Hast thou seen him who forbids

A servant when he prays?

Seest thou if he is on the right way,

Or enjoins observance of duty?

Seest thou if he denies and turns away?

Knows he not that Allah sees?

*Nay, if he desist not, We will seize him by
the forelock -*

A lying, sinful forelock!

Then let him summon his council,

We will summon the braves of the army.

*Nay! Obey him not, but prostrate thyself,
and draw nigh (to Allah).*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

إِنَّمَا نَزَّلْنَا بِالْقَلَمِ

وَأَنْتَ عَلَّمُوكَ

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمِ

فَلَا رَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ لَشَفَعِهِ

إِنَّ رَأْفَةَ وَسْطِهِ

أَنْتَ لَرَبُّكَ الرَّؤُوفُ

أَنْزَلْتِ الْإِنْسَانَ يَتْلُو

عَبْدًا لِمَا نُصِّلَهُ

أَنْزَلْتَهُ لَنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى

أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى

أَنْزَلْتَ الْإِنْسَانَ كَذَبًا

وَأَنْزَلْتَهُ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ يُرَى

كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِمْ لَسَفَعْنَا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ

نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَالِطَةٍ

فَلْيَنْزِلْ عُرْ نَادِيَةٍ

سَلِّطْ لِرَبِّكَ الْبَاقِيَةَ

عَلَّامِ الْغُيُوبِ وَانْقَرِبْ

It is unanimously accepted that the first five verses of the chapter *Al-Alaq* (The Clot) were the first words of revelation to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas). The remaining verses of the chapter were revealed later on. The Holy Prophet was deeply engrossed in devotion (meditation) in the Cave of Hira when the Angel Gabriel descended and said to him, "Read!"

He replied, "I cannot read."

The Angel then squeezed him in a tight embrace and repeated the

command: "Read!" Again the Holy Prophet answered: "I do not know how to read."

This happened three times. Then the Holy Prophet began to read and the Angel read out these five verses to him. The Holy Prophet then returned home, and so overcome was he by the majesty of the revelation, that the flesh on his shoulders and throat began to shiver so that he requested of Lady Khadija, "Cover me. Cover me."

Read in the name of thy Lord Who creates.

That is, seek the assistance of your Lord and read. What must be read? The meaning is, *Read the Holy Qur'an*.

When a book of guidance is being read, what are the things that are needed that will help us to seek that guidance? The first thing is that true knowledge of it may be acquired. The second thing is that we may receive guidance in putting this knowledge to proper use, for if we do not have true knowledge of a book, or if the knowledge is there but the action does not correspond with it, then the reading of the book becomes useless. Therefore, before reading the Holy Qur'an, we are commanded to seek the help of our *Rabb* (Lord) Who sent down this book in order that we may make greater and greater progress in life. We are to do this so that, through Allah's Providence, we may acquire the correct knowledge and the blessings of acting according to this guidance.

Thus, before beginning the Holy Qur'an, Almighty Allah has given the command to seek His help so that He may bestow on us the right knowledge of this book and the right ability to act upon it. It is for this reason that we find in the beginning of the Holy Qur'an, in *Suratul Fatihah*, the following words that are uttered in the presence of the Almighty, the Lord of the worlds: *Thee alone do we serve and Thee alone do we beseech for help*; and the petition is made: *Guide us on the right path*. That is, grant us the knowledge and understanding of the Holy Qur'an; let not our actions make us swerve from this straight

path nor let us stumble along it, and let us be among the group who have inherited Thy favours. But more than this, we find in the beginning of every chapter (except chapter 9, At-Taubah) and in the beginning of *Suratul Fatihah* itself, the words: *Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Rahim*, which are placed there for that purpose.

In short, the words, *Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Rahim*, are placed at the beginning of every chapter and even at the beginning of *Suratul Fatihah*, which itself contains a du'a (petition) for seeking the help of Allah. The object is that we should seek the assistance of Allah when reading the Holy Qur'an.

There are two aspects of Allah's *Rububiyyat* (Providence) in relation to man. The first is His *Rahmaniyyat* and the second is His *Rahimiyyat*. That is, Allah Most High, solely through His favour and mercy and without any effort on the part of man has made ample provisions beforehand for man to attain a state of perfection. That is His *Rahmaniyyat*. When man makes good use of those provisions, then Allah rewards his actions with higher and higher and better and better results. That is His *Rahimiyyat*. For example, only through His grace and mercy has Allah provided man with the sun, the moon, air, water, rain, earth, seed, hands, feet, eyes, brain, intellect etc. This aspect of Allah's Providence to man is called His *Rahmaniyyat*. Now, when man makes efforts, for example, he ploughs the land, sows the seeds, in short, when he makes use of his hands and feet and other provisions, then in a short time he reaps mounds and mounds of grain from a very small number of seeds that he sowed. This second aspect of Allah's Providence to man is called His *Rahimiyyat*.

Therefore the command *Iqra bismi Rabbika* (Read, by seeking the assistance of thy Lord) finds its full compliance in the words *Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Rahman (Beneficent), the *Rahim* (Merciful). Here we find in *Rahman* and *Rahim* the two aspects of Allah's Providence. That is, the *Rahman*, without any effort on the part of man, bestowed the Holy Qur'an purely as a gift as is mentioned in 55:1-2. The *Rahman* (Beneficent) taught the Qur'an

so that man may attain his perfection by understanding the Holy Qur'an and acting upon it. The attribute of *Rahim* signifies that if man acts in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, he is given the highest rewards through which he can achieve the purpose of his creation.

So to say *Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Rahim* before reading the Holy Qur'an means that we are seeking Allah's aid, that He Who blessed us with the Holy Qur'an through his *Rahmaniyyat* may by that very *Rahmaniyyat* now confer on us knowledge and the guidance to act upon it and then through His attribute of *Rahim* He may bring about such results that will enable us to attain the highest perfection. And that is the reason for which the Holy Qur'an was sent down.

In short, together with the command to read the Holy Qur'an, the instruction to seek the help of Allah's Providence was also given in order that guidance in knowledge and action may be acquired. But it was important for us to know Who that *Rabb* (Lord) was so it was said: *Al-ladhi khalaq* (The One Who created you). This is the testimony of man's inner voice, for every man knows that he is not his own creator but that someone else created him. So we are commanded to read by seeking the help of our *Rabb* (Lord) Whose Providence brought into being thousands upon thousands of provisions with the express purpose of creating us. And this we cannot deny. (When the whole heaven and the earth and the sun and the moon, air, water, grain, in short, the result of all the workings of the whole universe is solely for the creation and maintenance of man, then it becomes evident that man has indeed been created for a very high purpose.) Thus, we should always keep in mind Allah's Providence with which He has blessed us before our birth, and consider well that if we forge a bond with that *Rabb* (Lord) and Creator, to what great heights of advancement and perfection will His Providence lead us.

Creates man from a clot.

'Alaq means *attachment* or *clinging*.

Today Science has discovered that when the male sperm and female egg combine, first of all it clings to the womb and this clinging or attachment is called '*alaq*. Allah says here: O man, ponder over your former creation which was only your bodily or animal creation – that when the male sperm and female egg combined and formed an attachment with the womb, then, through this Providence in the mother's womb it received such nourishment that a beautiful and perfect human form was produced. That came about because of its attachment to the mother's womb. Now, a mother is only a minuscule manifestation of your *Rabb*'s (Lord's) Providence. So if you form a strong connection with your real *Rabb* and if you fall into the lap of His mercy and grace, then your spirituality or, in other words, your humanity, will achieve such nourishment and perfection that you will achieve the stature of *akram* (most honourable). That is, you will obtain pre-eminence in honour and rank over the whole of creation. Your being the best of creation will be easily recognised by all and sundry. This is the reason behind our Holy Prophet's saying that Allah's *rahm* (mercy) and the *rihm* (womb) of a mother resemble not only in pronunciation and form but also in beneficence. Just as by clinging to the womb of a mother a contemptible sperm is transformed into a beautiful human being, in the same way by clinging to Allah's mercy a lowly human being can obtain the perfection of his humanity and become the inheritor of the highest excellence.

Read and thy Lord is the Most Honourable.

Here, for the sake of emphasis, the command *Iqra* ' is repeated, meaning, Indeed, read! Your Rabb is the Most Honourable of those possessing honour. Whomsoever He gives knowledge is honoured in this world and the next. His teaching contains in itself intrinsic honour and excellence. It is impossible for anyone who acts according to His teachings to be disgraced. Instead, his honour is assured both in this life and in the Hereafter. Whoever acts upon His teachings and stands under the umbrella of the Providence of this Most Honourable Lord, and establishes a strong connection with Him, will definitely verify the truth of the Qur'anic verse: *We have honoured the Children of*

Adam (17:70).

Who taught by the pen.

The word *pen* refers to that medium of teaching which is so prevalent in the world today in the form of writing, and that, too, is a gift from the Almighty.

Imagine the astonishment of people when medical science published the finding of its research to the effect that in the human brain there is a centre which has a potential power for writing! In other words, when Allah, Most High, created man, He ordained that man could pass on his knowledge to others by means of writing.

If man did not possess this capacity for writing, then whatever a particular mind thought of and pondered over, and the fruit of that natural exertion, would be confined to himself alone or to a small circle of acquaintances. It would not reach those who lived far away or those to come in later times.

Today, whatever benefit we derive from the hundreds of sages, philosophers, scientific experts, and the works of scholarly people, have only come about through the gift of writing. If this talent for writing and its centre in the human mind did not exist then all this progress in physical and spiritual knowledge would have been non-existent.

To profit from the minds of learned people who live in far-flung countries, to benefit from their wisdom and findings as well as from thousands of observations and experiments and other branches of human knowledge which the learned wise men of the past discovered, there is only one medium, and that is the pen.

The pen or the ability to write and its centre in the human mind have been deliberately established by Allah. Thus, it is indeed this very *Rabb* (Lord) Who, as part of His providence to man, has provided the pen as a means for him to acquire knowledge.

However, in spite of all these achievements of the pen, knowledge of the true object of man's creation, his hidden capabilities and powers, knowledge of what the future holds and what stages of progress he has to traverse in the future, all these as far as man is concerned, have always remained a deep secret, and in these matters his knowledge is always in need of explanation and elucidation. Here, his knowledge and understanding have always had to admit, willingly or unwillingly, of ignorance.

It is for this reason, too, that in these matters, philosophers have always stumbled. Therefore, in order to educate man, Allah, Most High, has made use of another means, and that is the medium of Divine Revelation. In other words, out of His perfect knowledge, He has made up in this way for the deficiency in human knowledge just as a child whose intellect and understanding cannot plumb the depths of a particular matter seeks help from his more knowledgeable teacher who then fulfils the need.

So, because man in his limited intellectual capacity did not possess the ability to comprehend deep spiritual matters and to fathom the secrets of the unseen and to foretell future events, therefore, Allah has made up for this limitation from His Own perfect and superior knowledge.

Therefore, to demonstrate this need for revelation and the necessity for the Holy Qur'an, Allah says: *He taught man what he knew not.* This means: O man, read this Book and form a relationship with your *Rabb* and you will be honoured in this life and in the hereafter. This is the guidance which man, through his own knowledge, cannot comprehend. Without doubt Allah created the pen as a means of teaching, propagating and increasing knowledge. But if we read all the human writings and divine works which have been written and which exist in the world today, we will have to admit that whatever knowledge has been given to us through the Holy Qur'an is such that never existed in human knowledge, and more so, it is beyond the ability of man to discover by his own efforts. Furthermore, there does not exist any

former heavenly book which contains such details and perfect teachings as can be found in the Holy Qur'an. Thus, it is not without good reason that we are exhorted to read the Holy Qur'an, for by means of it, Allah has given us such knowledge which man never had even up to this day. Thus, we should read the Holy Qur'an and follow its teachings. The result will be that we will form a close relationship with our most Honourable Lord and so we will attain honour and excellence in this life and the next.

