

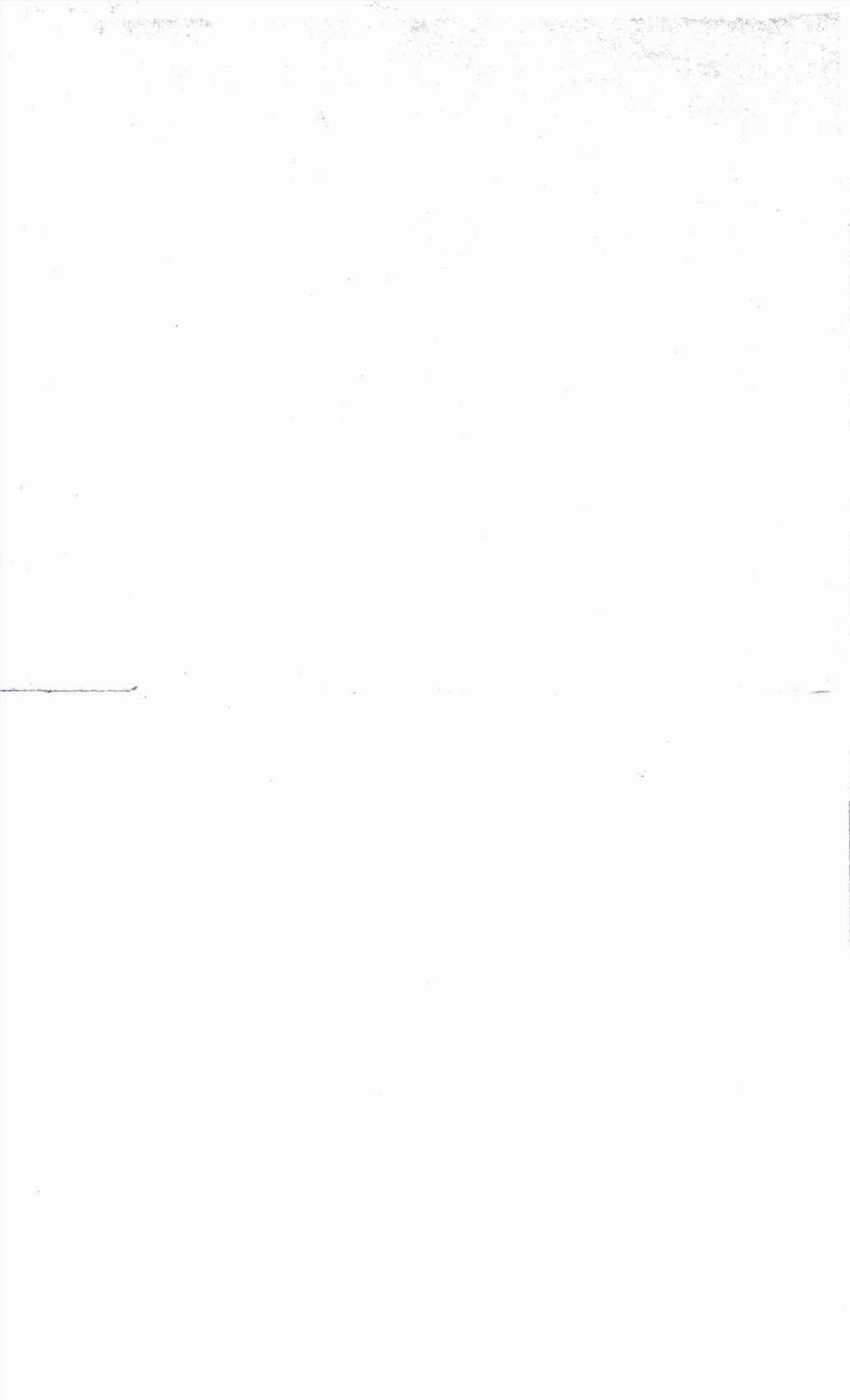
BEAMS OF
ILLUMINATION
FROM THE
DIVINE
REVELATION

Juz' Amma

The last section
of the Qur'an

الْمُطَفِّفَاتِ
الْمُتَمِّمَاتِ
الْمُتَمِّمَاتِ
الْمُتَمِّمَاتِ

Tafsir by
Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



Immat-e-Subhan

Al-Fahed

Al-Kamal-Asma-c-Elati



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INTRODUCTION

As part of the Zahra Publications series of commentaries on the Qur'an, we present *Beams of Illumination from the Divine Revelation*, a commentary on the last part (*juz'*) of the Qur'an. Juz' 'Amma begins with Surat an-Naba and ends with Surat an-Nas, and it contains the greatest number of surahs (37) of any *juz'*. Except for a few ayats which were revealed later in Medina, these surahs were revealed in Mecca and contain some of the earliest revelations.

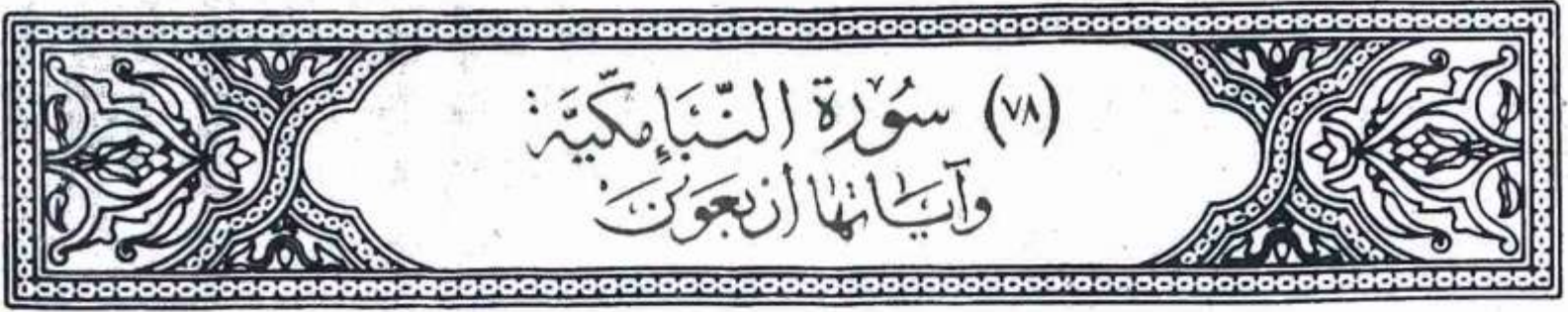
These early surahs are concerned primarily with the aspects of *ḥaqīqah* (the inner reality of creation), the outer reality, the laws governing existence, the destruction of this world, and the Next Life. They are extremely potent and served as the fuel of the early Islamic movement which burst forth, first in Mecca and later in Medina.

Following the pattern of the previous volumes in this series, the specific reasons for these revelations and the historical context in which they descended will not be discussed at length, for these points are well covered and documented in many other available commentaries.

The volumes in this series are based on the teachings provided at the American Institute of Qur'anic Studies in San Antonio, Texas. Their main goal is to bring out the immediate efficacy of the Qur'an in purification of the self and in the unfolding of higher qualities within the individual, after which one can then wholeheartedly follow the *sharī'ah* and accept the divine laws by which a just and humane society can be established upon this earth.

The roots of key Arabic words are examined and discussed, thus enabling the student to derive the full benefit of the original language of the Qur'an and its unparalleled ability to communicate what is most difficult to transmit by words. At their root levels, Arabic words have many different meanings, and these meanings are sometimes the opposite of each other. This aspect of the Arabic language reflects a very important dimension of the ancient Arabic culture, a dimension which enabled the Arabs to be extremely sensitive to their environment and therefore susceptible to the message of *tawḥīd* (divine unity). Although the Arabs were worldly, their language and ecology were well-suited to describing and communicating the unworldly and the Divine.

These revelations offer support and help for the true seeker in his passage through life. To remember these surahs in times of difficulty, uncertainty, weakness, or doubt is to gain considerable strength, because one is reminded of the Ever-Witnessing, the All-Seeing, the Ever-Present – the Creator, Allah, *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*.



SURAT AN-NABA'

THE NEWS

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُوْنَ

- 1 Of what do they ask one another?

عَنِ النَّبَاِ الْعَظِيْمِ

- 2 About the awesome news,

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيْهِ مُخْتَلِفُوْنَ

- 3 Of which they differ?

'Amma (عَم) is an abbreviation of 'an mādhā (عَنْ مَاذَا), which means "about what?" What is it that causes them to ask? This

is an early Meccan surah. All those who denied the truth, the *kuffār* (كفار ; those who cover up, who are ungrateful), that is, those who objected to the message of the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣallā-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam* (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم , peace and blessing be upon him and his family), those who could not bear the light of the message or could not comprehend the depth of it, those who could not yield themselves to the meaning of *tawḥīd* (توحيد ; divine unity), those who considered the life of this world to be the only one and who believed that there would be nothing after it — those deniers would naturally deny the ultimate, final event, object to it, and question it.

What is it that impels them to ask? The fact that they are able to ask is due to the spark of life in them, and where there is life there must also be death, for in this existence everything has its opposite. By reflecting on this fact, one can see that since life and death exist in this consciousness, then it is likely that there is life in another form at another level of consciousness, or life after death, which will be inaugurated by the Day of Rising. Therefore, how dare they question this fact? The absolute, undebatable fact is that whatever has begun will come to an end. Upon further thought, it is obvious that He Who brought this creation into being can easily bring into being its mirror image as well.

In the total picture of existence, the subtle aspects of this life will be the manifest aspects of the next life, and the gross aspects of this life will appear as only subsidiary or lesser manifestations; for example, the shape of the body, which is of primary importance now, will be only subsidiary in the next experience. The fact that the *kuffār* question the next life is proof of their uncertainty and confusion. On the other hand, the *mu’min* (مؤمن ; the believer, he who trusts), has complete certainty about his next abode.

Nabā’ (نبأ) means “news, tidings, information, announcement,” here referring to the news about the end of this creation. Those who deny the message of reality as expounded by the Book of *tawḥīd*, the Qur’an, wonder about the end and assume that the end of this experience will be the end of all experiences. They question it because they are in disagreement among themselves and have no idea at all about its nature. They imagine that they can escape the tribulations and turmoil of the last day in one way or another. They do not recognize that on that day Allah’s justice will be definitive and absolute, and that all they will bring with them will be their own actions.