Here we should bear in mind that these five verses which comprise the first words of revelation to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) contain a powerful message and deep knowledge. The first command which is given to man in the Holy Qur'an is: Read and acquire knowledge and act according to it. Then attention has been drawn towards the pen and divine revelation which are two extraordinary means of acquiring knowledge. That is, through the pen, whatever good things we come across we should read and learn. This is why our Holy Prophet (*sas*) said: "Wisdom is the lost treasure of a believer. Wherever you find it, seize it." Similarly, we are commanded to form a bond with Allah by reading the Holy Qur'an and acting in accordance with its teachings. Further, man, by reading the knowledge propagated by the pen together with the divine revelation of the Holy Qur'an and acting upon it will certainly be elevated to a position of honour and high rank.

Nay, man is surely inordinate, because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient.

Allah, Most High, has bestowed on man a most wonderful favour in the form of the Holy Qur'an with the express purpose that he may manifest the designation of being *the best of creation* and if he unites himself with his *Rabb*, the Most Honourable, he, too, will become honoured in this life and the next.

But a rebellious man feels himself above the need of such knowledge and guidance and increases in disobedience and transgression. It is a

fact that when man possesses vast wealth and has abundant provisions together with worldly honour in society, then he does not feel the need of Allah nor does he care for His commandments. Rather, oblivious of his accountability for his actions, he becomes proud, impertinent and cruel and makes fun of Allah and obedience to His laws and accountability for his actions. Thus, his wealth and self-sufficiency make him more rebellious.

Surely to thy Lord is the return.

In other words, how long will man continue with his negligence and strutting about in pride? He has to die one day and return to his Lord and give an account of his deeds. Wise is the man who, before returning to his Lord by force of death, inclines to Him willingly and cheerfully in this very life.

Hast thou seen him who forbids a servant when he prays?

Commentators of the Holy Qur'an say that the reference is to Abu Jahl who tried to prevent the Holy Prophet (sas) from performing *salah* (prayer). This is true, but one must remember that there will always be people who will perform *salah* (prayer) and you will always find, too, those who will try to prevent them. There is no doubt that originally the occasion for this revelation was a specific historical event. However, when this revelation came down, then every incident of this kind, or anything similar that may arise later on, comes under its rubric. For example, a decision may be given in the High Court and there is no doubt that this decision pertains to the case in question, but this judgement then becomes a standing precedent and assumes the status of law.

Similarly, a verse is revealed in reference to a particular incident, but it then becomes a permanent law and that incident becomes a precedent for all times so that if any event of this kind, or any similar condition comes up later on, this verse can be applied.

There is no doubt that Allah, Most High, has put before us the examples of two classes of men. The first kind engages in *salah* (prayer) in order to build a relationship with Allah and is a manifestation of *ahsani taqwim* (the best make) and the best example of this is, indeed, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*).

The other kind feels that there is no need to form a connection with Allah and he eventually becomes *asfala safilin* (the lowest of the low) and the truest example of this class of man was Abu Jahl.

An evil man is so impertinent that not only does he, himself, refrain from building a relationship with Allah, but he goes further and tries to prevent and actually persecutes a servant who is striving to form a connection with his Creator. Thus, it is eminently fitting that such a one who is arrogant and insolent, and opposes the lovers of truth and molests and tries to destroy them, should be the recipient of punishment in this very life.

Consider well who is a greater satan than this person who tries to prevent a servant of Allah from worshipping Him, and persecutes one who is striving to form a relationship with his Lord. Thus, it is mandatory that such a person be punished and that he be abased. But the love of Allah is such that, before meting out punishment, He always gives advice and exhortation.

Seest thou if he is on the right way, or enjoins observance of duty?

Addressing the inordinate one who prevents others from praying, Allah asks: "You are preventing someone from performing *salah* (prayer) and opposing him but have you considered whether he is on the right path and whether he is enjoining others to be righteous? In other words, it is your duty that before opposing a person you should observe whether or not he is following the right guidance himself, and if he is engaged in teaching others, observe whether this teaching is one of righteousness and piety, or one that encourages wickedness and

intrigue. In short, consider well his actions and condition and his advice to others. If that person is indeed a pious and righteous one who is on the right path, and if he teaches others also to be virtuous, then what is the purpose of standing in his way? Instead, one should always try to forbid evil and the teaching of evil. Which religion or which rule permits one to obstruct a person who is himself on the straight path and encourages others to goodness?"

Seest thou if he denies and turns away?

Addressing the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and all seekers of truth, Allah informs them that in His sight there are two kinds of persons. Firstly, one who is obedient to Allah and engages in *salah* (prayer) with the sole purpose of attaining union with Him, and the supreme manifestation of this kind is the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). Secondly, one who is a specimen of the lowest of the low who prevents others from praying and from establishing a connection with Allah, the most conspicuous testimony of this kind being Abu Jahl (the Holy Prophet's paternal uncle who was his most inveterate enemy).

Firstly, the one who obstructs others is addressed and spoken to thus: "Consider well the one whom you are preventing and see if he is rightly guided and if he exhorts others to virtue. Think where you will stand if this is so."

Then the one who tries to form a relationship with Allah is addressed: "See, if you are on the path of truth and righteousness and you enjoin others to goodness, then why should you bother with the one who tries to prevent you, who belies the truth, who turns his face from righteousness and guidance and withdraws completely?" This is the best principle for a righteous person to adopt *vis-à-vis* his opposers.

Before opposing any person commissioned by Allah, it is the duty of every human being to ascertain whether or not the sent one is on the path of true guidance, that is, whether or not his principles and actions are founded on solid guidance. Secondly, one should observe

whether his teachings and instructions are based on righteousness. And if they are, then no one has any right whatever to prevent and oppose him. On the other hand, since the commissioned one and his followers are on the path of guidance and righteousness, it is their duty to pay no heed whatever to anybody's opposition.

Concerning the man who belies the truth, it is said: *Knows he not that Allah sees?* That is, his deeds are not hidden from Allah – Allah is observing his wickedness, his untruthfulness, his opposition to the truth and his rebellion.

*Nay, if he desist not, We will seize him by the forelock.
A lying, sinful forelock.
Then let him summon his council,*

That is, let him call to his assistance his friends to try to save him from Allah's inevitable punishment of abasement and destruction.

We shall summon the braves of the army.

The reference is to those who will administer punishment. This can mean the strong and stern angels of chastisement and also the soldiers of Islam by whose hands Allah inflicts punishment on the opponents of truth. They are called the braves of Allah.

This spectacle was so clearly seen in the Battle of Badr and so vividly was this prophecy fulfilled that it can make a man dumbfounded in amazement. In spite of understanding the warning, Abu Jahl did not desist, and his opposition to the truth reached the utmost limit, so much so that even though the Holy Prophet (*sas*) fled from Makkah, yet he persisted in his hatred and, together with his friends, he marched on Madinah to destroy him. The battle took place on the field of Badr and such a chastisement of disgrace and destruction did Allah inflict on him that all that Allah had foretold came to pass in the exact manner as was prophesied. He was seized by the forehead and dragged, and in utter abasement, he was thrown into a pit with the others who

were killed in the battlefield. Those who did the dragging and throwing were those soldiers of Allah among whom could be counted the old and even fifteen-year-old children who were strangers to the art of warfare. In fact, they did not even possess proper weapons. Instead of swords, they had with them just short daggers. Furthermore, their number was small – a rag-tag bunch of just three hundred and thirteen. However, Allah had honoured them with the stamp of valour so that they excelled in bravery, humiliated the enemies of truth, and made them taste the bitterness of destruction. To all those who ponder deeply, there is in this event a lucid example, and for the believers it provides a source of increase in their faith. Therefore, having warned His enemies and foretold their end, Allah addresses the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and through him, all the believers, and instructs them thus:

Nay! Obey him not, but prostrate thyself, and draw nigh to Allah.

Here the word *sajdah* (prostration) can mean prostration in the literal sense. It can also mean *salah* (formal prayer) and also obedience to Allah, Most High. In other words, we should pay no attention to the one who tries to prevent us from *salah* (prayer) or from getting close to Allah. Rather, we are told to perform *salah* (prayer), to try to draw near to Allah and remain ever in obedience to Him. Then we will be among those who are close to Him with the result that we will be honoured in this life and the next. In ordinary life, look how man does everything to gain favour with temporary officers of Government. Imagine for a moment the honour and peace that a person can obtain through closeness to Allah when he remains obedient in His service.

Prayer is a demonstration of submission and a means of seeking help. Emphasis is placed on seeking help in the beginning of the chapter, and in the end prayer is recommended as the perfect way to seek assistance. It is for this reason that there is no prayer without *Suratul Fatihah*, for this chapter is indeed in itself a prayer for help. In prayer, the posture of prostration is a manifestation of submission and the

best manner of expressing willing obedience to Allah. Is there any better way to humility and meekness than to place one's head at the threshold of the Divine Master? For indeed, it is through humility and obedience that one can attain closeness to Allah. Therefore, we are told in the *Hadith* that at the moment of prostration a servant is closer to Allah than at any other time, so we should make much petition for *sajdah* (prostration) is the time of closeness to and acceptance from Allah.

The Holy Prophet (*sas*) possessed deep understanding and insight. Therefore, when he received the command to make prostration, he immediately complied so that there should be no delay in expressing his obedience. This example we should all imitate.

One should bear in mind that every chapter of the Holy Qur'an deals with a particular theme and from the beginning to the end that chapter expounds that subject. Whatever other material comes within it all deal with that theme as they touch upon the essential and relevant aspects of it. Thus, all the verses of the Holy Qur'an are inter-connected and sequential and they possess a peculiar order and style. Firstly, the substantive theme is given and then the details come after. In other words, the premise will be mentioned first, then arguments will be given, after which examples and historical precedents will be furnished, and thus the theme is expanded. This process of elucidation which we find in several places of the Holy Qur'an is called *tasrif-e-ayat*. This inter-connection between the verses contains another beautiful aspect in that the beginning and the end of the chapter are so closely linked that it can amaze the mind of a reader.

Accordingly, in the beginning of this chapter, after seeking the help of Allah's attribute of *Rububiyyat* (Providence), the order to read the Qur'an is given and it is further pointed out that all man's honour and dignity hinge on his having a close relationship with his Lord. In the end of the chapter the perfect manner of seeking that help is given to us in the form of *salah* (prayer). In addition, we are told that if we seek assistance through *salah* (prayer) and if we read the Holy Qur'an

and act according to its commands, we will attain nearness to Allah and be the recipients of honour in this life and the next.

CHAPTER 97

AL-QADR (THE MAJESTY)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty –

And what will make thee comprehend what the Night of Majesty is?

The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months.

The angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord – for every affair –

Peace! it is till the rising of the morning.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِنشَاءً أَسْرَلْنَا مِنْهُ لَبِئْسَ
الْقَادِرُ

وَمَا آذُرُكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَادِرِ

لَيْلَةُ الْقَادِرِ تُخْرِجُ مِنَ الْعِبَادِ

مَنْزِلَ الْمَلَكَةِ وَالرُّؤُوسِ فِيهَا يَأْتُونَ

رَبَّهُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ امْتِعَةٍ

سَلَامٌ فِيهَا وَهِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَمِ الْغُدُوءِ

In this chapter, *Al-Qadr* (The Majesty), it is stated that the period when the Holy Qur'an was being revealed was a time of great blessings, and the reward for worship, righteous actions and other efforts for the sake of religion that could have been attained at that time, cannot be paralleled in any other age.

The pronoun *hu* (it) in *anzalna-hu* (We revealed it) refers to the revelation of the Holy Qur'an on the Night of Majesty. Elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an it is mentioned: *The month of Ramadhan is that in which the Qur'an was revealed* (2:185). This tells us that the Night of Majesty is in the month of Ramadhan. According to the Holy Prophet, it is one of the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan, that is, it is either the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th night. Another report puts it as one of these nights – either the 25th, 27th or 29th night.

It has been called the Night of Majesty because it is a night of great grandeur and honour and one which man should value with total respect and reverence. There is no doubt that the night in which the

Holy Qur'an was revealed – an extraordinary gift and an incomparable book of guidance to mankind – should be regarded with the highest honour and respect. This night receives its eminence from the fact that the Holy Qur'an was revealed in it, and the anniversary of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an on this night has been laid down for all times as a night of great blessings and honour, so that every year when that night comes, Allah opens the doors of His mercy and blessings for His servants. This is not just a mere anniversary, for just as the rivers of Allah's mercy gushed forth on that sublime night when the first revelation of the Holy Qur'an came, so too, the same thing obtains every year on that particular night when Allah showers His mercy and blessings on the hearts of all those who endeavour to seek His grace.

Sometimes an objection is made that the whole Qur'an was not revealed on that night. The answer to that is that the word *Qur'an* has been used in reference to the entire Qur'an, or to a part of it, or even to a single verse as we read: *When the Qur'an is being recited, listen to it (7:204)*. Here the whole Qur'an cannot be meant, but we are commanded to listen attentively when a part or a verse of the Qur'an is being recited. Thus, when it is said that the Qur'an was revealed on that night of Majesty, it does not necessarily mean that the whole of the Qur'an was revealed. Even if one verse was revealed, the statement would still have been true – that the Qur'an was revealed on the Night of Majesty. The fact remains that the revelation of the Holy Qur'an extended over a period of twenty-three years and its verses were revealed in various places on different occasions. But that night when the first verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed will always be considered as the night on which the Qur'an was sent. The reason for this is that before that night there was no Qur'an on earth.

And what will make thee comprehend what the Night of Majesty is?

The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months.

In other words, to perform worship and to do acts of righteousness

on that night will bring to the believer more reward than he would get in a thousand months. Here the word *thousand* is used to signify a very large number and what is meant is that countless blessings will accrue to the devotee if he fulfils the conditions. It is recorded that in the month of Ramadhan the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was extremely generous and at night he engaged in extra devotional prayers, especially in the last ten nights when his worship reached the topmost peak of perfection. In the latter part of the night he used to read ten *rakahs* (cycles) of prayer in twos and then add one *rakah* (cycle) called *witr* thus making the whole prayer an odd number, that is, eleven *rakahs* (cycles) in all. People normally read three *rakahs* (cycles) of prayer (*witr*) in the latter part of the night.

The Holy Prophet (*sas*) used to read eleven *rakahs* (cycles) of prayer called the *Tahajjud* prayer. This name was given to it because *tahajjud* means *getting up from sleep*. So the prayer that people read after rising up from sleep is called *Tahajjud*. But if a person should stay awake all night and keep on performing prayer throughout, that prayer according to the definition of the *Shari'ah* (Law) cannot be called *Tahajjud*.

So the eleven *rakahs* (cycles) of prayers that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) used to read in the latter half of the night was called *Tahajjud* because he used to read them after waking up from sleep and he used to add the *witr* prayer so as to make the number an odd one.

This is the prayer that is called *Tarawih* in the month of Ramadhan because after every two *rakahs* (cycles) of the prayer a short rest is permitted and it is because of this short rest that this prayer is named *Tarawih*. Thus the *Tarawih* prayer in the month of Ramadhan is really the *Tahajjud* prayer and not an additional or separate one, and for ease and convenience it is read in an earlier part of the night rather than in the later part. To read twenty *rakahs* (cycles) of *Tarawih* prayer with three *witr* added making a total of twenty-three *rakahs* (cycles) is not in accordance with the *Sunnah* of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). This came about because, in the time of the Caliph Umar, peo-

ple were sitting one night in the *masjid* (mosque) and engaging in idle talk. The *Caliph* passed by them and asked them what they were doing. On receiving the reply that they were just enjoying some small talk, he asked a *hafiz* (person who knows the Qur'an by heart) to gather the people into a congregation and lead them in twenty *rakahs* (cycles) of supererogatory prayer. The idea was that the whole Qur'an should be read in the *Tarawih* prayer during the month of Ramadhan. This then became the accepted practice, but this was not the custom of the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

As regards the Night of Majesty, Lady Ayesha once asked the Holy Prophet (*sas*) what *du'a* (supplication) she should make if she ever experienced that extraordinary Night of Grandeur, and this is the prayer he gave to her:

“O Allah! Thou art the Forgiving and Thou lovest forgiveness, so please forgive me.”

The angels and the Spirit descend on it by the permission of their Lord for every affair. Peace! it is till the rising of the morning.

Here, many people infer from the expression *min kulli amr* (for every affair) that on this night all decisions for the following year regarding the administration and other affairs of the world are determined. This deduction is not correct. *Kul* (every) is a relative word and its application depends on the context or the situation and covers only such matters that are under discussion. For example, if on the occasion of a feast it is said that all the people have arrived, it cannot mean that all the people in the world are present there. What it means, in fact, is that all the invited guests are present. Similarly, when the Prophet Noah was given the following command in the chapter *Hud*: *We (Allah) said: Carry in it two of all things, a pair* (11:40) it did not mean that he had to take a pair of all the animals on earth, but the order extended only to those animals that he would need later on. So here the expression *min kulli amr* (for every affair) does not refer to all the

affairs of the world, but only to such spiritual blessings and favours which are pertinent to that glorious and honourable night on which the Holy Qur'an was revealed.

Ar-Ruh (the Spirit) refers to those angels who descend with the word of Allah on the hearts of the righteous infusing them with spiritual life. That is why they are called the *Spirit*.

The word *salam* means peace and freedom from every kind of fear or anxiety. In other words, everything that descends on that night is aimed towards the giving of physical and spiritual blessings to man. Thus, if we study the Holy Qur'an, which was revealed on that night of Majesty, we shall discover that it contains a message of complete peace, the chief objective of which is to save man from sin and evil, and trials and tribulations, and make him attain a life of peace and tranquillity.

Therefore, if a person derives the benefit of this night and through worship and strenuous efforts towards goodness he makes his heart worthy of spiritual blessings, then it is inevitable that the angels will bring divine communication and spiritual blessings to his heart with such force that his soul shall be freed from the straight-jacket of sins and shall enter the sanctuary of peace.

The question arises as to why the angels descend only on the heart of man. The fact is that it is always the heart of man which receives Divine communication and spiritual blessings through angels as has been mentioned concerning the Holy Qur'an itself: *Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel – for surely he revealed it to thy heart by Allah's command (2:97).*

This verse proves that it is the hearts of righteous people that receive spiritual blessings and Divine communications through the agency of angels through whom Allah inspires righteousness. However, those people whose hearts are closed to spiritual blessings and who are under the sway of satanic forces will find it impossible to receive angelic inspiration.

The literal meaning of *hatta matla'il fajr* (until the morning) is that the spiritual blessings of that grand night extend till dawn. However, it also conveys a deeper meaning and that is that the peace and blessings that descend on the heart of man on that night continue till the darkness of evil dissipates and heavenly light suffuses the heart.

Lailatul-qadr (the Night of Majesty) is generally known as one of the odd nights of the last ten nights of Ramadhan on which the Holy Qur'an was revealed. But it has a deeper significance for it refers to the period of the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) when the Qur'an was revealed. This period is called *night* because at that time the whole world was shrouded in darkness, misguidance and unbelief. It is also called *Al-Qadr* (The Majesty) because the Holy Qur'an, that extraordinary heavenly book of Divine guidance, was sent down to man, and the Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), that incomparable guide, was appointed on that night. There can be no doubt, therefore, that our Prophet's time was greater than a thousand months and superior to all other ages. The blessings that came to a believer for worship and religious service in that age cannot be had in any succeeding age. In this regard, the Holy Prophet himself said that the recompense for giving a handful of barley in that period far exceeded the reward one would get in a later age for giving a heap of gold as large as Mount Uhud. This is because at a time of great need a little assistance merits greater reward than great help later on when the need is not demanding.

In the Holy Prophet's time, Islam was faced with such monumental difficulties and calamities that the extent of the need for sacrifices by way of wealth and lives is beyond description. So the reward for the selfless service of those who sacrificed their lives and property for Islam in that precarious time and never swerved an inch from the path of Allah cannot be attained by those who came after when Islam had triumphed in the world and Muslims had at their command great wealth and power.

The Prophet's lifetime was the time when the angels and the spirit were descending on earth – on the one hand the Holy Qur'an was being revealed and on the other hand the hearts of the believers were being suffused with spiritual life. For every act of sacrifice and selflessness there flowed a constant stream of assistance and support – angels descended, faith was revived and strengthened, hearts were invested with spiritual power – and even in the midst of all these dangers the message of peace was silently working its way into the hearts of people to such an extent that eventually the dark cloud of unbelief was lifted and the divine light of guidance spread its glorious rays all over the world.

The expression *a thousand months* embodies a subtle meaning – one thousand months amount to almost eight-three years. Now, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) has said that at the turn of every century a *mujaddid* (reformer) would appear for the revival of the religion of Islam. As every *mujaddid* is a *khalifah* (successor) of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), therefore, his age is like a facsimile or reflection of the Prophet's age and bears a strong connection with it. And the seventeen years that make up the complete century bear a superiority over the remaining eighty-three years just as the Prophet's age enjoyed a complete supremacy over all other eras. In other words, a *mujaddid's* dispensation extends on the average over a period of seventeen years and the remaining eighty-three years are deprived, as it were, of a *mujaddid*. What a wonderful coincidence it is, therefore, that the *Mujaddid* and Promised Messiah of our century, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, claimed to have received revelation for thirty years but his claim to being the Promised Messiah amounted to exactly seventeen years!

As the time of the appearance of a *mujaddid* is a trying time for religion and there is a crying demand for religious service, therefore the reward for worship and good actions in this period is correspondingly greater than in any other age, more so because sacrifice of wealth and lives is called for.

This is the time of the *mujaddid* of the fourteenth century when Islam

is beset by all kinds of dangers and attacks. There is a preponderance of false creeds and the darkness of irreligion and misguidance has overspread the earth. Therefore, for this reason, the descent of Allah's angels and His communications are respectively much more numerous and more powerful now than in the time of any other *mujaddid* and so, too, the deeper knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and the inspired truths that have been revealed.

Furthermore, the magnitude of blessings for divine service and sacrifice for religion in this age will never be equalled in later times when the darkness of misguidance will have been dissipated, thus allowing the sun of Islam to rise from the West and shed its rays over the whole world. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) himself has said in relation to this present age that a sincere *sajdah* (prostration) to Allah now will be worth more than years of worship in another era.

Thus, in this period of godlessness, to put religion above the world and to sacrifice wealth and lives for Islam in these vulnerable times, and to devote oneself to the worship of Allah in this atheistic age, will bring to the sincere devotee more blessings than those people will receive in later times when the need for such sacrifices for Islam will not exist, and when the Oneness of Allah and true knowledge of Him will be prevalent throughout the world.

AL-BAYYINAH (THE CLEAR EVIDENCE)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the idolaters could not have been freed till clear evidence came to them -

A Messenger from Allah, reciting pure pages,

Wherein are (all) right books.

Nor did those to whom the Book was given become divided till clear evidence came to them.

And they are enjoined naught but to serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, upright and to keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, and that is the right religion.

Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the idolaters will be in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein. They are the worst of creatures.

Those who believe and do good, they are the best of creatures.

Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of perpetuity wherein flow rivers, abiding therein forever. Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him. That is for him who fears his Lord.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
لَوْ كُنَّ الذِّينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ
وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُتَّقِينَ حَتَّىٰ تَأْتِيَهُمُ
الْبَيِّنَةُ
رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُطَهَّرَةً
فِيهَا الْكُتُبُ قَيِّمَةٌ
وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُزُوا الْكِتَابَ
مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ فَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ
وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ
لَهُ الدِّينَ هَسَنًا وَّيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ
وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَاتِ
إِنَّ الذِّينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ
وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا
أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ
إِنَّ الذِّينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ
جَزَاءُ ذُوهُمْ عَلَىٰ رِقَبِهِمْ جَنَّاتُ
عَدْنٍ يَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
سَاءَ لِلَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَهُمْ فِيهَا
خَالِدُونَ

This chapter, *Al-Bayinah* (The Clear Evidence), was revealed at Makkah. In the last chapter, *Al-Qadr* (The Majesty), it was mentioned that the Holy Qur'an was revealed as a message of peace to the whole world. In this chapter, the point is made that mankind at the time of the Holy Prophet (sas) was so far away removed from guidance that unless clear testimony had come from Allah and unless the Holy Qur'an had been revealed, the world would never have received guidance from any other source.

Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the idolaters could not have been freed till clear evidence came to them -

Here, by *those who disbelieved from among the People of the Book*, the kind of unbelief meant is unbelief by way of evil deeds and also by attributing parties to the one God, Allah. That is, the People of the Book (the Jews and Christians) earned the title of unbelievers because of their sinful actions and because of their joining others in the worship of Allah and this, despite being followers of revealed books.

Mushrikin (idolaters) refer to the unbelievers who were not Jews or Christians but were worshippers of idols.

By *al bayyinah* (the clear evidence) is meant Allah's messenger as is plainly stated in the next verse of this chapter. He is called *the clear evidence* because the purity of his life, his exalted teachings and the heavenly signs shown in his favour all provide indisputable proof of the existence of Allah. With his advent, faith became implanted in the hearts of men who could now find deliverance from the burden of their sins.

This verse tells us that as a result of unbelief and polytheism, vice and immorality, the condition of people had become so depraved that those who were idol-worshippers had already fallen into such a deep pit of misguidance that there was no hope of self-regeneration for them. But even more reprehensible was the condition of the People of the Book. They were inheritors of revealed scriptures, yet so buried were they in unbelief and polytheism that they had become deserving of being called unbelievers. So how could those who were in error themselves, guide others to the true path?

Therefore, there was no way available to liberate man from such a condition of slavery to sinfulness except one - that an apostle of Allah should come and recite *pure pages* to the people for so far had they fallen in the abyss of sin and iniquity that it was beyond the power of

an ordinary preacher to reclaim them.

It is a proven historical fact that two well-known groups of the People of the Book, the Jews and the Christians, had tried for centuries to woo the Arabs away from polytheism, but all their efforts to effect a change in the morals and beliefs of the people of Arabia had amounted to no more than the ripple of a gentle breeze on the vast ocean. Sir William Muir provides eloquent testimony of this when he writes:

“From time beyond memory, Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steeped in spiritual torpor. The slight and transient influences of Judaism, Christianity, or philosophical inquiry upon the Arab mind had been but as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice.... Their religion was a gross idolatry; and their faith the dark superstitious dread of unseen things.... Thirteen years before the *Hejira*, Mecca lay lifeless in this debased state. What a change had these thirteen years now produced!... Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they, too, awoke from their slumber, and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life” (Muir’s *Life of Mahomet*, ch. vii).

But retrogression from religion was not the lot of the People of the Book alone. In fact, in every part of the world people with scriptures had all become corrupted and debased as this verse of the Holy Qur’an attests: *Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of that which men’s hands have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return* (30:41).

So when people with divinely-inspired books were themselves engaged in all kinds of debauchery, how could they purify others of their vices? Those in need of a deliverer cannot liberate others from

the bondage of sin.

The world was crying out desperately for a reformer, that is, mankind was in dire need of a messenger who, through his holy personality, his spiritual powers and heavenly signs would revive faith in Allah in the heart of people, rescue them from sins, provide them with the principles of true guidance and establish purity and righteousness on earth.

*A Messenger from Allah, reciting pure pages,
Wherein are (all) right books.*

In the verse, *Wherein are (all) right books*, instead of *bayyinah* (evidence) the word *rasul* (messenger) is used. In other words, by *bayyinah* (evidence) is meant the Messenger of Allah because his presence is indisputable evidence of the existence of Allah and so overwhelming a proof is he, that, through him, faith in Allah is renewed and so man can achieve salvation from a sinful life. Here the word *rasul* (messenger) refers specifically to the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

This verse discloses to us that so degenerate had people become because of polytheism and profligacy that the time had come when that extraordinary Prophet, who had been prophesied by all the preceding prophets, should make his appearance for the sake of reforming the world. His life, which was replete with miracles and heavenly signs, together with the manifestation of Divine help which was never absent from him, was sufficient in itself for resuscitating faith in Allah. However, in addition to that, the Messenger taught a holy scripture to the people. This Book was called "holy" because it was free from all impure doctrines and interpolations which self-serving and unscrupulous people had themselves inserted in the earlier scriptures.

Thus, that prophet came and brought with him a Divine scripture that was filled with pure, holy, exemplary and unadulterated guidance. And this is why its teachings can purify people of sins and fill them with piety and purity.

The verse, *In which there are (all) right books*, tells us that in this Book, that is, the Holy Qur'an, all those teachings which are of permanent value to mankind have been collected together because they enjoy the status of eternal verities. In other words, on the one hand, the message of this prophet is exempt of all kinds of human admixture or interpolation. On the other hand, the book he brought is a compendium of all permanent truths and perfect guidance that are indispensable for mankind whether these truths existed in previous Divine scriptures or elsewhere, or whether they were not yet revealed until his advent.

Nor did those to whom the Book was given become divided till clear evidence came to them.

In this verse, *al bayyinah* (the clear evidence) refers to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) who brought explicit proofs and heavenly signs in support of the truth of his message.

By *ta-far-ra-qa* (became divided) are meant those who differed in their attitude to the faith. Some believed and others rejected, while another group comprised those who were believers in the former revealed books but rejected the Book of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in spite of the fact that it brought incontrovertible evidence from the Almighty. In this way, they made a differentiation in their belief in the prophets of Allah. In truth, their refusal to accept the Holy Qur'an was really a rejection of the pure teachings which were preserved in their own scriptures. They also made a division in the universal concept of prophethood, for before the Holy Prophet's advent, they used to believe in all their prophets, but now they rejected him in spite of the fact that he had come with such incontestable arguments and clear signs that he earned the title of *al bayyinah* (the clear evidence).

And they are enjoined naught but to serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, upright, and to keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, and that is the right religion.

In this verse, the rejecters are told that they have no grounds for disbelieving because there was no difference in the essential message of the Holy Prophet and the teachings of the previous prophets. In fact, it is through the Holy Qur'an that the teachings of the former prophets have been revived and perfected. And what did they teach? It is the same belief in the Oneness of the Almighty and obedience to Him. Further, all of us are commanded to be sincere to Allah and to worship Him and do deeds solely for His pleasure. We are further directed to be upright, that is, to avoid extremes as we walk along the straight path. We are also reminded that all these virtues cannot become possible except through a strong connection with Allah. To achieve this, we must establish regular prayer so that respect for the commands of Allah can be embedded in our hearts; we should also pay the *zakah* (poor-rate) to develop love for our fellow-human beings and to win the approval of Allah thereby. That is the authentic religion which all the prophets came to this world to preach and this is the same message that the Holy Prophet is expounding. Furthermore, in the verse, *In it are all right books*, we are told that all the teachings of all the prophets of the world are contained in a perfect form in the Holy Qur'an. So there is no basis for showing indifference and hostility to this Book.

Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the idolaters will be in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein. They are the worst of creatures.

The people meant here are those People of the Book and the idolaters who did not believe in the *clear evidence*, that is, the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and so rejected him. In other words, in the beginning of the chapter, the verse, *Those who disbelieved from among the People of the Book and the idolaters could not be freed...* refers to those People of the Book and the idolaters who were unbelievers by virtue of their evil deeds and polytheistic beliefs. However, when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) came, those who believed in him were freed from unbelief and polytheism and were included in the fold of Islam.

However, the later verse, *Nor did those to whom the Book was given become divided till clear evidence came to them*, pertains to those People of the Book who did not believe and showed indifference to the Holy Prophet (*sas*). So in this verse under discussion, (*Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the idolaters will be in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein. They are the worst of creatures.*), mention is made of those People of the Book who stood aloof from the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and refused to believe in him. Also included in the punishment mentioned here are those idol-worshippers who rejected him.

In other words, in the beginning of the chapter, the words, *Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book*, speak of those false beliefs and evil deeds that had already taken root in these people before the advent of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). To liberate them from this state of unbelief, Allah sent His apostle, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*).

But here, in this verse the reference to *those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book* is to those later ones who rejected the *clear evidence*, that is, the messengership of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) when it came to them. Therefore, as they rejected the complete and perfect message that had come to them, they made themselves deserving of punishment, and for this reason they were called the *worst of creation* because they deliberately refused to benefit from the Messenger of Allah and the *clear evidence* he brought. Instead they increased in unbelief and polytheism. So who can doubt that they truly earned the description of the *worst of creatures*? Without doubt, by their own evil deeds they made themselves *asfala safilin* (the lowest of the low).

Those who believe and do good, they are the best of creatures.

In chapter 95, *At-Tin* (The Fig), we were told that man was created *fi ahsani taqwim* (in the best make) but if he does not believe in Allah

and does not do good deeds then he becomes *asfala safilin* (the lowest of the low). On the other hand, if he has faith in Allah and follows it up with righteous actions, then he rises to the rank of the best of creation. This latter point is repeated in this verse, *Those who believe and do good, they are the best of creatures*, that is, those who believe and do good are the noblest of Allah's creatures.

At this juncture, there is a subtle point worthy of notice: One can observe that there is a resemblance between the preceding verse, *Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the idolaters will be in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein. They are the worst of creatures*, and this one, *Those who believe and do good, they are the best of creatures*. In the former verse, the deniers of the *clear evidence* are mentioned as the *worst of creatures* and in the latter verse, those who accepted the *clear evidence* are called the *best of creatures*. But what is important here is that before naming the rejecters as the *worst of creatures*, the verse describes the punishment they will receive as a result of their denial, whilst in the next verse, the acceptors of the truth are referred to as the *best of creatures*, but their reward is not spoken of in this verse. In fact, their recompense is described in the verses that follow and we may very well ask why this is so.

The difference is this: when the punishment of an unbeliever becomes public, only then do people realise that he is one of the worst of creatures. Before this exposure, most times people do not have the slightest intimation of the character of the wrong-doer. For example, many officers of high rank and standing in the society happen to be dishonest, but no one knows. However, when their dishonesty is disclosed and punishment is meted out to them, then they lose their erstwhile honour and prestige, and their true station of the *worst of creatures* comes into full view.

Therefore, to establish the fact that the unbelievers are the *worst of creatures*, it is important to make known the result of their actions. That is why the punishment for their wrong-doing is mentioned first

and then their position of the *worst of creatures* is expressed.

However, in contrast to them, the believers and doers of good, that is, the truly righteous ones, begin to be noticed by all as the best of people by reason of their good deeds, and there is no need to wait for the consequences of their actions to confirm their high standing. That is why only their belief and good works are mentioned and straightaway they are named as the *best of creatures*. In other words, a believer who is a doer of good deeds is quintessentially one of the best of Allah's creatures regardless of whether the results of his belief and actions are known to people or not. That is because faith and good deeds are so intrinsically pure qualities that those who choose that path in life are sure to become the most illustrious of Allah's creation. This, in itself, is a glorious thing, but that is not the end of the matter, for their Lord has in store for them a more honourable reward.

Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of perpetuity wherein flow rivers, abiding therein forever. Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.

Faith is compared with a garden whilst good deeds are likened to rivers. Just as rivers give life to gardens and cause them to flourish, so, too, good deeds keep faith perpetually alive. In addition, the promise is given that this gift will be perfect and everlasting. This is contrary to the Arya Samaj concept of salvation from which, after a period of time, Parmeshwar will expel them for a sin that was committed earlier but had remained hidden and will send them back to earth. Peace and happiness that are ephemeral are really a form of deceit and unkindness. If something is not lasting you cannot enjoy true contentment from it. No happiness can be genuine unless it is permanent. So, in this verse, in addition to the promise of perfect happiness, the good news is also given that it will last forever.

As regards Hell, the words used are: *They will abide in it*. No mention of eternity is made there because after sinners have undergone a period of punishment in Hell they will eventually be taken out of it.

But when Heaven is spoken of, the word *abadan* (forever) is added to *They will abide in it*. And to underscore the long period of time, or, in other words, the perpetuity of Heaven, the words *everlasting gardens* are also added, thus making clear that the sojourn in Heaven will be everlasting.

This is indeed a great favour from the Lord, Most High, to a servant who is absorbed all through his life in the thought of pleasing his Master through his good conduct, whether it is a matter of obeying the *Shari'ah* (Law) or accepting the *taqdir* (decrees of Allah).

Firstly, as regards the Law, he obeys all the commands of his Lord solely for the sake of pleasing Him.