Man thinks he can overcome the laws that govern existence in this life. He thinks he can escape the fact that his ultimate reward

is given only according to his actions which, in turn, stem from his intentions. His life in the next level of consciousness will be based upon his actions and intentions; he will be re-created according to the overall makeup of his actions and intentions at the point of his departure from this life.

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

4 Nay, they will come to know.

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

5 Again, Nay, they will come to know!

Kallā (كَلَّا) is a rebuke, a positive reprimand to those who differ. Each person will, through his death, experience the end of creation as far as his own life is concerned and will later also experience the end of the entire creation and resurrection. The lesser death, the lesser *qiyāmah* (قِيَامَة), is the death of the person, of the microcosm. At that point those who deny will have no doubt about the news, the tremendous event, which is the end of this existence.

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهَادًا

6 Have We not made the earth an even expanse,

وَأُجْبَالًا أَوْتَادًا

7 And the mountains as supports?

The *āyāt* (آيات ; signs, Qur'anic verses, plural of *āyah*; we will continue to use the Anglicized plural, ayats, in the remainder of the text) from six to sixteen constitute a single meaning. Allah is presenting the proof to us of the perfection of creation and its cyclical nature. Is the earth not made expansive for our ease of movement and so that we may gain a livelihood, and are the mountains not its support? Gravitationally and geologically, mountains are like pillars sunk deeply and connected tectonically, holding the thin crust of the earth together so that we have a semblance of security and stability.

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا

8 And We have created you in pairs,

This refers to the pairs of human beings, male and female, man and wife, and the doubles or opposites in every other aspect of creation such as good and bad, healthy and unhealthy, the lower *nafs* (نفس ; the self) and the higher *nafs*. It refers to all the opposites and pairs throughout creation.

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا

9 And We have made your sleep as a rest,

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا

10 And We have made the night as a covering,

The root of *subāt* (سُبَات) is *sabata* (سَبَتَ), which means "to hibernate, to rest, to stop action." *Sabt* (سَبْت) means "Saturday, the Sabbath," the day when the Jews were not supposed to fish or do any work in the worldly sense. The Sabbath was called *sabt*, meaning that all outer action was forbidden so that the people might replenish themselves inwardly. *Subāt* is "hibernation, repose," and that is what sleep is, a kind of death. Sleep actually re-creates one's

vitality, serves to recenter one after the troubles of the day, and allows one's physical ecology to realign itself.

The night is *libās* (لباس), from *labisa* (لبس), which means "to slip something over something, to cloak something, to dress." *Libās* refers to whatever we are wearing, to clothing. Here it describes how the night engulfs us, comes over us like a cloak and hides us.

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا

11 And We have made the day for seeking livelihood,

Ma'āsh (معاش) comes from *'āsha* (عاش), which means "to live, to be alive." *Ma'āsh* means "a way of living or lifestyle," and also "livelihood, income." The day is the time for outer action because then there is light. Then by the law of opposites, when there is no light, as at night, it is the time for inward delight.

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شَدِيدًا

12 And We have built above you seven strong (ones),

Sab'an shidādan (سبعا شدادا) means "the seven heavens." *Shidād* (شداد) is the plural of *shadīd* (شديد), which means "strong," from the root *shadda* (شد), which means "to be firm, solid, strong, fortified," and "to saddle." This means that the heavens are firmly interlinked and intertwined. There are seven layers of higher physical realities, but it is only the lowest one of these which we can discern, the one wherein the stars exist which we can see and measure.

Banā (بنى) means "to construct, to erect, to build, to set up." The heavens are held together and constructed by subtle forces and powers. The physical parts of the heavens above are in a way less

significant than the myriad unseen forces which hold them in balance during their course of expansion.

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا

13 And We have made a blazing lamp,

This is a description of the sun, depicted, as it often is, as *sirāj wahhāj* (سراج وهَّاج ; a blazing lamp). The light of the moon is described in the Qur'an as *nūr* (نور), which means "light, ray of light, a lamp." *Wahhāj* (وهَّاج) means "blazing, incandescent, white-hot, bursting forth in flames, brilliant." The nature of the sun is to emanate light, whereas the nature of the moon is to reflect light.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا

14 And We have sent down from the rain-clouds water flowing copiously,

Mu'sirāt (معصرات) is from *'aşara* (عَصَرَ), which means "to squeeze, to press out." *'Aşir* (عَصِير) means "juice." *Mu'sirāt* are clouds from which rain will descend, pressed out like juice. *Mā'an thajjājān* (ماءٌ ثَجَّاجًا) means "water, rain," which pours down abundantly.

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا

15 That We may bring forth by it grain and plants,

وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا

16 And gardens of thick foliage.

Through the agitation that is caused by the rain's descent and the earth's throbbing, the grain and the new plants spring forth and the gardens that are folded up within themselves open out and produce thick foliage.

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا

17 Surely the Day of Decision is an appointed time —

Then there is a sudden shift. The day of division and segregation is the Day of Reckoning, the day of clarity, when everything is clearly apportioned and put where it belongs, the good with the good and the bad with the bad. On this day there will be no uncertainties. Specifically, *yawm al-faṣl* (**يوم الفصل**) means “the Day of Resurrection.” *Faṣala* (**فصل**) means “to separate, to segregate, to clearly distinguish between opposites.” It denotes complete discrimination with no possibility of doubt, no gray areas. *Faṣala* also means “to wean,” because the act of weaning separates a baby from its mother. *Fayṣal* (**فيصل**) means both “a judge” and “a dividing sword.” This form of the word also means “decisive criterion, arbitrator.”

This ayah implies that today is not *yawm al-faṣl*, but rather, today is a day of confusion when we do not know whether something is right or wrong or whether we are truly in *īmān* (**إيمان** ; faith, trust, belief). At best, there is some wisdom in this day, and there is at least an attempt to discriminate by *dhikr* (**ذكر** ; remembrance of Allah). But on that day, after death, there will be no possibility of confusion. The people of the Fire will be in the Fire, the people of the Garden will be in the Garden, and everything will be seen clearly through the eye of a just Creator.

Mīqātān (**مِيقَاتَا**) comes from *waqt* (**وقت**), which means “a fixed time, an appointed time, deadline,” or “meeting point.” We will all meet on the Day of Appointment which is also

called the Day of Gathering, when everyone will be gathered together for the final reckoning.

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا

18 The Day when the trumpet is blown you will come forth in groups,

This refers to the Day when Esrafil will blow into the horn of light to extinguish all other lights except the one and only Light. On that day there will be no other way of seeing things except by the pure Light of Allah, and the second sounding of the trumpet will be heard, signalling the Resurrection. There will be nothing other than the Light of the Creator, and no interference can take place. Nations will rise with all the tribes, families, and households, and they will come in groups. They will come in waves and according to a rhythm, and within these groups will be souls who have led them — prophets and messengers. The Qur'an says that that Day, according to the measure of Allah, will be 50,000 years of our normal reckoning. The closer one is to Allah, the Timeless, the clearer becomes the relativity of time. An instant of Allah's time could be nearly infinite for us.

وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا

19 And heaven will be opened, and be as doors,

And heaven will be opened up; none of the forces that now hold it together will be present any longer. There is space in which there are doors, and when the readjustment of all things comes about, all the energies of creation will slip through these doors which will open in heaven. Heaven will no longer be held together as one single structure (*binā'*; بناء), but will be subject to a new trend, which is its destruction, and will return to its original state, its annihilation in the Creator. It will be as though it were all moving backwards in time. There will no longer be seven strong layers; rather, they will have become channels.

وَسَيَّرَتِ الْجِبَالَ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا ط

20 And the mountains will be set in motion as if they were a mere mirage.

The mountains which now appear to us as solid will be made to move. The common translation of *sarāb* (سراب) is "mirage." Its root is *sariba* (سرب), which means to "slip away, slither away, to disappear before one's eyes, to slip away unnoticed." *Tasarraba al-mā'u fī'r-raml* (تَسَرَّبَ الْمَاءُ فِي الرَّمْلِ) means "the water found its way into the sand," that is, secretly.

The mountains will recede and disappear like a mirage. The closer one gets to a mirage, the further away it appears – it is elusive and always escapes us. This implies that there is another level of consciousness, that matter and energy will interchange and exchange. Mountains as such will not become a mirage, but they will be transformed. They will take a course that cannot be understood, a course that is secret, and the secret is that they will dissolve back into their subtle reality, back again into a subtler and subtler energy form, back to the nothingness from which they sprang.

The collapse of creation will be transformative and will be the reversal of creational processes. From nothingness came the subtlest matter, followed by the manifestation of gas, which then liquified and became molten. After it cooled and solidified, the water cycle started. Next came plants and the constant, creational cycle which we, in our lives, have been able to witness for a moment. Later, however, that process will be reversed, and step by step, manifestation will return to its source.

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا

21 Surely hell lies in wait.

Jahannam (جهنم) is one of the names used in the Qur'an to designate the opposite of *jannah* (جنة ; the Garden), and it means "hell." The word is connected to the root *jahuma* (جهم), which means "to frown," and *jahm* (جهم), which means "grim,

gloomy, sullen, morose." *Jahnīm* (جهنيم) means "a bottomless pit" that has no resting place, no place of stability, no peace. *Jahannam* is a name for this hellish state because it is man's nature to seek security as well as certain knowledge, and the worst uncertainty that a man can experience is being flung into a bottomless pit to flounder helplessly forever.

Mirṣād (مرصاد) means "an ambush," from *raṣada* (رصد), which means "to watch something intently," as a cat watches a mouse waiting in ambush for it at the mousehole. *Mirṣād*, in modern Arabic, means "telescope," for by the use of a telescope we ambush a star, corner it in our field of vision. Thus this ayah is saying that the bottomless pit, that state which will cause us trouble, is in fact looking for us, scanning the landscape to catch those who qualify in its "field of vision."

لِلطَّٰغِيْنَ مَآبًا

22 A place of return for the transgressors,

Ṭaghā (طغى) means "to transgress, to go beyond the boundaries." Every system has a boundary. If in our system we do not keep within the bounds, we will eventually be destroyed. *Jahannam*, the final stage, perpetual bottomlessness, is the state to which *aṭ-ṭāghīn* (الطَّٰغِيْنَ ; those who transgress) will return. This implies that they were in *Jahannam* already, that they were already on their way towards that final abode in this life. By their wrong actions and intentions, they were moving into the field of fire and confusion.