Secondly, as regards the decrees of Allah, that is, whatever his Lord ordains for him, whether happiness or sadness, he accepts from Him and submits willingly and cheerfully to Him and yet continues to seek His pleasure. Therefore, for a person like this, it is the essence of justice that his Lord should be pleased with him, and even more, that He should be so happy as to give him never-ending blessings. And this actually happens in two ways.

Firstly, if a servant tries his best to please his Lord in this life by obeying all the commands of the Law, then in return, his Lord will be pleased with Him and it is an evident truth that there can be no greater happiness or success for a servant than to win the pleasure of his Master.

Secondly, if a servant is not only pleased with the decrees of his Lord and cheerfully accepts whatever conditions his Lord imposes on him, but also willingly sacrifices his own pleasures and ambitions to please his Lord, then as a reward, his Lord will be pleased with him and what greater recompense can man conceive of than this?

When the Lord of all the worlds, the Supreme Master, the Best of all Judges, is pleased with a servant, and not only pleased, but makes

provisions for the happiness of that servant, then what greater manifestation of honour, love and favour can there be? Likewise, if an individual or a community should attain this station as the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) did, then there can be no good fortune to equal this.

That is for him who fears his Lord.

Faith engenders fear, and fear generates good deeds, and good deeds win the pleasure of Allah. Fearing Allah does not mean the same thing as fearing that a wild beast will tear us to pieces and eat us; nor is it akin to the fear we have for the punishment of a tyrant if we dare to disobey his commands. But in using the expression *khashiya Rabba-hu* (he fears his Lord), what is meant is that there is an apprehension in the heart of man lest Allah's providence be cut off. In other words, man is afraid that the source of his support, advancement and perfection may be curtailed. In short, the fear of Allah is similar to the trepidation one may have at the thought that the fear of sustenance and favours from a very kind and loving benefactor may be interrupted.

Every human being yearns for blessings, progress and perfection and so everyone is always careful to keep the person who provides these things, happy. Similarly, people are always fearful lest the patron becomes angry and so those favours and privileges that they were enjoying and hoped to enjoy in the future may be discontinued. This, then, is the meaning of fear and this is the kind of fear that motivates man to try to keep his Lord always pleased. That is why the Holy Qur'an tells us that a person who fears his Lord will always be concerned about pleasing Him with the result that his Lord will be pleased with the efforts of His servant and in return He will make him happy.

NOTE

In the beginning of this chapter, the people of the world were divided into two classes: the People of the Book and the polytheists. The People of the Book were those who claimed to possess a revealed scripture whilst the polytheists were those who did not have any di-

vine scripture with them even though according to the Qur'anic verse, *Every nation received a messenger* (10:47), they, too, had each been given a book before (but it was lost).

However, many nations claimed to be followers of a divine scripture even though the text of their book had suffered interpolations and alterations. These people were called *People of the Book*. The other group, among whom neither trace nor remnant of a holy book existed, and who followed all kinds of national customs, false superstitions and polytheistic beliefs, were called *idolaters*. These are the two technical terms used for them in the Holy Qur'an.

Thus, in the beginning of this chapter, the very first statement made was an explanation of the necessity for the advent of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). The verse states that both the People of the Book and the idolaters of that era were so steeped in polytheistic and atheistic doctrines and customs that there was no hope of salvation for them except one - that Allah should send an outstandingly extraordinary messenger whose coming was foretold by all the previous prophets, and who would bring a perfect and comprehensive Book, that is, the Holy Qur'an. That was the state of the world at the time of the Holy Prophet's appearance. However, the same state of affairs obtains in today's world. If we consider the present religions of the world, we can find none that can truly teach the Unity of Godhead or lead anyone along the straight path. That is because their original teachings have been corrupted over the passage of time and they have lost their authenticity.

Today, the only religion upon which the redemption of all the nations of the world depends is Islam. There exist today many religions whose present form has become so disfigured that they bear no resemblance to their original likeness. For example, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Magism and Sikhism are not true religions as such but are really cradles of polytheism. Their adherents have tried to refashion and reinterpret them from time to time but the more they do so, the more they mutilate them. Similarly, Brahmo Samaj and Dev Samaj are not

the names of any religions. In fact, they are different forms of atheism.

Only Judaism now remains to be considered. This poor religion is so confined to a special nation and so limited to a particular place and time that its followers are unable to practise it in its original form, so now, not only Jews but all other nations are incorporating the principles of Islam in their lives. This is because whenever national, economic, cultural or social problems confront them, they are forced to alter their principles, and whatever values they consider necessary to solve their difficulties are, in fact, tenets borrowed from Islam. So after much worldly tribulations and through trial and error, the world is slowly beginning to accept those teachings which have been mentioned in this chapter, and without which there can be no deliverance, and for which purpose the *clear evidence*, that is, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and the Holy Qur'an were sent.

Just as fourteen hundred years ago there was a crying need for this *clear evidence*, so, too, today, the demand for this message still exists in order to extricate the world from the clutches of error and misguidance and rid it once again of polytheism and all kinds of corrupt practices for no other religion can effect this transformation. So, whoever rejects this message, in fact repudiates the collective teachings and guidance of all the prophets of the world, for today, the only beacon of the true, original and universal teachings of all the prophets is the religion of Islam. The remaining religions do not contain the authentic teachings of their prophets. Therefore, in this age, no other religion except Islam can bring about the regeneration of mankind.

CHAPTER 99

AL-ZILZAL (THE SHAKING)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

When the earth is shaken with her shaking

And the earth brings forth her burdens

And man says: What has befallen her?

On that day she will tell her news,

As if thy Lord had revealed to her.

On that day men will come forth in sundry bodies that they may be shown their works.

So he who does an atom's weight of good will see it,

And he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

اِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْاَرْضُ زُلْزَالَهَا

وَاخْرَجَتِ الْاَرْضُ اَنْفُسَهَا

وَقَالَ الْاِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُخْبِرُكَ عَنْ اَعْمَالِكَ

بِاَنَّ زُجْجَكَ اَوْخَىٰ لَهَا

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَخْبِرُ الْاِنْسَانَ اَشْيَاغَهُ

لِكُلِّ دَاۤءٍ اَعْمَاةٍ

سَمِعَتْ نَسْفَةً وَّشِقَاةً وَّكَرَاهِيَةً

يَوْمَئِذٍ

رَسَمٌ لِّكُلِّ نَسْفَةٍ وَّشِقَاةٍ مِّثْرًا

This chapter is a Makkan revelation. The mighty revolution mentioned in the last chapter, *Al-Bayinah*, (The Clear Evidence), and which depended on the coming of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), could not have been effected without an earthquake. For, how can centuries of stagnation and inertia be eliminated unless a country is severely shaken by an earthquake of wars and calamities? This is the earthquake with which this chapter deals.

There is no doubt that this cataclysm refers to the Day of Resurrection, but as has been explained on many occasions, the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) was a representation on a smaller scale of the mighty upheaval that would take place on the Day of Resurrection, for the recompense for good and evil that took place in Makkah then, serves as a sure preview of the happenings in the Great Resurrection.

Therefore, the exemption pertains also to this life. Indeed, such was the power and intensity of this explosion on Arabia in the time of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and so glorious were its repercussions, that peo-

ple could clearly see unfolding before their eyes a smaller picture of the overwhelming earthquake promised in the Great Resurrection.

So, whatever descriptions of the earthquake are given in this chapter concern the two resurrections, that is, the one which took place during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and also the one which has been fixed for the final Resurrection on the Day of Judgement. Therefore, the following commentary will encompass signs of both resurrections.

*When the earth is shaken with her shaking
And the earth brings forth her burdens
And man says: What has befallen her?*

Ath-qa-la-ha (brings forth her burdens) means, according to Razi, the classical commentator of the Holy Qur'an, what is concealed in its interior, or a hidden secret.

Zil-za-la-ha (shaken with her shaking) refers to an upheaval that is calculated to cause a great commotion in the hearts of men.

It is a well-known fact that if the effects of an earthquake that brings in its wake trials and tribulations cannot remove centuries of stagnation and instil life in those who were dead for generations, then it cannot be considered an eruption of cataclysmic proportions.

When a person is sound asleep in the languor of heedlessness it is necessary to shake him over and over in order to rouse him. Sometimes he does not get up at all and sometimes he wakes up for a while and then promptly falls back in sleep, so he has to be rudely shaken repeatedly in order to get him up. Similarly, a nation that has sunk into the pit of passivity and sloth has to be shaken over and over else it would not awake from its torpor.

So here, when reference is made to that wonderful material and spiritual revolution to which Islam gave birth when it came into the world,

it is stated that it was necessary for Arabia to be thrown into convulsion and that the upheaval should be such as to cause a great awakening in the hearts of people.

And by Allah! look at how the Messenger of Allah and his companions were afflicted by every imaginable kind of calamity; how many persecutions they had to endure; how the sentence of boycott was pronounced on them; how they were exiled and blockaded in a valley for three long years; how many were slaughtered like lambs. In short, there was no distress which they did not have to suffer.

But in using the word *zil-za-la-ha* (shaken with her shaking) Allah was telling the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and his companions that they had to get ready for more severe trials that were in store for them, for Arabia was deservedly going to experience an eruption of immense magnitude.

After the ordeals in Makkah came the *Hijrah* followed by wars which brought such tumult and hardship that not only was the whole of Arabia shaken to the core, but the people's hearts, which had become harder than stone, were also softened to such an extent that they were forced to bow their heads before the truth, and consternation reigned as to the reason for this unprecedented earthquake.

So, the Holy Qur'an tells us that if an earthquake does not take place, the earth cannot throw out its treasures. And indeed, how true a statement is this! For today, fourteen hundred years after the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, scientists have come to the conclusion that all the minerals and priceless treasures that lie hidden in the bowels of the earth may be brought to the surface of the earth only through the agency of an earthquake and, in fact, this is what really happens. If there is no earthquake, all these precious minerals and invaluable metals and chemicals will be lost to people. And it is to this spiritual truth that the Holy Qur'an draws our attention when it tells us that just as in the physical world if earthquakes do not occur, the hidden treasures beneath the earth cannot emerge, so, too, in the spiritual world,

if earthquakes of trials and tribulations do not strike, then the hidden pearls in the nature of individuals or nations cannot come into actuality. In other words, without an earthquake of this severity, their innate talents cannot be discovered, nor receive nourishment, nor can their sublime morals be seen.

The Arab people were a hidden treasure, and because of their savagery and barbarity, their potential was concealed from the eyes of people. In other words, they were a treasure that lay buried under brutality and paganism. However, with the coming of Islam they had to undergo such severe convulsions and calamities that their hidden pearls flashed into view from under their concealed cover.

If the pious companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) did not have to encounter such severe torments and upheavals how could we have witnessed these unparalleled examples of patience and perseverance, bravery and courage, personal and financial sacrifice and moral and spiritual excellence? If there were no *Hijrah* and no wars, how could the world have beheld those incomparable marvels of self-abnegation of which Muslims are so proud today?

Let us take a look for a moment at the lives of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and his noble companions. Every trial that befell them and every torture they faced only served to burnish their high morals and their sublime but hitherto latent capabilities and make them so resplendent as to dazzle the eyes. If after the death of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) Arabia was not convulsed by apostasy and rebellion, how could the world have been apprised of the sterling qualities of Hazrat Abu Bakr's character? If the armies of Iran and Italy had not deliberately set out to trample the Muslims in the dust, could the world have known of Hazrat 'Umar's glory? Again, if the same nations and their numberless armies had not launched attack after attack against the small Muslim community, how could we have celebrated the heroic deeds of Khalid bin Walid? And if the whole Christian world, including the European nations, had not joined forces and advanced to capture the Holy Temple at Jerusalem, would the valour and chivalry of the Sul-

tan, Salah-ud-din Ayyubi, have been venerated both in the East and the West?

In the same way, if the combined forces of Christianity, the Arya Samaj, the atheistic communities and all false religions had not united to attack Islam, the glory of the great *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, would not have been disclosed to us. And who would have heard of his departed companions like Maulana Nur-ud-Din, Maulana Muhammad Ali and Khwajah Kamal-ud-din, and their illustrious literary works and fervent missionary zeal in the cause of Islam?

So, we see that an earthquake is indispensable in unearthing the hidden capabilities of man. Maulana Nur-ud-Din, the first successor to Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, used to say that until a host of objections was not raised against a particular verse of the Holy Qur'an, the wealth of spiritual knowledge and insights contained in that verse could not be revealed.

In short, that revelation that Islam brought to the world needed a unique earthquake in order to bring out of the graves those who were buried under centuries of unbelief and misguidance. And when the time of that wonderful and glorious event comes to pass, man will cry in amazement: "What has come over the earth?"

History has recorded what a mighty transformation the land of Arabia underwent. In place of the darkness of savagery and barbarism, polytheism and misguidance, overnight there shone the light of civilisation and culture, righteousness and belief in one God and true moral and spiritual guidance. Those who were dead for centuries received life and became the standard-bearers of knowledge, guidance, culture and purity of life which they carried all over the known world and blessed every country with an unending legacy of divine knowledge and wisdom. This metamorphosis so astonished the Shah of Iran that he made certain derogatory remarks when he addressed the Muslim ambassadors in his court. A summary of those words was immortal-

ised by the poet, Firdausi, in beautiful verses that captured the stupefaction of the Shah. The following is an interpretation in English of the Persian couplet:

Look at the audacity of these Arabs!
These drinkers of camels' milk and devourers of lizards' flesh.
Now they have dared to set their sights on the royal throne of
Iran!
O Heaven, fie on Thee!

Can we find a more graphic description of the verse, *And man will ask: What has befallen her* (that is, the earth) than this expostulation of the Shah of Iran?

European Christian historians also have been forced to admit that the phenomenal practical transfiguration wrought in Arabia by the Holy Qur'an in just a few years has not been matched in the history of the world. Indeed it is a most stupendous sight to the eyes of every intelligent person. It is to this miracle that the poet, Hali, refers in the following poetic composition:

Was it the flash of lightning or the clarion call of the spiritual guide?

He who shook all Arabia to its foundations
Inspired in the hearts of all a new zeal.
A single voice awakened a slumbering nation.
The thunder of this messenger of Truth echoed in every corner
So desert and mountain alike reverberated with the name of
the Almighty.

On that day she will tell her news,

Tu-had-di-thu (she will tell), that is, the existing state of things will speak for themselves and will need no further description (Abu Muslim in *Tafsir Kabir*).

As if thy Lord had revealed to her.

Here *la-ha* (to her) refers to the revelation of the Holy Qur'an because the reformation that is to come about because of this Book is for the benefit of the whole world. Not only will it be a case of astonishment to the people of one country, but this startling progress, perfection, knowledge and civilisation of the servants of the Holy Qur'an will spread and flourish in every nook and cranny of the world so that men of their own accord will exclaim: "How wonderful indeed is the revelation of this Qur'an from Allah and how universal is its benefit!"

Even today in Arabia, Iraq, Italy, Syria, Egypt, Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Iran and India, in fact, wherever the light of Islam shone, the evidence of an advanced and enlightened culture, civilisation and government stands out conspicuously as a testimony of the legacy that the Qur'anic revelation bequeathed to the world. Indeed, half of the poet Hali's *Musaddas* is devoted to the explanation of the verse: *On that day she will tell her news*, of which the following lines are just a sample:

Visit the ruins of Cordoba,
And look at the niches and doors of the mosques.
Cast a glance at the palaces of the Arab princes,
Examine the desolate ruins of former glory and splendour
And notice the resplendence of their beauty even in their fallen
state
How even in the dust they shine like gold.

But this is not all, for is it not a universally accepted fact that the foundation of European science and learning was built on that very Islamic culture and civilisation which flowed to Europe through Spain and Palestine? It is to this that the poet, Hali, refers in this couplet:

The seeds of flowers of this beautiful spring that now adorns
the earth,

Were all sown by those servants of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

In his book, *The Civilisation of the Arabs*, Gustali Ban, the famous French research scholar, has confirmed the fact that every branch of human knowledge, learning and culture existing in the world today owes its origin to the civilisation and culture of the Arab Muslims who disseminated their learning throughout Europe. In fact, does not every atom of the earth repeatedly celebrate the truth that the Qur'anic revelation encompasses the whole world in its merciful embrace? And did not this earthquake that shook Arabia in that era of ignorance initiate an unprecedented world revolution, the benefit of which will never be cut off till the Day of Resurrection?

On that day men will come forth in sundry bodies that they may be shown their works.

*So he who does an atom's weight of good will see it,
And he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it.*

The expression *a 'ma-la-hum* (their works) means what they actually did or what they were engaged in just as the words, *its way of evil and its way of good* (91:8) refer to the evil that the soul will commit (in the future) or the righteous deeds it will perform.

These verses inform us that when that mighty revolution takes place, then the consequences of deeds will also be exposed to view and in order to witness them people will have to come out of their respective places in sundry groups. However, each person will contemplate his own action all by himself as explained by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in this memorable couplet:

When the prophecy reaches its term,
Some will be honoured and some will be disgraced.

Accordingly, when Makkah was conquered, the first results of the great revolution were observed. People found themselves into two

opposing groups: the first group comprised those cruel unbelievers of Makkah who experienced a fate of great shame and humiliation. In the second group stood the formerly oppressed companions who were relishing that day the fruits of honour and victory. So, those who chose the path of goodness received a good result which was plainly evident to all, and those who opted for a life of evil saw before their eyes the bitter consequences of that unfortunate choice. In the war between good and evil, each person perceived the result of his actions in direct proportion to the measure of his choice and was rewarded according to the degree of his actions.

The example of the consequences of deeds that became visible in this very life provides strong proof that actions do produce results and that finally a day will come when the full manifestation of deeds will take place. On that day the consequence of the smallest deed will be laid bare - even an atom's weight of good or evil will be disclosed.

In the Latter Age, a great material revolution will take place in which the whole world will be turned upside down, and the foundation of a new world order will be laid because of an unprecedented explosion of knowledge which will encompass both earth and outer space. So stupendous will be this new knowledge that it will bewilder the minds of men.

It is a testimony to Allah's glory that today new scientific researches are confirming what the Holy Qur'an revealed to us fourteen hundred years ago - that no word or deed of man is ever lost or destroyed, but they are all preserved in the vast expanse of the universe exactly as sounds are preserved in a gramophone record and actions and movements of actors are recorded in films.

So, scientists are deeply engaged in trying to decipher the records preserved in the book of nature. They affirm that if this attempt is successful there will be a tremendous revolution in the historical records of the world and the veracity or falsity of historians will come to light as well as the words and actions of every character in history.

Uspan, an English Muslim convert and former editor of the *Outlook* and the *Light* (two magazines), has made an incisive remark on this matter, boldly declaring that the day the records conserved in the book of nature are decoded the result would be the immediate collapse of Christianity, for the false stories relating to the Godhead of the Messiah, Prophet Jesus, and his being taken up alive to heaven will be exposed and consequently the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement will vanish from the face of the earth.

Of course, Allah, Most High, has promised us in this chapter that when the great revolution takes place on the Day of Judgement the resultant earthquakes and convulsions will be such that no secret will remain hidden in the world and a most bewildering change will take place in the Universe and this will leave man in utter consternation. On that day, this world's record that is preserved in the book of nature will be seen and heard and through Allah's command His sound-box will play its music and the film of man's actions will appear on the cinema screen. Then man will realise how merciful to him was the revelation of Allah's Holy Book, the Qur'an, which came to warn him of this dreadful day and to urge him to walk along the straight path, for if he takes this path, no shame shall befall him on the day when all secrets will be exposed. On that day, men will be gathered together to witness their deeds but the conditions will vary: for those who acted righteously, it will be a day of happiness when they will be heroes of their film, whilst for those who chose the way of opposition to the truth, it will be a day of terrible anxiety, confusion and perturbation. That is because their hidden sins which they kept concealed from the whole world will be played on a big screen for all to see. And what greater humiliation can there be than for supposedly cultured and noble people to have their foul and impure deeds exposed to public view?

The concern will naturally arise in the hearts of man: will every action of man, including those sins forgiven by Allah be shown to everybody on the Day of Resurrection? If that is so, then why make *taubah* and *istighfar*, that is, supplication for forgiveness and the suppression of

sins? The answer to this is that every action will indeed be exposed but those sins which have been forgiven by Allah will be seen only by the person who has been forgiven and not by everyone. This fulfils the promise of every deed being witnessed, yet at the same time, it is in keeping with the Divine attributes of *Ghaffar* and *Sattar*, which mean the One Who forgives and covers up the wrong-doings of His servants (who beg for forgiveness and make amends). And for this favour of the Almighty, the servant should bow down in this life at the threshold of his Lord and thank Him for His unbounded mercy for concealing on the Day of Resurrection the sins which He has out of His bounty and grace forgiven him.

CHAPTER 100

AL-'ADIYAT (THE ASSAULTERS)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

By those running and uttering cries!

And by those producing fire, striking!

And those suddenly attacking at morn!

Then thereby they raise dust,

Then penetrate thereby gatherings -

Surely man is ungrateful to his Lord.

And surely he is a witness of that.

And truly on account of the love of wealth he is niggardly.

Knows he not when that which is in the graves is raised,

And that which is the breasts is made manifest?

Surely their Lord this day is Aware of them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالنَّادِيَاتِ يُضَعَاوْنَ

فَاتُورِينَ رَبَّاتِ عُلَّانِ

فَالْمُجْرِمَاتِ يُضَعَاوْنَ

فَأُكْرَهْنَ بِهِ نَقَاوْنَ

تَسْتَغْنَ بِهِ جَمَاوَانَ

لَأَنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكْفُورٌ

وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَنَهَيَّوْنَ

وَأَنَّهُ بِسِتِّ الْعَيْرِ لَسَيَّوْنَ

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ مَا فِي

الْأَنْجُورِ

وَمُحْضِلِ مَا فِي بُعْدِ أُوقُورِ

لَئِنَّ رَبَّهُم بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ

This chapter, *Al-'Adiyat* (The Assaulters), was revealed at Makkah. A prophecy about a great imminent revolution had been made in the preceding chapter, *Al-Zilzal* (The Shaking). In this chapter, *Al-'Adiyat*, the Muslims have been told that the success of the revolution will depend upon the struggle made by them. Until a nation takes its struggle to its climax, no grand and awe-inspiring changes can be made in the religious field of life. With the struggle and exertion put in by a horse as an analogy and as a model, the human being, the highest form of creation, has been roused to action. Allah, Most High, says:

By those running and uttering cries!

And by those producing fire, striking!

And those suddenly attacking at morn!

Then thereby they raise dust,

Then penetrate thereby gatherings -

Surely man is ungrateful to his Lord.

No other analogy could be as effective as that of a horse in the case of the Arabs because in Arabia a horse was a greatly loved animal and no doubt it was worthy of their love because the loyalty, the hard struggle and obedience of an Arab horse to its master is legendary. The analogy that has been presented here was no doubt an everyday scene for the Arabs of those days, but even today, the graphic sketch portrayed here to our eyes, of obedience and loyalty, cannot be equalled by another picture.

Here, the object is to make the reader understand the analogy of the horse: look at how the horse renders obedience to its master's commands, a master who provides the horse with ordinary nurturing, that is, he feeds and waters it and cares for it; how it runs at his master's bidding, and the reins that are held by the master can direct the horse to turn or to run faster and faster. Yet its obedience and loyalty to its master is so perfect that it does not show the slightest reluctance in starting to move and to run at the master's command and signal. When the master desires it to work, it runs according to his command and signal. It not only runs, but runs and runs till it starts panting. Panting, in fact, is a signal from nature of the danger entailed in the exertion; it says that the exertion has reached such a pitch that the heart can no longer cope with it, and if this hard running continues for any length of time, the heart will fail, leading to death. Indeed, many a man and horse have fallen and died when running, but the horse keeps on running, even when panting, at the master's signal. By panting, its limbs and faculties are hinting at the danger of death, yet the regard for safeguarding its reputation for loyalty and obedience drives it on and it cares not a bit even for death, and continues to exert itself to the utmost limit under the master's orders. This gives us an idea of the intensity of its exertion.