The Qur'an defines the ultimate Fire as the *nār al-kubrā* (النار الكبرى ; the great Fire, the permanent one). The implication is that small fires are the ones we taste in this existence because of our ignorance and injustice. Many other ayat tell us that the man who has transgressed is already in a mini-*Jahannam* within this realm of existence. He may not be aware of it himself, but he is fueling it with his anger, insecurity and hate. If a person can truly reflect upon his state, he will see that he is moving towards the state either of *Jahannam* or of *Jannah*. The ayah says: *Li'ṭ-ṭāghīna ma'āban*. They return to *Jahannam* in the next experience as if taking refuge in it. The same is true of *ahl al-jannah* (أهل الجنة ; the people of *Jannah*). The Qur'an tells us that when they find themselves in the

Garden in the next life, they will say, "We remember this!" This means that they have already experienced aspects of the Garden.

In this life we are preparing for the state or condition that will engulf us in the next consciousness. The next life, therefore, is the fruition and continuum of our state in this life and is the outcome of our intentions and actions at the point of death.

لَا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهَا أَحَدًا

23 Living in it for ages.

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا

24 They will not taste in it any coolness or drink,

الْأَجْمِمْ وَأَغْشَاءًا

25 But boiling water and a paralyzing cold,

People whose intentions and actions have not been unified, who have lived a life of disconnectedness and dispersion, end up in extreme agitation and conditions not conducive to peace and centeredness. They will remain in *Jahannam* for ages because the next consciousness is in a timeless zone and seems to go on forever.

The condition of *Jahannam* is extreme heat and cold and agitation; it is a perpetual fall, neither life nor death, the opposite of the love of connectedness, fusion, and certainty ingrained in man's spirit. If a soul has lived a life of confusion, then its natural progression will be to an abode wherein that dreadful state reaches its perfection. The same is true for a soul that has lived in harmony: its natural progression is toward the Garden. This life and the next are not disconnected, but rather, they form a continuum; what differs is the level of conscious-

ness and the clarity and purity of experience. This can be illustrated by the example of a dreamer who, upon awakening from dreadful nightmares, sees clearly pure dreadfulness, or a dreamer who, upon awakening from joyful, satisfying dreams, finds himself in an absolute, joyful reality.

جَزَاءٌ وِفَاقًا

26 A fitting recompense.

This is the appropriate reaction to a life of covering-up and the appropriate reward, *jazā'* (جَزَاءٌ), which means "outcome, reward, recompense." This is the perfect end corresponding to that which came before. Allah's creation and decree are in perfect harmony.

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا

27 Surely, they did not anticipate an account,

Those people, those nations, expected neither a final account nor a reaction to their actions, nor did they think that they would ultimately meet the reflection of what they had themselves created by their actions and their thoughts.

وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كَذِبًا

28 And they called Our signs lies with strong denial.

And they denied. *Kadhaba* (كَذَبَ) means "to lie." *Kadhhaba* (كَذَّبَ) means "to accuse someone else of lying" or "to deny." This means they have denied the truth which is within themselves, the truth of the news that Allah is the One Lord, that the creation's

purpose is *tawhīd* (divine unity), and that the *nubūwah* (نبوة ; the prophecy) and the *risālah* (رسالة ; the message) speak of the necessity of acceptance of *tawhīd*. By denying this, they have deluded themselves.

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا

29 And We have recorded everything in a Book.

Everything in this existence is gathered in the one and only Book that contains everything. Everything *is* the Book, and the Book contains everything. All creation is contained therein and everything in existence is interconnected and ultimately brought to its conclusion from one point. Nothing is separate. Those who transgress against themselves have denied all this, yet everything has been considered and is included in the Book of reality, the Book of manifestation, the comprehensive Book of *qaḍā' wa qadar* (قضاء وقدر ; fate and divine decree). The Qur'an is the clear manifestation of that Book.

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا

30 So taste! For We shall not add to you anything but punishment.

“So taste!” means “connect!” We will taste, in the sense of knowing fully what our intention was. He who has denied, therefore, will be denied. If he denies that there is only oneness, that he has come into existence by the grace of that oneness, that through oneness man is sustained, and to this oneness he will return; and if he denies the fact that there were prophets and messengers who confirmed this truth leaving behind the document, the song itself, in the form of the *kitāb* (كتاب ; the book), then he is in dispersion, separation, and delusion. It will be these which he will fully taste in the hereafter. He is blind now and moreover refuses to be conscious of his blindness, but in the next consciousness he will live only in his blindness.

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا

31 Surely, for those who have fearful awareness
is achievement,

The *muttaqīn* (**مُتَّقِينَ**) guard themselves and are fearfully aware of the boundaries. They live as if between two sheer cliffs in terms of what lies beyond those boundaries, and thus move straight. *Īmān* (faith, belief, trust), enhances *taqwa* (**تَقْوَى** ; fearful awareness – of exceeding the boundaries, thereby causing harm to oneself).

حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا

32 Enclosed gardens and vineyards,

وَكَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا

33 And companions with freshness of youth,
equal in age,

Here the argument of the surah comes down to the level of our understanding, our human needs, and our expectations in this world. Our expectations are lush gardens and companions who are compatible, compassionate, of the right age and who give us solace. *Kawā'iba atrāban* (**كَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا**) means “women,” or “companions of the appropriate age,” of the appropriate understanding.

وَكَأْسًا مَدِينًا

34 And a full cup.

Their cups are full: thus there is no need, no anxiety. Desires and expectations are completely neutralized.

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا

35 They will not hear in it any foolish chatter or falsehood,

Laghw (لغو) means “foolish talk, nonsense, ineffectual, null.” *Laghā* (لفي) means “to speak, to be null, to cancel.” *Lughah* (لغة) means “language.” When a person speaks, he nullifies and cancels out the silence; the energy of linguistic communication by its very grossness overrides what was there before, that is, the world of silence. The condition described here is a very high state of the Garden; there is no distraction or break in a most sublime and tranquil consciousness of peace.

جَزَاءً مِنْ رَبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا

36 A reward from your Lord, a gift according to a reckoning.

This is the reward and natural outcome. *Rabb* (رَبِّ) means “Lord, Sustainer,” the attribute that brings our growth in knowledge to its full potential and causes us to realize that in this life we will be rewarded according to our actions and intentions, and in the next life we will also be re-created according to our actions and intentions. This process of action and reaction is in perfect balance, and it comes about according to a just measure. This balance is so intricate that it encompasses both meaning and form; for example, a physical action in this world may have its reward at the mental or intellectual level, or in the same way a good intention may result in a physical reward.

رَبِّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَنِ لَا
يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا

37 The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, the All-Merciful, they are not able to address Him.

Here Allah refers to Himself as the Lord of the heavens and the earth. The Sustainer of the heavens, of all that is in the heavens, is the Container and Holder of the forces in the heavens, of all that is on earth, and of the interspace between them. It specifies the interspace between different systems and emphasizes the fact that physical and energy subsystems, obeying the laws of measurement and predictability, are bonded together by another aspect of reality. What governs the earthly realm is often discernable and measurable. What governs celestial entities is also reasonably measurable by human beings because these two systems are not separate. That no-man's land, the interspace, whose nature may escape us when we shift our attention from Newtonian physics to quantum mechanics, is under the same Lordship. In our modern world, in so-called "science," we have studied various systems and have found laws that are not applicable to all. Between these systems there are interspaces which we do not understand. Each module makes sense, but the interrelationship between them does not. Newtonian physics makes sense, but only to a certain point. Quantum mechanics applies to a zone where Newtonian physics is nonsense. One can also consider subatomic physics, which is different from both. Each science has its self-contained laws. In the interspace, in between *as-samāwāti wa'l-ard* (السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ; sky and earth) are also heavens or zones, and they are all under the sustainership of the Lord.

Khiṭāb (خِطَاب) comes from *khaṭaba* (خَطَب), which means "to speak to a group of people," and also "to ask for a woman's hand in marriage." *Khiṭāb* means "speech, letter," or "communication," while *khuṭūbah* (خُطُوبَة) means "courtship, engagement." All of these imply connection and unification. The transgressors were disconnected from what governed physical reality in this life; thus they can only taste even greater disconnectedness in the next life.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا

مَنْ أذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا

- 38 The Day when the spirit and the angels will stand in ranks — none will speak except he whom the All-Merciful gives permission, and who speaks words that hit the mark.

The Day of Reckoning, the day when action stops, is the day when a new set of laws which have existed from the beginning will take hold. Our bodies are complex systems made up of the subtle interaction of subsystems and forces involving chemical, electrical, magnetic, mechanical and other physical, as well as more subtle, systems, each subject to its own laws. The laws that apply in the next realm, after the end of this existence, are of another nature. Now we are experiencing everything in a certain direction of time; the collapse of creation will occur as if creation has been in reversed time. We can only intellectualize and theorize about it since we have but a very limited comprehension of it.

We are told that in that situation we as individuals will no longer have the power to act — we will be completely and utterly under the control and at the mercy of the new dominion. It will be like the end of a play; it will be sealed. It will be the time for the evaluation of each player's performance.

Rūḥ (رُوح) comes from the same root as *rāḥah* (رَاحَة). It is also related to *rīḥ* (رِيح), which means "wind," *mirwāḥah* (مِرْوَاحَة), which means "fan," and *istirwāḥ* (اسْتِرْوَاح), which means "respiration." It is the subtle element that is blown into us in the form of the soul, as we call it. The *rūḥ* issues from the command of the Sustainer and is the subtlest manifestation which covers itself with the body, rendering it sentient and capable of vast, conflicting and diverse possibilities. The process of death is that of the *rūḥ* slipping out, leaving the body behind where it belongs: in the earth.

Lā yatakallamūna (لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ) is from the verb *takallama* (تَكَلَّمَ), which means "to speak." *Kalimah* (كَلِمَة) means "spoken word," or "words." *Kalām* (كَلَام) is the act of making sound, speaking, discussion, expression. It is an

action. We generally take for granted our ability to act and speak, but on the Day of Resurrection no action or verbal interference can take place. Only the Merciful and the Perfect in every way will prevail. There will no longer be any possibility for anybody to perform harmful acts. We can transgress only in this realm of existence, in this dimension, along this direction of time. The only choice we have here is to recognize that in reality we have no choice. Choice is really ignorance, and the knowledge of having no choice is wisdom. If we know what the best action is in each new situation, we have no choice; it is clear to us what action we must take.

ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا

39 That is the true Day – so whosoever desires should seek refuge with his Lord.

On that day, in that new state of affairs, justice is perfect: *ḥaqq* (**حَقٌّ** ; truth) will prevail in every way, with absolute certainty. It also prevails in every way in this existence, but as limited beings we are often uncertain about this fact. From the point of view of Allah or of *ḥaqīqah* (**حَقِيقَةٌ** ; the truth), there is never injustice; everything is absolutely just. It is only our ignorance which results in seeing injustice in this life. Allah says, “I created them for the Fire and I do not care.” Allah has created everything in justice, *bi'l-ḥaqq* (**بِالْحَقِّ**). It is only man who transgresses the balance and thereby creates the climate or appearance of injustice.

Fa man shā'a't-takhadha ilā rabbihi ma'āban means, “So whosoever should seek refuge with his Lord.” This indicates that Allah is talking to people who are not aware of the fact that they are sustained and contained by the Lord. The warning conveyed is, “Those of you who now heed, or wish, return there – find a way back! You have transgressed, you have acted wrongly, so return back to the only reality in which you have been given freedom to rebel.”

Huwa-t-tawwāb (**هُوَ التَّوَّابُ**), “He is the Often-Returning,” He accepts our return over and over, as does a loving father who knows his child is so rebellious that he will constantly leave. Whenever the child returns, the father says, “This is the last time I will take him back.” The father welcomes him, knowing full well that in the next moment he will be off again.

The Creator knows that we are full of nothing but doubt and

bickering. From the point of view of someone who trusts in the absolute mercy of Allah and so submits to it, doubts cannot arise, because he accepts what comes to him as being the best for him, and from that very acceptance the knowledge that it is the best arises.

This ayah says that on the Day of Judgement, the Day of Truth, all doubt and questioning will stop. He who wants to return to that state of unity, which is his true heritage and is already contained in his essence, will have to find a way, and that way lies in the recognition of all that is not the way. The way towards knowledge of the Lord is through knowledge of the *nafs*, the experiencing self; that is, being able to recognize the lower *nafs*, the animal *nafs*, the commanding *nafs*, the doubting *nafs*, the whimsical or inspired *nafs*, and the trouble caused by all of these aspects of the lower *nafs*. Recognizing all of these traits, men of reason will be able to avoid them in future situations, and the higher aspects of the *nafs* will spontaneously begin to predominate and become nourished.

The secure and contented self, the *nafs* that is purified, is at ease and at peace in the hands of its Lord, serenely allowing the Lord to do with it what He wills according to perfect destiny. The path to the Lord, therefore, lies in recognizing and avoiding all that is going to cause us harm and confusion. By avoiding what is clearly wrong we will move toward that which is right.

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ
يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا

- 40 Surely We warn you of a punishment near at hand: The Day when man will see what his hands have sent ahead, and the one who covers up will say: O, would that I were dust!

The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*, said, “I am only a warner. I am warning you where the Fire begins, where tranquility ends, and where loss begins – it is when you do not accept that there is only the decree; and the decree is just.”

The inner meaning of this ayah is that we bring affliction upon ourselves right now, but we may not notice it because we cover our-

selves up with all kinds of excuses and justifications. As an all-encompassing *nafs* which has within it the meaning of *Rahmān* (الرحمن ; Allah, the All-Merciful), as well as the meaning of *shayṭān* (شيطان ; Satan), a person can justify any action, high or low, good or bad. Justification is in fact just connecting one thing to another and is an aspect of *tawḥīd* (divine unity). By uniting his intention with his action, everyone is actually in a state of worship. It could be at the altar of the high, which results in knowledge of the Almighty Lord, or at the altar of the low, which is that of delusion and illusion.

The condition or state of the Day of Resurrection, in which everything is exposed and nothing is hidden, can be partially tasted now by each one of us if we are willing and able to stop our minds and actions and to take complete stock of ourselves. If we have the ability and bravery to face our intentions and can recognize the degree of the self's purification, we will catch a glimpse of the meaning of the Day of Requital and the meaning of balance.

On the Day of Judgement we will be reconstructed according to our intentions and actions in this world. If we want to know the condition of our hearts in the next life, all we need to do is look at the condition of our hearts in this life. If the condition of the heart is pure, our home in the next life will be close to the pure Source of creation. If not, it will be somewhere along a spectrum, at one end of which is eternal Fire and at the other end of which are the highest Gardens. If we live totally in the present, remaining aware and taking account of ourselves, then we are living *yawm al-qiyāmah* (يوم القيامة) now.

“And the one who covers up will say: O, would that I were dust!” He who has denied in the past, who has been disconnected and who suddenly sees that he has wasted the treasure of his time and life, will say, “I wish I were nothing — I wish I were dust, forgotten!” Unfortunately for such a one, nothing is forgotten. Every person, every *rūḥ*, will be fully brought to life and will totally recognize his full significance. He cannot hide; he cannot be like dust lost in the desert. Allah says that if a man has done one iota of good, it will appear before him. No more recesses of the *nafs* will be allowed; all the corridors will be opened. That is why if a person faces himself totally right now, this act is his personal *yawm al-qiyāmah*. That is the meaning of the saying, “If you know yourself, you know your Lord,” because that is the business of Lordship — to show everything openly, in every way.

We seek permanency in everything in this life, in relationships and knowledge, and that is why we distinguish between true knowl-

edge and mere information. Information about things changes, such as when new medicines are developed which cure certain diseases. True knowledge does not change, however. It is absolute, and for this reason we seek it. All of us are seeking absolute knowledge and absolute knowledge is the news, is the *nabā'*. What are they asking about? What news do they want? What higher information or news do they want other than that there is Allah, and by His Grace we have been created. When we abandon ourselves to Allah and follow the men of Allah, we will enter this sought after realm of absolute knowledge.



SURAT AN-NAZI'AT

THOSE WHO TEAR OUT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This is a late Meccan surah concerning this life and life in the next phase and which also gives a description of the occurrences on the Day of Judgement.

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا

1 By those who tear out violently,

The surah begins by describing various forces of which everyone is aware. A very common interpretation is that it refers to the angelic powers, those myriad forces which perform various functions throughout the creation.

An-nāzi'āt (النَّازِعَاتِ) comes from *naza'a* (نَزَعَ), which means "to take away, to strip off, to quarrel," implying two forces opposing each other.

Ghariqa (غَرِقَ), the root verb of *gharqan*, means "to go under, to be drowned." There is an ambiguity here whose explanation only Allah knows for certain. This could be a reference to the moment of death, when the angels of death forcefully strip life away. It could also be a reference to the souls of the people who do not want to

depart from this life, who are not prepared for the next experience and whose souls have to be forcibly stripped out of their bodies in order for them to continue the course of destiny. It could also refer to the cosmos. The first five ayat could equally refer to the different types of planets and stars since they are all energy centers which keep the cosmos in a state of constant motion.

وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشِطًا

2 And by those who draw out gently,

This might refer to those souls which become *nashiṭ* (**نَشِط** ; vigorous and active, healthy and dynamic). Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, 'alayhi-s-salām (peace be upon him) said, "Death for the *mu'min* (**مُؤْمِن** ; believer, one who trusts Reality) is like the stripping off of a filthy, smelly, garment." That soul looks forward to the next experience because he knows that the next life does not contain the turmoil and tribulation of this world. Clearly, under the guidance of the one-and-only direction of Allah, no interference can take place there; we cannot intervene or interject. We will be actionless, at peace.

This ayah might also be a reference to distant stars whose light reaches us after hundreds and thousands of light years and which are ever increasing their speed in the cosmic expansion.

وَالسَّابِحَاتِ سَبْحًا

3 And by those who float in space,

Sabaḥa (**سَبَح**) means "to swim, to float, to drift." The soul flows with destiny and moves along its course with no resistance. It could also refer to those entities whose substance is similar to energy wavebands, the angels, who make it easier for the souls who are willing to surrender. Again, this could also apply to the planets spinning along their orbital paths.

فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبِقًا

4 Then those who are foremost going ahead,

These ayats can also be taken entirely on the level of the *mulk* (مُلْكٌ ; earthly dominion, having to do with worldly things). *Sabaqa* (سَبِقٌ) means “to go ahead of, to outdistance.” Often *sābiq* (سَابِقٌ) refers to horses, especially good racehorses. Some commentaries say that this ayah means “to see the thoroughbred, to see the winning horse.” The horse that has been true to its breeding is a winning horse. It may also mean planets that move faster than the others or stars or galaxies which move faster than others in their trajectory.

فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا

5 Then those who regulate the affair.

This may refer to those forces, powers, planets, and energies whose objective is *tadbīr* (تَدْبِيرٌ), which comes from *dabbara* (دَبَّرَ), meaning, “to make arrangements, organize,” that is, to perform actions that interconnect the various happenings in this world, actions that eventually manifest as movement of wind, clouds, volcanoes, or human beings; in other words, a movement of the outward elements which hold all elements together. Anything which is *mudabbirāt* (مُدَبِّرَاتٌ) is concerned with *tadbīr* or arranging affairs.

This surah opens us up to begin reflecting on all the powers and forces from which we are not separate and which affect us outwardly and inwardly, such as the spirits within our bodies and the surrounding environment. These first ayats are a prelude to the explanation of what will occur when this creation, with its cosmic expansion issuing from the initial explosion, comes to an end.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ

6 The Day when the quaking one will quake,

This is the first occurrence heralding the end of the expansion. When that expansion stops, a major disturbance in the entire cosmic system will take place. As far as the earth is concerned, there will be a quaking and violent trembling: *rājifah* (راجفة).

When a system follows its course, it moves smoothly. Once its course is changed and redirected, that break manifests in itself a resistance which takes the form of trembling. This first occurrence is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an describes in detail how the world will come to an end. This ayah indicates the stopping of the first system. Systems always interact with one another; thus, when one stops another begins. What holds these systems together is beyond our intellectual comprehension.

تَتَّبِعَهَا الرَّادِفَةُ

7 What comes after will follow.

The next quaking then will come, the next sounding of the trumpet, which will herald the new course in the *'ālam al-arwāḥ* (عالم الأرواح), the world of subtle energies rather than the world of gross energies. *Rādifah* (رادفة) comes from *radifa* (ردف), meaning "to follow," and *rādif* (رادف) means "the next one, what follows." The first quake, then, the first sounding, will be the rending apart of the existing system, its cessation, and the second quake will be the start of the next system.

قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ

8 Hearts on that day will throb,

This statement implies that all that will remain of us then is what

was implanted in our hearts, that which had been constructed by our actions and intentions in this life. The hearts of those who have denied this occurrence, who have denied the truth of the message that there is only one reality and one creator and that we are never separate from our decreed destiny, those hearts will be completely at odds. When the Resurrection begins, they will then feel the separation sharply and will feel that they are not flowing smoothly with the current, but struggling against it.

أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ

9 Their eyes cast down.

Man's sight, his faculty of perception, will no longer function as it had before. Man's vision and the expectations in his heart will be low, subdued, disconnected from events. Rather, they will be cast aside.

يَقُولُونَ إِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَاكِمَةِ

10 They say: Will we indeed be restored to (our) first state?

The state or situation of those hearts echoes a rebellion which is based on their doubt and questioning: "Are we going to return? Is there a return? Are we going to start all over again? Is there going to be a continuation? Is there going to be another cycle?"

إِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخِرَةً

11 What! When we are rotten bones?

The questioning continues with a firmly voiced doubt: "How can that be? We never expected it!" Being gross, they were only judging it

from the clumsy attitude of a physical point of view. They say, "How can these bones be restored after they, the hardest elements of our bodies, have decayed?" They must understand that this question is not concerned with flesh and bones but with the *rūḥ* (spirit) and what it has done during its passage through this world.

قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذْ أَكْرَمُ خَاسِرَةٌ

12 They say: This, then, would be a return with loss.

As soon as they realize that they must enter into a new situation, they conclude that they have returned to a situation of loss, because their *rūḥ* is not ready for this next realm of existence. They already realize that it will be a loss to them and that in the next experience they will be completely bereft.

فَأَنفَاهِي زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ

13 But it will be only a single cry —

Zajara (زجر), the verbal root of *zajrah* (زجرة ; cry), means "to drive back, to drive away, to prevent, to rebuke." For those people who have been astray, the ones who have denied the truth of the message that there will be a return, an afterlife, there is but one shout, one major reminder. After the first movement, this life with all its varying facets will continue, but the awakening will come with the next cry. The first shout or jolt will stop this system, and the next jolt will begin the next system. Instantaneously, with one jolt, the souls will realize that they are at a loss. They will recognize it and say it openly, for it is embedded within the soul.

فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ

14 When behold! They will be awakened!

The ordinary meaning of *sāhirah* (سَاهِرَةٌ) is “the surface of the earth.” The inner meaning is derived from the root of the word *sahira* (سَهَرَ), which means “to be sleepless, to stay awake (in some activity).” *Sahar* (سَهَرٌ) means “insomnia.” This all implies that the surface of the earth is always alive. Here the meaning is that once these souls have been awakened, they will then be awake to reality forever. They were asleep to the truth before, but suddenly they will awaken. The outer meaning of this ayah is that the dead bodies which had been previously hidden in their graves will be cast up to the surface of the earth. The inner meaning is that those souls will suddenly be fully awakened. There will be no more sleepiness of the kind we may experience in our consciousness in this life.

هَلْ آتَيْكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى

15 Has the story of Musa not come to you?

Now we are brought to this world. Allah asks, “Have you not heard the story of the prophet of Allah, Sayyidna Musa, ‘*alayhi-s-salām*, when his Lord, his Sustainer, called him to action, called him to move along the path of reality in this life?”

إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى

16 When his Lord called upon him in the holy valley of Tuwa:

Sayyidna Musa, ‘*alayhi-s-salām*, was brought into the sacred valley. His heart was held by *ar-rūḥ al-quḍus* (الروح القدس). The sanctity of the heart was caught and held by the *rubūbiyah* (ربوبية ; Lordship). He had no option but to serve his Lord,

and he was inspired by Him to strike at the top of the pyramid of corruption.

اِذْهَبْ اِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ اِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ

17 Go to Fir'awn, he has certainly transgressed the bounds!

When a man is a slave to the Highest, then his task will be the highest, his responsibility will be the highest, and his rewards will be the highest. Hence Sayyidna Musa, *'alayhi-s-salām*, was commissioned to direct his message of unity towards Fir'awn (Pharaoh) because Fir'awn had transgressed and, as a result of this transgression, the entire nation was brought into a state of loss.

فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ اِلَّا اَنْ تَرْكَبَ

18 Then say: Will you purify yourself?

Allah commanded Sayyidna Musa: "Give him the message; Why have you not purified yourself? Why have you not given up your self in submission? Why do you not move along the path of self-abandonment? Why do you not leave off this garb that you have taken on, in which you are hiding, playing at being God?"

وَاَهْدِيكَ اِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ

19 And, I will guide you to your Lord so that you fear.

The implication here is that Fir'awn had no fear of anything and no respect for anything; he had no knowledge of the boundaries of behavior. Guidance (*hidāyah*, هداية ; from *hadā*, هدى)

here implies fear (*hashyah*, خشية ; from *hashiya*, خشي ; to fear or dread something). The door to guidance is the fear of transgression, the fear of making mistakes and the fear of displeasing Allah by breaking His laws which govern both this existence and the next. This was the message of Sayyidna Musa, 'alayhi-s-salām, to Pharaoh. He was saying, "If you are willing, if you want to purify yourself, if you want to live a life of pure existence in true preparation for the next world, I will show you the way, clearly indicating the boundaries, so that you will have *hashyah*. Then you will be guided to the one and only Truth. If you do not have fear, then you cannot receive guidance."

فَارِيَةُ الْآيَةِ الْكُبْرَى

20 So he showed him the great sign —

Sayyidna Musa, 'alayhi-s-salām, had many signs, and many of them were tangible in this world — his staff which became a serpent; his white, shining hand; the appearance of blood and frogs, and many others. These were the ordinary signs. Here the reference is to *al-āyat al-kubrā* (الْآيَةُ الْكُبْرَى ; the great sign), which is the knowledge of Allah. Sayyidna Musa said, "If you have fear, you will have guidance, and from that will come to you knowledge of the one and only Reality from which you are not separate!"

So the message of Sayyidna Musa to Fir'awn was a high message, not an ordinary one, because Fir'awn was not an ordinary king. He was a king involved in knowledge and sciences that were very sophisticated. He had innumerable powers but they were not in accordance with the *sunnah* (سُنَّة ; way) of Allah. He and his people used supernatural powers, such as the harnessing of the *jinn*. It is not correct for us to do these things. For a true man of Allah, such powers mean nothing — they are just insignificant gifts. The highest of all signs is the knowledge of Allah, while the lowest signs are outer ones. There is only Allah, and we have come into this world to be baffled and tested and afflicted in order to surrender and submit to Him. The way is through *hashyah* (fear of transgression).

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ

21 But he denied and disobeyed.

Fir'awn, having invested all his life in his system of power-mongering and control, could not accept this message that he should be fearful of transgression. In his powerful arrogance, he could not receive it. His reaction to it – to the fearful sign that there is only Allah, and that he, Fir'awn, was of no significance – was to deny what was already truthful in himself, to deny the spark of truth that was in his heart.

Fir'awn denied – he said, “No!” ‘Aṣā (عصى) means “to disobey, to resist, to defy, to oppose.” Then, after denying, he sought to be reconfirmed in his position. We all want confirmation in this life; we all seek security. We want confirmation that what we are doing is right. We are lovers of the One Reality and so, if our thoughts are perverted, we will want to be connected to people who are also perverted in their thinking.

At all times we worship and adore the divine attributes. Everything in creation is in perfection, and we are only witnesses of it. There is nothing we can add to it. Only those who have been chosen for a higher mission will have to come out and act, teach, and follow in the footsteps of the prophets, like Sayyidna Musa, ‘alayhi-s-salām. Fir'awn, quite naturally and understandably, did not comprehend this message. He veered off in his own perverted direction.

ثُمَّ أَذْبَرَ سَعْيَهُ

22 Then he went back hastily,

Speedily he went to collect himself and to connect with his own system, the system of *kufr* (كُفْر ; covering up), and of building power for himself.

فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَى

23 So he gathered and proclaimed —

He collected his supporters together because he felt vulnerable. He felt isolated in the illuminating beam of the message of Sayyidna Musa, 'alayhi-s-salām, so he gathered all his supporters together in order to gain reassurance.

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى

24 Then he said: I am your Lord, the Most High!

Again, he fell back into his old habits, safe and sound under the crown of leadership and lordship with which he had crowned himself. He was playing at being God, trying to set himself up in that most powerful, impossible position. This is a grave danger for all human beings. The higher we go, the more this danger becomes accentuated. People of insight and inward strength especially must be kept within the limits of the *sharī'ah* (شريعة), the parameters of the outward law, for the danger of self-delusion lies within all of us. We have seen it in this life, both among people of the *zāhir* (ظاهر ; outward), and people of the *bāṭin* (باطن ; inward). There is always a tendency to fall prey to this danger unless we continue the *sulūk* (سلوك ; journey on the path of knowledge), within the *sharī'ah*, through constant performance of the prayers and worship.

Fir'awn said, "I am your Lord, the Most High," to his people. No man can exist in isolation because he is either connected to the one and only Reality and can only act as a slave, or he is connected to a perverted and distorted version of the truth, as in this case.

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَىٰ

25 So Allah seized him with the punishment of the hereafter and the first.

The reaction of Reality to Fir'awn in his self-elevated position was punishment. *Nakāl* (نَكَال) means "punishment." Fir'awn received a rebuttal from Reality for both his early deeds and his later deeds, both for those he had committed before Sayyidna Musa came to him and for those he was committing at that time. This ayah refers to the suffering with which he will be afflicted in this life and later. As we know, Fir'awn and his people were drowned crossing the Red Sea. But "last" and "first" could also mean "outer" and "inner;" outwardly he was challenged, and inwardly he was tormented. He could not do anything in the face of the outer actions of Sayyidna Musa, 'alayhi-s-salām, and inwardly he was shattered as well, because he did not know how to react to the message.

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَى

26 Most certainly there is in this a lesson for he who fears.

'Ibrah (عِبْرَة) means "admonition, example, lesson." The root of it is 'abara (عَبَرَ), which means "to cross, traverse, to interpret (a dream), to shed tears." The word for "Hebrew" ('Ibrī; عِبْرِي) comes from the same root, because they crossed to the safety of the other shore. It also implies crossing to the shore of knowledge for he who is wary, eager to know, and concerned about not remaining in ignorance. Such a person wants to have safe conduct, which is secured by correct behavior.