Now let us turn our attention to the state of the road. It will not be a difficult task if the road is easy and soft and offers no hardship during this arduous run, but the master of the horse puts it on hard and rocky terrain and the rocks are so hard that they may well nigh break the foot. As the foot of the horse hits them, sparks fly off. But even there,

the horse does not disobey the master's command but it hits this hard road at once and continues to exert itself with such grace, and continues to strike the road with such fury that wherever the foot falls, sparks fly off. We now have an idea of the intensity of the struggle and the hardships of the road.

Now let us look at the difficulties of the timing. In this world, the day is meant for work and the night for rest. No matter how hard one works during the day, if the fatigued human or animal can go to his place of rest and go to sleep, he gets up the next day quite refreshed for the struggle that commences the next morning. But what of the horse? Allah, Most High, explains: If the master needs its services during the night, though it is meant for rest, he calls upon it to go to work, for an all-night sprint will enable the master to mount a surprise raid on the enemy at dawn. So, at such a time the horse cares not a whit about this untimely pursuit. On being given the command by the master, it does not care whether it is day or night. Casting aside all thought of rest and sleep, it starts off at its master's bidding and begins to run on a rocky and difficult path, and panting, it keeps running, putting its own life at risk. Galloping all night without any rest, it reaches its destination by dawn and forthwith attacks the enemy.

Let us recap. Three difficulties have been mentioned so far: unbearably hard work and difficulties on the journey entailing the risk of death; the difficulties encountered on the way and the difficulties of the timing of the run. The point is made here that the horse cares not a bit about these three difficulties and gives top priority to the obeying of orders. In such a struggle, there are two other difficulties; one is the anxiety for those left behind, and the second is the fear of what the future may hold. So, here we are told that the daring and the bravery of the horse in this respect is worth emulating. It continues to go forward under his master's orders, caring not at all about what is left behind. The only thing that one can see in its rear is the dust it stirs up with its hard gallop, which is proclaiming the intensity of its struggle. The horse is only concerned with obeying the master's command and not caring about what may happen in the rear.

Similarly, as for what may befall it in the future, it cares not a whit. After running all night, panting, after making sparks fly off the rocks on the road, after covering the entire distance by night, no rest station is its lot, no food or fodder is ready for it. Instead, the enemy hosts stand in front. To attack them and to enter their ranks is to enter the jaws of death. But the horse is not at all worried about this in the presence of the master's orders. Obeying the command of the master, it charges into the enemy ranks and into the jaws of death, caring not a bit about anything. This is what can be called the height of obedience and loyalty.

These are the five difficulties that can break a man's resolve and put an end to his struggle. By giving the analogy of the horse here, Allah, Most High, says: When faced with its master's command, it cares not a bit for these difficulties; loyalty as well as obedience to the master is its religion and its faith.

Allah, Most High explains further: Compare the gratitude and loyalty of the horse to its nourisher with the ungratefulness of man who does not gird himself up for the sake of his Master and Nourisher, although the providence provided by the Lord to man is many times greater than that provided by man to his horse, because the latter is only an inferior, ordinary and deficient nurturing, whereas the nurturing provided by Allah, Most High, is a perfect nurturing; every particle of man stands in need of this nurturing every moment of his life.

But no revolution can be brought about in the world until man takes a lesson from the struggle of the horse. The fact is that man's reins should be in the hands of his Master, the Nourisher of the worlds, and whenever the Master gives the signal for the start of the struggle, it should start with such zest that, though his mind may feel anxiety over the struggle and it may repeatedly remind him of the danger of death and destruction, nay, even his relatives and friends may try to dissuade him from putting his life and honour on the line, yet in the face of the command of his Master he should not care a bit about such

dangers, advice and misgivings, and should continue his struggle despite all kinds of dangers and apprehensions. Then, in whatever direction his Master points him, he should go cheerfully, and if hardships and difficulties are encountered on the way, he should be totally oblivious to these. The difficulties should act as a spur for further increasing the intensity of the struggle. He should continue to advance with such force and power, trampling over the difficulties and ignoring the hardships, that the on-looker, who thought that these difficulties would break the feet of his struggle and put an end to them for good, should feel the firmness of his steps of fortitude and the sparks of his fire of faith, sparks that cannot be ignited without deep love and longing for Allah, Most High. The observer should be able to see how a true believer intensifies his struggle in the time of difficulties. Then, in the face of his Master's commands, there should be no thought as to whether the time is convenient or not. When the Master's command comes, he should cast off all thoughts of his own ease and comfort and all feelings of sleep and rest and should gear himself for action. Although the time may be an inopportune one, however much the inconvenience and hindrance offered by the circumstances, he should pass through every darkness, and not get tired nor feel worn out before he finds his destination.

Again, he should have such faith in the nurturing power of the Master that he should have no concern for the welfare of those he left behind. Here, when the soldiers of ordinary temporal kings get killed in battle, the government itself cares for the dependants of the deceased and honours them by granting pensions and land grants. So, for those who offer to sacrifice themselves while complying with the commands of a King like Allah, Most High, to have any misgivings and worries as to what would happen to their dependants is to show a great deficiency of trust in Allah. Therefore, it is essential that a true believer should have faith in the providential power of his Lord and should sacrifice his all - wealth, life, time, honour and reputation - in His Way, leaving behind such an unparalleled example of selfless sacrifice, struggle and exertion that the coming generations may take a lesson from the example that his struggle has left behind. And, though

he himself is not desirous of leaving behind his example, yet the law of nature is such that, in the course of time, it highlights the evidence of such a struggle.

As for the future, there should be no ambition for greatness or fame or name or rulership and rank, or comfort and luxury, or luxurious enjoyment. Nay, even if finally there is an order from the Master to accept death, and instead of comfort and ease and benefit there is an order to take on the burden of dangerous difficulties and hardships, he should accept those cheerfully and should not at that time begin to mutter, "What shall we gain after all this struggle?" Because in this entire struggle he does not have any benefit for his own self or person in view, but only obedience to his Lord is his aim. In other words, he starts on the way after sacrificing all he had and now in the end he sacrifices himself. This is the ultimate in obedience and gratefulness to one's Lord. It was only because the noble companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) transcended all the stages of this struggle that they could have brought about a revolution the like of which the world has never seen. Today, we, too, cannot bring about a spiritual revolution in the world until we pass through these five stages of struggle.

Allah, Most High warns: Ungrateful is he who shirks from going through these five stages of struggle in obedience to his Lord's commands. And He brings up an argument about this ungratefulness saying:

And surely he is a witness of that.

And truly on account of the love of wealth he is niggardly.

What a lovely argument has been given. Says the Lord: "Let no one bring up the excuse that the five stages of struggle that Thou hast mentioned are beyond our capacity and capability, so please do not burden us with work we cannot do."

He adds: This lover of wealth is quite used to covering these five stages with great eagerness and relish for the sake of wealth. Give

him money, show him money or tempt him with wealth, and he will at once bear the heaviest of burdens for its sake!

In short, he will bid farewell to all ease and comfort for the sake of money, and will be quite prepared to do anything for it. But why? Because he loves wealth and loves it intensely. That is why he is always ready to make every sacrifice for its sake and goes through the five stages of struggle with such eagerness and relish as if he gets a feeling of ecstasy in the process of the struggle itself. As long as the money keeps coming, a man will work from dawn till dusk and again from dusk till dawn, and no fatigue will slow him down. He does not care about eating, drinking and sleeping, but to him these are of no consequence.

Anyway, what is the secret underlying the love for wealth and getting enjoyment out of the struggle for it? It is nothing else but that man knows that wealth supports him and fulfils his needs: that is why it is so dear to him. So it stands proven that in reality it is the nurturing power of wealth that has made it so beloved to man. But a wise man can appreciate that the real Nurturer is Allah, the Most High, and wealth is only one means of support. How often it happens that wealth is there, yet a man's life is lost and his honour destroyed. He may be rolling in wealth and enjoying all sorts of lavish bounties, yet if he is a victim of diabetes or is suffering from any other such illness, he cannot enjoy his luxuries. He may possess wealth but has no offspring, or his most beloved family member may die and thus his life becomes bitter. His wealth is still there but he is powerless. A man's honour may be lost due to the misdeeds of a family member or the misdemeanour of a relative. And often a man, despite all his wealth and affluence, may not enjoy the respect that is given even to a beggar.

In short, wealth cannot provide a comprehensive nurturing; it is just one means out of many means of nurturing. Thus, the real source of comprehensive nurturing is the Nourisher of the worlds Himself, Whose nurturing is real and all-encompassing. So, how foolish it is for one to go cheerfully through all the stages of struggle for the sake

of attaining a single means of nurturing, yet for going through even one of those for the sake of the True Nurturer one raises a lot of objections and offers numerous excuses!

Thus, the testimony of man against himself contained in the verse, *Verily he is a witness over it*, is only this, that he loves wealth, which is only one means of nourishment, and this love is given to the deficient nurturing that one gets through wealth. Therefore, there is no reason why one should not love the real Nurturer, Who is a manifestation of all-embracing nurturing, more than one loves wealth. If nurturing is to be the cause of love, then the love for the real Nurturer should be far greater than love for wealth. And whatever sacrifice is made for His sake, and whatever toil and struggle one has to carry out in obedience to his Lord should be far more than one does for wealth. Yet, on the contrary, if man has to perform a struggle in obedience to his Lord, he starts to offer excuses and arguments, although for the sake of wealth he is prepared to bear everything. So, what can be said of him except that he is utterly ungrateful to his Lord?

Allah, Most High, then admonishes man thus:

*Knows he not when that which is in the graves is raised,
And that which is the breasts is made manifest?
Surely their Lord this day is Aware of them.*

How well has it been put! Allah, Most High, says that the very wealth, for the love of which a man bears such toil and hardship and makes so many sacrifices, will remain behind in the world and he himself will be put in a grave. After death, that wealth will be of no avail. On the other hand, the life that comes after death is a life that is real and eternal. On the Day of Resurrection, all the secrets that lie buried in the graves will become manifest and the intentions and resolutions that lie hidden in the breasts or the hearts will also come to light. On that day, it will be realised that the body for whose nurturing one had struggled so hard to acquire wealth had become rotten in the grave, and the real thing that was to endure was the thing that was in the

breast, that is, the love of Allah and the yearning for winning His pleasure and the effects of deeds that leave an impression on the heart and are the building blocks for the new life. On that day it will be realised how well their Lord, to Whom they had been so ungrateful, was aware of their intentions and the secrets of their hearts. On that day, no excuse, no machination and no pretence will work with their Lord, because no secret of the heart is hidden from Him. But certainly the veil that covers a man's eyes today will be lifted on that day and the manifestation of the glory of Allah's attribute, *Al-Khabir* (the All-Knowing), will be so complete that every man will come to know that no word or deed of his is hidden from this attribute of Allah. That is why the judgement delivered by Allah, Most High, on that day will be correct and perfect. The recompense for good and for evil will be exactly according to the demands of justice, because only perfect knowledge can deliver perfect justice.

Thus, the one with his heart full of love for money and the one with his heart overflowing with the love of Allah will not be equal on that day. Whosoever trusted in the nurturing power of wealth and filled his heart with its love will discover that that wealth will not be present there to provide nourishment on that day. However, whosoever trusted in the beneficent providence of Allah, Most High, and filled his heart with His love, will find that love visible there on that day, and Allah's perfect nurturing will also be present there, a nurturing that had been made beloved by Him, and without which every life will become a source of torment on that day.

Look at the life of this world: people save money in the bank during their working years so that it will come in handy in the latter part of life, and if there is not enough savings they live in constant fear of adversity. But however much this money may be, it remains behind in this world because its deficient nurturing is only limited to this world. After death, the money in the bank is of no avail. But whosoever has his trust in the perfect nurturing power of Allah, Most High, and in obedience to Him he saves the wealth of good deeds in the treasury of the Lord, such wealth shall come in useful after death. In other words,

money is a means of nurturing, yet it is a means of nurturing this body only, a body that shall meet annihilation in the grave, and also its nurturing is limited to this world alone. However, the good deeds that a man does in obedience to his Lord and the struggle and sacrifices he makes are also means of nurturing, but this nurturing is for that life of man which is at present hidden in the breasts. But a day will come when these secrets will be exposed and whatever is hidden in the breasts will come out. On that day, this means of nurturing will be of great avail to man and will remain with him forever, and will be the cause of his elevation to the greatest heights in the Hereafter and his enjoying a life that is real and eternal.