In these ayat we have been given the example of a man of reality, a man of Allah, in this case the prophet Musa, 'alayhi-s-salām, and his polar opposite, a man of *bu'ud* (بُعْدُ ; remoteness, separation), a man of *shayṭān*, a man of loss. We are told in the Qur'an that the two systems cannot meet: "To you your way and to me my way." (Qur'an, 109:6). One will be destroyed, and the other will prevail.

Reflecting on the power of Fir'awn and what happened to him and his people, we are asked in the next ayah, "Are you stronger than the heavens?"

27 Are you harder to create, or the heaven? He erected it.

Samā' (سماء) implies that which is holding our cosmos together. The root of the word means "high" – not just high in the vertical sense, but of a subtle height, elevated and lofty in meaning, anything that is *latīf* (لطيف ; subtle, of exalted, subtle realms, sublime). *Rajulun sāmin* (رجل سام) means "a man of high values, of high moral character." To refer to an action as *sāmin* means that the action is of a high moral value.

The ayah is asking, "Are you stronger in creation, tougher and more permanent than all the heavens, both outer and inner?" This refers to the nearer heavens of the planetary systems and the outer heavens beyond them. In Qur'an those heavens of which we can conceive and perceive, which to us are unfathomable, are in fact the lowest heavens. Above these are six other heavens. It is the lower heaven which has been decorated with the planets and stars. As there are seven heavens, so there are seven layers, or phases, in the earth, the innermost being molten metal. There are also seven heavens of energy levels of electrons around the nucleus of the atom.

It is true, however, that in Arabic the numbers seven or seventy imply a very large number. In ordinary speech, if we say that someone has told us something seven times, it does not necessarily mean an actual seven times but could simply mean many times. The same is true from the number seventy. In many of the *hadīth* (traditions) of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, we find these numbers mentioned, as for example when he said, "No day has passed without my making *istighfār* (إستغفار ; asking pardon of Allah) seventy times." Now, this does not necessarily mean that he used a *tasbeḥ* (Muslim rosary) or that he sat with date-pits, as was common at that time, counting out the number of times he said, "*astaghfiru'llāh*," I ask God's pardon. Rather, it means that he said this a great number of times, probably at least seventy.

رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّيَهَا

28 He raised high its height, then put it in order.

Samk (سَمَك) means “roof” or “ceiling,” *sumk* (سُمَك) means “thickness,” while *sāmik* (سَامِك) means “thick.” *Rafa‘a samkahā* (رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا), “He raised up its height,” means that the width of the heavens was increased to what in our perception was an unfathomable degree. In this ayah the word implies that the heavens are exploding. It is possible to read into this ayah the inner meaning of the Big Bang.

Fa-sawwāhā (فَسَوَّاهَا) is one of the earliest references to the word *sawā* (سَوَّى), meaning “to be equivalent, to even, to level, to smooth, to equalize, to regulate, to put in order.” *Sawā* and its derivatives overlap in meaning with *‘adala* (عَدَلَ), which means “to act justly, to be equal, to equalize, to set in order.” From it comes the word *musāwāh* (مَسَاوَاة), which means “equality before the law,” and *taswiyah* (تَسْوِيَةٌ), which means “arrangement, equalization.” So after the great explosion order was established.

وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا

29 And He made dark its night and brought out the light of its morning.

This refers to the duality of existence: the night was rendered dark; the day, the early morning, was brought out and made more visible. *Akhraja* (أَخْرَجَ) means “to bring out, to bring forth.” *Kharaja* (خَرَجَ) means “to go out, to come out.” *Kharāj* (خَرَاَج) is what we are supposed to pay from our wealth or whatever we have as our tax or *zakāh* (زَكَاة).

وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحِيهَا

30 And the earth, He expanded it after that.

The earth is part of the heavens, part of the total creational balance. Here the earth was stretched out flat and made usable. *Dahā* (دحي) means “to spread out, flatten level, unroll,” and *dahyah* (دحية) means “egg.” This refers to the fact that the earth was created in an egg-shape, a fact that modern man has known for only a few decades. This ayah is saying, therefore, that the earth was made small, usable and plain, and was shaped like an egg.

أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعِيهَا

31 He brought forth from it its water and its pasturage —

In the early stages of creation, the earth was made solid from what appeared to be molten or gaseous material. The fluid catalyst that was needed in order to transform solid matter into more usable, more sentient matter, and into plants, animals and human beings, was squeezed out of the earth.

Mar'an (مرعى) means “pasturage” or “a place for grazing.” *Ra'ā* (رعى) means “to graze,” and it also means “to tend a flock of animals” or, more generally, “to take care of someone or something.” *Rā'ī* (راعي) is “a shepherd.” *Rā'inī* (راعني) means, “Take care of me.”

Thus, fluidity from the earth comes, a fluidity which both renders life possible and gives us the possibility to graze on it, letting our animal instincts express themselves, having as we do the earthly elements of bodies and robust health.

وَالْجِبَالَ أَرْسَاهَا

32 And the mountains, He made them firm —

Here again we have an example of how the earth came about, settling into a solid form. *Arsāhā* (ارساها) means “that He made them fast in a liquid medium, He anchored them,” and it comes from *rasā* (رسا), which means “to be firm,” and “to anchor.” This firmness exists in order for us to settle and seek provision and to give us the stability we need to help us go through life’s journey. The Qur’an told us 1400 years ago what modern geologists have only recently been able to describe about the original formation of the earth.

مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ

33 A provision for you and for your cattle.

Thus, there is ease on this journey of ours on this earth which culminates in the great calamity, referred to as the *at-ṭāmmatu’l-kubrā*.

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى

34 But when the great calamity comes —

Death is the great calamity for those who regard the experience of this world as the main objective of our existence, but it is only a prelude to the next.

يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى

35 The Day on which man will recollect that for which he strove —

It is on that day that a man will remember all that had gone before, and all that he strove for will unfold for him, revealing his intentions.

وَبُرِّزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَن يَرَى

36 And hell will be manifest to him who sees.

The sight of all of us will be sharper then and *jahīm* (جحيم), which is another name for hell, will become vividly evident. Those who have been leading their lives in that direction will clearly descend into it.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى

37 Then, as for him who has transgressed the bounds —

وَأَشْرَاهِ حَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا

38 And prefers the life of this world —

فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى

39 Then certainly hell, that is the abode!

For those who transgressed in this world, preferring the life of this world to the next, for those who have denied and been engulfed in their denial, certainly *jahīm* is their final resting place.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ
عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ

- 40 And as for him who fears to stand before his Lord, and forbids the self from low desires —

As for he who had *khashyah* (خشية ; fear), who feared the overwhelming power and position of his Lord, who always stood as though he were in the hands of his Lord, who always acted as though he were an extension of that Lordship, he is someone who forbade his soul low desires, who stayed in remembrance and did not transgress. He who was always aware of the havoc the *nafs* can play by its whims, by its *hawa* (هوى ; desire), always remained on the *ṣirāṭ* (صراط ; the Path).

فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ

- 41 Then surely the Garden — that is the abode!

For whoever had the fearful awareness of Allah's presence, naturally *jannah* is his final abode, since he had been preparing for it here and now and had already learned its condition and its state. He had already entered into a state of the Garden in this world in preparation for his final and perpetual state in the next world.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسِيهَا

- 42 They ask you about the Hour — when it will come.

This is a reference to the Hour of Reckoning, the hour of complete and total unfolding, the hour in which action and reaction meet and

are united, in which man's intentions, his deeds, and his own spirit, will be connected and unified. This is when man will see himself to be the result of his actions which are, in reality, the manifestations of his intentions. He will see nothing other than the subtle nature which was his all along, and it will be clear that he was always presented with the option of either polishing it or causing it to be increasingly covered by his *nafs*.

فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرِهَا

43 About what! You are of its reminder.

إِلَى رَبِّكَ مُنْتَهَاهَا

44 To your Lord is the goal of it.

How can you remind them of its goal, its end? All time stops with the Lord; the Lordship of Allah is beyond time. That Hour, that stoppage of time, that end or resting place, is with the Lord.

إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ مَنِ خَشِيَهَا

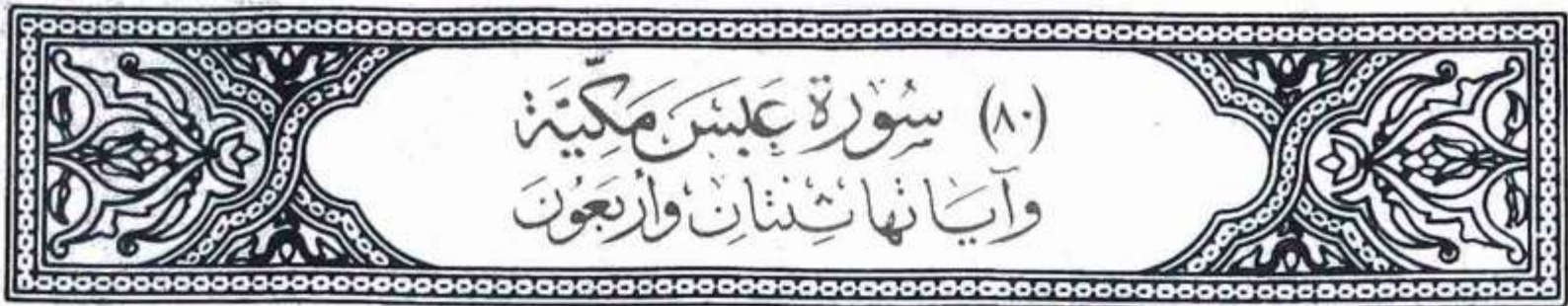
45 You are only a warner to him who fears it.

All we can do in this realm, which is subject to time, is to warn others, to make them aware that a situation will come about in which time will stop. All that we will have will be our capital, that which we have earned, and the knowledge which we have brought forth from the source of knowledge within us, by our *khashyah*, by our wariness, by our fearful awareness that this experience will come to an end.

كَانَ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا
عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحِيًّا

- 46 On the Day that they see it, it will be as though they had not tarried except for the latter part of a day, or the early part of it.