Remember, that just as a man has to go through the five above-mentioned stages of struggle for bringing about a great revolution in the world, similarly, he has to go through these very five stages of struggle to bring about a great change in his inner self, and these are:

1. To put one's person into great toil in obedience to Allah's commands and despite the reluctance and excuses put up by one's evil self, not to give up the compulsory duties like prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, *zakah* (charity), and *jihad* (struggle) with the Qur'an and with the sword; and not to dread any sacrifice in showing affectionate concern for one's fellow-men.
2. To disregard the difficulties of the journey, and whether in sickness or in health, to advance and never turn back.
3. To remain awake during a part of the night for worship and for service to Allah's creatures, and even in the most testing moments, never to abandon one's sublime principles.
4. To display perfect trust in the nurturing power of Allah, Most High, and not to worry unduly about one's dependants in times when one is called upon to make sacrifices and show selflessness.
5. Not to have as the goal of one's sacrifices the procurement of indulgence and comfort, or name and fame, or

prestige and authority, but to be ready to accept death for attaining the pleasure of the Lord and to accept it willingly, if need be, as a testimony of one's sincerity, love, obedience and gratitude in the way of Allah.

The self of such a person then undergoes such a change that he becomes heir to a new kind of life, and by getting annihilated in the love of Allah, Most High, he, himself, becomes a beloved of Allah.

CHAPTER 101

AL-QARI'AH (THE CALAMITY)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

The calamity!

What is the calamity?

And what will make thee know how terrible is the calamity?

The day wherein men will be as scattered moths,

And the mountains will be as carded wool.

Then as for him whose measure (of good deeds) is heavy,

He will live a pleasant life.

And for him whose measure (of good deeds) is light,

The abyss is a mother for him.

And what will make thee know what it is?

A burning Fire.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 الْقَارِعَةُ
 مَا الْقَارِعَةُ
 وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ
 يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَارِسِ الْمُبْتَرِئَةِ
 وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ
 فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ
 فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ
 وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ
 فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ
 وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَةٌ
 نَارٌ كَامِتَةٌ

This chapter was revealed at Makkah.

The plight the non-believers was going to suffer after the triumph of the great revolution caused through Islam, a revolution that was mentioned in chapter 99, *Al-Zilzal* (The Shaking), and the directions for the struggle to attain which were given in chapter *Al-'Adiyat*, has been portrayed in this chapter, *Al-Qari'ah* (The Calamity). What has been portrayed in this chapter is the sad debacle that would overtake the non-believers at that time: they would be like the moths who burnt their wings by attacking the torch of Islam, and who were then crawling on the ground because of their disgrace, weakness and helplessness. Says Allah, Most High:

The calamity!

What is the calamity?

And what will make thee know how terrible is the calamity?

This is a type of address that is intended to show great emphasis and to highlight the importance of an affair. The root meaning of *Al-Qari'ah* is *something that knocks*, and idiomatically, it is used for a severe calamity, or is also applied to a battle. The Day of Resurrection is also called *Al-Qari'ah*. It has also been stated earlier that there are many names that have been given to the Day of Resurrection. For instance, *Al Qiyamah* (The Resurrection), *Al-Akhirah* (The End), *As-Sa'ah* (The Hour), *Al-Haqqah* (The Sure Truth), *At-Tammah* (The Calamity), *As-Sakhatah* (The Sudden Cry), *Al-Azifah* (The Near Event), *Al-Qari'ah* (The Calamity), etc. The name used in a particular situation carries a special significance of that name. The intention is to highlight a particular sign of the Day of Resurrection to which the dictionary meaning of the word used alludes. Here, also, the name *Al Qari'ah* has been used for the Day of Resurrection, but here, there is a special significance to it, and that is, we should not consider that day, the Day of Resurrection, when a great upheaval shall overtake the world and the good shall be recompensed with goodness and the evil with evil, as being far off; the day is close by, knocking at our door. The fact is that when a thing is knocking at the door, no doubt remains about its existence and its nearness. The meaning is that a sample of such an upheaval is about to come before the people in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) when the virtuous will be honoured and the evil disgraced. Hence, the final Day of Resurrection is not far off. Nay, it is knocking at the door and a small picture of this major resurrection is about to be unfolded, an upheaval in which the opponents and the non-believers will be humiliated, and this abasement is portrayed thus:

*The day wherein men will be as scattered moths,
And the mountains will be as carded wool.*

Only Allah, Most High, has complete knowledge of the special glory in which the scenario of the final Day of Resurrection will unfold, but the minor upheaval that has been alluded to above was going to manifest itself shortly. Indeed, the grand manner in which this upheaval took place in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) leaves

no room for any doubt and suspicion about the final Day of Resurrection.

Allah, Most High, says: The wings of those who are attacking the light of the torch of Islam will be burnt off by this Divine torch just as the wings of the moths are burnt by worldly lamps and they are seen crawling around on the ground in a state of great weakness, frailty, disgrace and helplessness.

Let those who are the subject of the verse: *They desire to extinguish the Light of Allah with their mouths but Allah is going to perfect His light though the unbelievers might be averse* (61:8), learn that by attacking this light nothing will happen to it. What will happen is that their wings - all means and powers by relying on which they are opposing Islam - will be burnt, and the outcome will be that they will reach such a state of disgrace, helplessness, weakness and forlornness, like the wingless moths crawling on the ground, that anyone who so desires can easily crush them under his feet. And let them know that all the mountains of difficulties that are obstacles in the path of Islam's progress will fly off like carded wool. The chieftains of Arabia used to refer to themselves as *jibal* (hills) and the idea was to proclaim their own greatness and importance. The meaning here, also, is that all the major personalities and leaders of the non-believers will be so completely destroyed and wiped out as if they were wool that has been scattered by carding.

In short, a very fine sketch of the disgrace, helplessness and destruction that was about to overtake the non-believers in the coming grand upheaval has been portrayed, an upheaval that was knocking at their doors. And the later events put a stamp on the truthfulness of this prophecy, word for word.

In fact, this sorry plight of the non-believers was displayed to the world exactly as prophesied in the very lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and the virtuous were so clearly rewarded with a goodly reward, and the evil ones with an evil recompense, that no

room for doubt or suspicion remained concerning the law of just returns for one's deeds.

*Then as for him whose measure (of good deeds) is heavy,
He will live a pleasant life.*

*And for him whose measure (of good deeds) is light,
The abyss is a mother for him.*

And what will make thee know what it is?

A burning Fire.

After having argued thus for the certainty of the Day of Resurrection, Allah, Most High, now admonishes us that we should be careful of the outcome of our deeds, for in this lies the bliss and happiness, or torment and grief, of the next life. The increase in the weight of the good deeds will bring about a life of bliss, and the increase in the weight of evil deeds will bring about a life of distress and torment. That is, if the good deeds of a person outweigh the evil deeds, in other words, if the good part dominates the evil part, his coming life will be a life of bliss which is called the Garden or Paradise. In other words, what is paradise but a life of happiness and bliss that will be vouchsafed to man in the Hereafter? And it will be the outcome of good deeds, but on the condition that the good deeds should outweigh the evil deeds and the good should dominate the evil part.

Unfortunately, our religious scholars have taken the weight of the deeds to be like the weight of something solid, like wood, and have painted a strange picture as if a big scale, like the one on which fuelwood is weighed, will be set up on the Day of Resurrection, although it is plain common-sense that the type of balance used is always pertinent to the thing that is weighed: for weighing heavy things we use a scale; for gold and silver a balance; for finding out the weight of water a different method of calculation is used; for measuring air pressure we use a barometer, which is quite another type of measuring instrument, and for measuring the temperature there is another instrument called the thermometer. For electricity measurements we use the voltmeter etc. which, again, is a distinct type of instrument,

and the reckoning and totalling of the sums in mathematics take on quite another form.

So, it is obvious that for deeds, which are not solid, the balance used for measuring these certainly cannot be like the balance used for material things. Rather, the method of assessing their worth will be quite distinct and appropriate, the detailed knowledge of which is no doubt with Allah, Most High. The weighing of deeds is something certain and essential because the bliss or grief of the next life depends upon it, but to consider it something akin to the weighing scale used for fuel-wood is a mistake. Only Allah, Most High, can know its specifics, but from the *Hadith* it seems to be something like a numerical and mathematical computation. As the Holy Prophet (*sas*) says: "Most unfortunate is the person whose units exceed his tens." In other words, the evil deeds a man does are written down in ones and his good deeds are written in tens. In fact, the Holy Qur'an says: *Whoever brings a good deed will have tenfold like it, and whoever brings an evil deed shall be recompensed only with a like of it* (6:161).

So, a misdeed of a man is written down as one and his good deed is written down tenfold. Therefore, if someone's misdeeds should outnumber his good deeds, that is, the weight of the evil deeds outweighs the weight of the good deeds, who could be more unfortunate than such a person?

In the case of a person whose good deeds are lighter than the evil deeds, that is, the evil part dominating the good part, the abode of such a person shall be the *hawiyah* (abyss). The word *hawiyah* is applied to a fathomless pit and the significance here is hell. In naming it *hawiyah*, there is a special hint in view which is that the root word of *hawiyah* is *hawa*, which means carnal desires, or paying no heed to one's reasoning and intellectual faculties. Thus, the allusion here is to the fact that the abode of the *hawiyah* is the result of one's indulging in *hawa-o-hawas* (lust and sensuality). This abyss has no bottom as the lust and sensuality of man have no end, and his sense and reason desert him during an arousal of passion. For instance, a man may

commit such indecent and disgusting things during a bout of covetousness or sexual arousal, or anger or jealousy, that afterwards, when he regains his senses he feels ashamed when he remembers them. This pit, so to say, has no bottom and one continues to fall into it endlessly.

Thus, as there is no end to the depth of the abyss called *hawiyah*, so, too, there is no end to the lust and covetousness of man. Calling it an *umm* (mother) is for the reason that just as a mother takes her baby in her arms, so will this abyss take the person into its embrace. In this world, a man is wont to play happily in the arms of lust and covetousness, day and night, like a baby in its mother's arms, so at the time of reckoning if the same pit of lust and covetousness is seen embracing the man like a mother, it will be entirely according to the demands of just requital for one's actions. On the Day of Resurrection, the actual reality of the lap of the so-called mother will become apparent.

What is the *hawiyah*, which a man considered as his mother's lap in his worldly life and kept on with his merrymaking? It is nothing but a flaming fire, a fire of desires and passions and sensuality and covetousness. Anyone who falls into this fire in this world keeps sinking down and down and never enjoys the coolness of tranquillity nor peace of mind and satisfaction, so, if in the Hereafter a man finds himself in the lap of fire, it is nothing to be surprised at. The only difference is one of perception: in the Hereafter the perception shall be very sharp and incisive.

The word *ummuhu* (his mother) contains the subtle allusion also that though it is a pit of fire, and the lap is a lap of fire, yet, just as a mother always remains a well-wisher of her baby, though for his reformation she may have to beat him at times, similarly, the purpose underlying the burning by fire is also the reformation of man. No doubt he will be undergoing burning by the fire of desires which he, himself, lit, but the purpose will be that the virus of sensuality and covetousness should be killed and the dirt of desires and passions be burnt to ashes, and so that this fire, lighted by the man, himself, should be extinguished forever after burning off all the evil emotional impulses, so that he might

find deliverance from chastisement. If the firewood for lighting a fire is burnt out, then no fire can be lit. Similarly, when those passions and desires that have been the cause of intensifying the fire feel the burning pain of fire and undergo chastisement then they shall be extinguished forever.

In this world also, when a man gets punished for his wrongdoing, he often comes to his senses and regrets his misdeeds and repents. But since the various punishments of this world do not have the full reformation of the culprit in view, it is quite possible that a man may not be reformed by them. But the chastisement of the Hereafter, because of its comprehensive reforming character, will bring about a full reformation. Like fire, it will burn off every motive for evil and this is the purpose of hell, to burn off all motives for evil in man so that he will be thoroughly reformed.