The final hour can be tasted here, but in the absolute final hour time will stop. When we experience that, the long years of this life will seem like just one day, or part of a day and a night. Life will seem short and insignificant. When time comes to an end, and we look at it from the angle of that state of consciousness, our total existence in this world will look completely distorted. We will leave time to go into timelessness, which is the essential backdrop to time; and Allah is the Timeless.



SURAT 'ABASA

HE FROWNED

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Each surah came down on a specific occasion and has direct relevance both to the instant and to posterity as well, because words of wisdom are always applicable. The occasion of this surah arose when the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, was sitting one day with some important *kāfir* Quraysh leaders who were against *islām*, the attitude of positive submission, and was interrupted by a blind man. This blind man, 'Abd-Allah ibn Umm Maktum, was of excellent character and whenever he came upon the Prophet, he would ask him, "Give me from what God has given to you." The Prophet would then try to illumine his heart and give him the good news. On this occasion, however, the Prophet frowned at the interruption, since he was in all likelihood about to convert these leaders of the Quraysh to Islam, an event which would have strengthened its position and increased its number. This surah came down to him as he returned to his chamber after the interruption, and was overwhelmed by an inner awareness.

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى

1 He frowned and turned away,

أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى

2 Because a blind man came to him.

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهِ يَتَزَكَّى

3 And what do you know that he may purify himself?

The third ayah is a reference both to leaders of the Quraysh and to the blind man. *Yazzakkā* (يَزَكِّي) is from the verb “to purify oneself”; purification must take place in order to make *ṣalāh* (صلاة ; prayer), which is one of the pillars of Islam. *Ṣalāh* not only means prayer, but also recharging and connecting; and this is done five times a day until one is permanently connected. *Tazkiyah* (تزكية) means purification, and that implies increasing or enhancing the quality of something. For example, the quality of water is enhanced by purifying it; one purifies oneself by paying *zakāh* (زكاة ; alms tax).

The third ayah asks, “And how do you know that he may be purified?” The whole subject of life is purification, for if there is purity, there is peace. Man always seeks to purify his mind and actions in the best way he can. The purification of some people’s actions may come through taking an action to its extreme, whereupon a balance will be recognized and the lesson will be learned. Some scholars say that this ayah refers to the Quraysh, while others say that it refers to the blind man since it is not about quantity but about purification, for if one man is fulfilled it is enough.

أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى

4 Or become reminded so that the reminder should profit him?

“Or that he will remember,” says the fourth ayah. All the prac-

tices of the men of Allah are attempts to be in a state of remembrance and awareness. We may ask, remembrance of what? Remembrance of what causes fulfillment and of what causes lack of fulfillment. We all suffer from a lack of fulfillment that we ourselves bring about. Each person, as an individual, has prescribed that his fulfillment will occur only if certain events happen. If they do not happen, then he is miserable. He is the author of his own fulfillment, and nobody else can help him, from the womb to the tomb. So *dhikr* (ذَكَرَ), from the word *dhakara* (ذَكَرَ), which means “to remember,” is the beginning of reflection; it is not even meditation. Remembrance is difficult in the modern world because we are always in such a hurry that we do not even take time to look at our reflections in a mirror.

The fourth ayah asks, “How do you know that he will remember so that it might be of use to him?” It is positive remembrance that is referred to. If remembrance is only a romantic notion, then what use is it? That is why we say we must neither dwell on yesterday nor concern ourselves with what comes tomorrow, but only do our best today. This is all that we have. If all our energies are preserved, then each day will be the best possible one, because we will always be alert. Unfortunately, most of us are not able to do this.

أَمَّا مَنْ اسْتَغْنَىٰ

5 As for him who considers himself free from need,

Istaghna (اسْتَغْنَىٰ) is derived from *ghaniya* (غَنِي), which means “to be rich, to be free from want.” There is no independence, but only the Independent, the One. Separateness does not exist — everybody affects everybody else. One fly affects the whole cosmos, even though its effects are minute. Some of us, however, think we have recently discovered ecology. Only after having caused the extinction of fifty species do we discover an imbalance in the ecology of nature. There is no freedom from want or need. We neither own anything nor possess anything, for there is no *we* to own or possess.

فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى

6 So you address yourself to him.

Taşaddā (تصدى) is from the verb “to occupy oneself, to turn, to oppose, resist.” As for those who appear to be self-sufficient, they will have obstacles thrown in their way. They will be intercepted.

وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَزَّكَّى

7 And it is not upon you for him to be purified.

The job of a true messenger is to address the other. He can do nothing other than try and share his state. It is an essential element of the human condition; it is our birthright to share those aspects which we ourselves like. Yet, the messenger cannot purify another and the burden of it is not on him. He can only provide the means and the example.

Outwardly, *zakāh* involves giving. Inwardly, it is to abandon and purify oneself, because it indicates the recognition that whatever a man possesses is going to tie him down. Since he is already tied down by his body and out of necessity has possessions, he must give *zakāh*. *Zakāh* is obligatory from a *sharī‘ah* (revealed Islamic law) point of view. It is equally obligatory from an inner standpoint, for if the outer does not move towards the inner, it is of no use.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى

8 And as for him who comes to you striving hard,

This ayah refers to the same event, that of the blind man coming to the Prophet seeking knowledge. *Sa‘y* (سعي ; running seven times between Safa and Marwa) is derived from the same verbal root as *yas‘a* and means “to move quickly, to strive for.” *Sa‘y* is what we do on *hajj* (pilgrimage), and is symbolic of what we, as intelligent human beings, do every day of our lives. In all of our attempts we are struggling.

وَهُوَ يَخْشَى

9 And he fears,

Whoever has come to him with a firm resolve (because he will come seeking knowledge like that blind man) is fearful of anything that is not conducive to his fulfillment. He does not come out of fear alone, but out of a fearfulness of that which helps neither his progress nor his enrichment.

فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى

10 And you are distracted from him.

Every Arab knows what a *malhā* (ملهى) is – a nightclub. Originally, however, it meant anything that distracts. One only has to look at the state of a society's language to see its degeneration. Anything that distracts one from pursuing a goal is *lahw* (لهو ; amusement, diversion), except inward abandonment, since outward abandonment is only useful if it takes the direction of inward abandonment. If there can be equal inward abandonment that is not connected to the outward, that is fine. It is our attitude towards the material which counts – are we in charge of it, or is it in charge of us? If we experience loss, do we experience a lessening of our selves, or are we absolutely the same as before the loss? Each of us knows the answer.

This ayah is a reprimand – the voice of Reality within the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, reprimanded him, telling him that he was being distracted by that blind man who had come to him seeking guidance. This distraction, however, was a positive one since, as a human being, the Prophet was showing a preference for a man (the Qurayshi) who had a higher station in life than that of the blind man. As a man of abandonment, he should have been available, and he should have recognized that the blind man could not have known that the Prophet was with someone else. As a result, he was then completely seized by Reality, from his forelock down.

In every culture, seekers have always retained some of their hair, even when required to shave their heads. The forelock and the beard symbolized the Adamic reality; it symbolized being caught by Reality, held in its grip. The Prophet here was totally in Its grasp. One slight

deviation caused the shock of recognition, a reminder of Allah.

This ayah signifies more than a mere reprimand, however. It describes an event which affects all of us, lost as we are most of the time, not knowing where we are going or why. In his Diwan (odes) Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib says, *Astaghfiru'llāha min 'āmalin bila niyyatin*, "We ask forgiveness from Allah for any action taken without intention." We ask forgiveness for having done anything without a clear intention. This is how every instant of life is to be lived, every breath, every pulse of it. The relevance of this ayah is that since this happened to a man such as the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, what can happen to us? What are *our* intentions? Indeed, we are in a state of confusion.

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذَكُّرَةٌ

11 No! Surely it is an admonishment.

When "no" (*kallā*; كَلَّا) appears in the Qur'an, it means "yes" and is used in order to reinforce the point. It is a reminder, and a reminder such as this one extends beyond time. Looking back over the past year, can we remember an occasion when we had clear intentions and were moving towards their fulfillment? If we cannot, then can we say that we were even alive? Those years should be counted against us, because they were only years in passage, not years in actual experience. This ayah is a reminder for us to become sensitive, alert, and alive.

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ

12 So let whoever wishes heed it.

The choice is in our hands. Reality has been manifested in just this way and in no other. There is nothing other than mercy in this system, and it is so vast and enveloping that even our own actions will look good to us whether they are or not.

The ayah says whoever wishes to remember will do so. The choice

is up to each individual, not to any other entity, because each of us, as a human being, is the highest creature in creation. We are that mutation in the creational reality which has been given the opportunity of trying to live in defiance of Allah's laws even though we are not, in reality, separate from our Creator. There is no separation, no two. The Qur'an states: "The way has been shown to him whether he is in gratitude or in *kufr*" (76:3). Thus, he is either in a state of gratitude, fulfillment, and inward drunkenness, or in one in which he covers up, makes excuses, and becomes fossilized. Man must choose! As soon as he comes into being, he is faced with duality, with alternatives. A pregnant woman is still one entity until the baby is born and then there are two.

We will remember to avoid whatever is not conducive to our happiness from our own direct experiences. We will become fearful of causing harm to ourselves by simply remembering what already exists within us.

فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ

13 In honored pages,

Ṣuḥuf (**صُحُفٍ**) is the plural of *ṣaḥīfah* (**صَحِيفَةٌ**), which means "a page of a book." A *ṣaḥīfah* in current Arabic parlance means "newspaper." What does a newspaper do? It spreads out the news, shows the situation. *Ṣuḥufin mukarramah* (**صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ**) means "honored scriptures," which have the stamp of the creational reality. This refers to the honored writing which is inscribed in our genes from the beginning of creational time, not to something written by a wise man called Ibrahim (Abraham). What is written is what is inherent in the creation.

We are conditioned in that we are given a certain overall physical disposition as well as an emotional one, and, on a deeper level, a spiritual one. Whatever we may call it, we nevertheless are given an overall disposition which exists within an even greater disposition. Our disposition is interacting with that greater one all the time. If we think of it as a fully written computer program, then we can completely predict what is going to happen. A person who is given to changing his mind *will* change his mind. It is scientific; it is perfection. Only we are in ignorance, and so do not know what is going to happen because there are a thousand and one different permutations. We do

not know what result will emerge when the outer interacts with the inner. A person who is given to chatting and is driving a car with well-worn tires may not see a large stone ahead on the road while speaking enthusiastically with his passenger. As he approaches the stone, he might suddenly jerk the car so that the tire hits it and is punctured. Another person, aware of the factors involved in this situation, would be able to warn the driver against the potential puncture. The man in the car himself does not foresee it, however. This is destiny. This is what *ṣuḥufin mukarramah* means, and it is repeatedly referred to in the Qur'an, the Bible and all the other scriptures. There are many other names for it, such as scroll or tablet (*lawḥ*; لوح).

Man is the tablet personified, made flesh. If man abandons himself to the full reality of the tablet, then he is the tablet. But if he restricts himself, then he is only part of it.

رَفُوعَةٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ

14 Exalted, purified,

That scripture, reality, or genetic encoding, is high and pure. What is absolute purity? The degree of purity here is immeasurable; it cannot be captured or gauged. There is no truth, for example, in describing something as pure electric current, for there is no purity in it. It is actually dissipating itself, since it is flowing against resistance. As long as something can be measured, it is not pure, and as long as man exists, he is not pure. This ayah alludes to that abstract encoding which is in the tablet.

The "honored books" are exalted and high in order to give us an example, for all gross things go downward, being subject to the laws of gravity. Anything that is heavy goes down, while anything that is light moves upward. That is why when we address God we unthinkingly look up and not down.

بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ

15 In the hands of scribes,

Safarah (سفرَة) is the plural of *sāfir* (سافر), meaning “scribe.” *Safar* (سفر), from the same verbal root, is “travel, journey,” while *safīr* (سفير) is “an ambassador, emissary, or mediator.” *Yad* (يد ; singular of *aydi*) means “hand,” which is an instrument of action. The voice of Reality says that this encoding, which is absolutely abstract and pure, has come about or been created through the hands of emissaries. An ambassador is only an ambassador if he fully represents whom he is supposed to represent. If he is not faithful to his mission, a good leader or king would dismiss him. The process of recording the message is one of grossification. Those hands symbolically represent all the powers and forces which brought about this world from a dense speck into its explosive, fiery, and molten state.

كِرَامٍ بَرَّةٍ

16 Noble, virtuous.

These words describe the powers of execution which bring about this creational reality. We must bear in mind that the Qur’an joins the echo of eternity with humanity. The Prophet, *ṣallā-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*, was that vibrating, pulsating entity who said it in words into which we can dive deeply. We cannot examine them superficially. *Kirāmin bararah* (كرام بررة), therefore, does not only mean “noble and virtuous.” *Karam* (كرم) means “absolute, total generosity.” If a man is totally generous, then he is a conduit through which things pass, whether they be wealth, knowledge, or anything else. If he is *karīm* (generous), he will only be an instrument, while he himself is absent. This is generosity in its ultimate form.

The root of *bararah* (بررة) is *barra* (بر), which means “to be pious, just.” *Birr* (بر), from the same root, is defined in Arabic dictionaries as “righteousness, reverence, or devoutness,” but this is only partially correct. If a person refers to his son as having *birr*, he means that he is faithful to his heritage and has followed the proven path that has been laid. By abandoning himself into that faithfulness, he is freed.

Kirāmin bararah means that those forces which executed the creational reality were not interfered with. Only the human being, as the culmination of creation, is given the choice of being either foolish enough to think that he is something special or wise enough to be desperate for abandonment as a spiritual seeker.

قُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ

17 Accursed is man! How ungrateful he is!

Qutila (قُتِلَ) is the passive form of the verb “to kill,” and as such changes its meaning slightly to “may he be cursed.” Being cursed in this case retains the strong connotations of being doomed, of dying.

The Qur’an has just taken us to a very subtle point and then suddenly brings us back to our human grossness. *Kufr* (كُفِرَ) is covering up in order to justify the antics of our ego. Everything in life is perfection — we get what we deserve, not what we desire. Life is totally perfect, but because we have expectations, we are usually frustrated. The whole world moves in one direction, but our expectations veer off in another. Man says, “I am not liked,” or “They don’t really know who I am,” as though he were something!

What does being killed really mean? When something is killed it means it has been stopped in its tracks. It has been wasted. How many of us are wasted as human beings between the womb and the tomb! This brings to mind the story of an Iraqi who went to Sweden. Upon visiting a cemetery in a village, he noticed one tombstone which read, “Johann Herenson, born 1910, died 1976 at the age of two years.” This did not make sense to him. He looked at another tombstone which read, “Here lies Maretta Henretta, born 1890, died 1938, at the age of two months and one day.” All these graves had similar inscriptions. Not being able to figure it out, he asked a villager, “What is this? Am I crazy, or is it that you in the West count differently from us?” “No, we count the same,” replied the villager, “but in this village we only count the days in which these people certified they had lived happily.” The Iraqi exclaimed, “Allah!” He sat down on a tombstone and said, “Please, if I die here, write: ‘Here died Jabr, from his mother’s womb to the tomb,’ ” (in Arabic, of course, the words rhyme). The man in *kufr*, on the other hand, has not seen a single day, nor even a moment of enlightenment, joyful bewilderment, or happiness. This is what the ayah means.

مِنْ أَيْ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ

18 From what thing did He create him?

مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ

19 From a small life-germ, He created him, then
He shaped him according to a measure.

From what has man been created? He has been created from a sperm. "Then He shaped him." *Qadr* (قدر), which is related to *qaddarah*, means "destiny, divine decree." A decree is measurable. We must reach that conclusion scientifically within ourselves to understand the meaning of destiny. If we do not understand destiny, then we understand nothing. Individual destiny is the outcome of one's will interacting with the decree, and it is perfect. There is no truth in saying that since everything is predestined, there is nothing we can do.

This ayah means that the complete encoding of man is in that sperm. What remains for man is to come out into gross manifestation, interact with the rest of existence, and find his way back to his Source. The Qur'an takes us up into absoluteness and then brings us back to this earthly reality in order to shake us up so that we may then dissolve into Reality.

ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ

20 Then the way — He has made it easy.

Again, this refers to the positive. *Sabīl* (سبيل) is the same as *ṭarīq* (طريق) and means "road, path." What is a path? Why do we all want a path in life? The *sabīl* is sought in order to avoid the pitfalls of not being on a clearly marked road. This "road" may be one of a transactional situation, a marriage, a business, a holiday, and so on. We want a path because we have strayed due to the bad choices we have made in our ignorance or *ẓulm* (ظلم).

Let us look at the word *ẓulm*, which means "darkness." Darkness is described in the Qur'an as a shield which should be removed because the essence of everything is light. Light is knowledge; thus we have the description: "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35). *Ẓulm*, in covering that light, occasionally becomes a blessing. Everything is a blessing, but we do not always perceive it as such. If

a person knew that within six months he would be hooked onto a kidney machine, he would be sick with anxiety from now until then. The darkness that covers his knowledge of what is to come is, therefore, a blessing.

Yassarah (يَسَّرَهُ) is from *yassara* (يَسِّرُ), meaning “to smoothen, level, pave, make easy.” *Yusr* (يُسْر), from the same root, means “ease, prosperity, abundance.” *Yasār* (يَسَار) also means “ease, luxury,” and means “left hand” as well. In all cultures, during periods of great spirituality, the right hand symbolized positive action and the left hand negation. Man takes, gives, and eats with the right hand. He discards and does away with superfluity with the left. He knows what is positive by negating the negative. At first, however, he does not know what is positive. He may not know, for example, that it is a positive action to avoid an electric plug: he simply negates the negative. Wisdom is already there; all that must happen is for it to unfold. Unfolding is uncovering. That is why Muslims fold themselves up in *ṣalāh* (صَلَاة ; ritual prayer), in order to disappear, to fold up the so-called “I”. In doing this, they maintain the lowest profile. Whoever fails to understand any of these meanings is not truly fulfilling the outer practices. Every action is as good as its intention and, therefore, if a person carries out these practices in good faith, even though in ignorance, some benefit will be derived from them.

The path has been made quite easy. Allah says in the Qur’an that the path towards realization, towards inner knowledge, is easy. Why is it easy? The implication is that we must simply avoid what we have already experienced as being inconducive to us. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, “The *mu’min* (the man who has faith, who trusts that he will reach his reality in its totality) will not fall into the same hole twice.”

ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ

21 Then He causes him to die, then buries him.

The story of creation is described in these three ayat: From a sperm we have been created, measured; the way has been made easy for us, if only we would desire to be awake and in constant remembrance; then we die and are buried! If we think of this whole process when we are angry, how hilarious our anger will appear, how ridicu-

lous the whole scene will become. "By remembrance your heart is made tranquil," says the Qur'an, because man does not accept that this life is the whole story. The only thing which every one of us, at any time, in any situation, can say is that we are dying. At the moment of birth, if a baby could speak, it would say, "I am dying, each moment I am closer to the grave." This is the only rational statement anybody can make, whether or not he himself is rational.

The second true statement which only rational people can make is, "I don't want to die." Some of us, when we are in a romantic mood, may say to our partners, "Oh, I would like to die with you," or when we are exasperated with the whole world we may say, "I want to die!" Therefore the second statement can only be made in a rational state of mind.

Here, then, we have a conflict. Yet how can there be a conflict? Allah is Merciful, and there is no mercy in conflict. The only possible implication, then, is that this entity which sees death and life as only an aberration, an echo of something which is permanent, is seeking permanence. Each one of us seeks permanency, in all aspects of our lives, whether it be manifested in wealth, relationships, or in the things we desire. We worship life; therefore we worship the Creator of life. Each one of us is a worshipper, and all that is necessary for true worship is to extricate ourselves from that perversion of worship which looks to what is transient, and instead to subsist in the absolute permanency of the Creator. The whole biography of man is encapsulated in these three ayats one after the other.

ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنشَرَهُ ط

22 Then when He pleases, He raises him to life again.

This ayah again refers to Reality. One could paraphrase it to read, "And if Reality wants it (because everything is related to the conditions set by Reality), it will be exposed, opened, known — meaning *here and now*." The attempts of other religious practices to arrive at this state of openness, as, for example, in the practice of confession in Catholicism, are superceded by this ayah, because by following this, there will remain nothing more to confess. Everything will be out in the open.

Ansharah (أنشره) comes from *anshara* (أنشر ; to resurrect from the dead), which in turn derives from *nashara* (نشر), meaning “to unfold, spread out, publicize.” If a person looks back on his own life, he sees that he tended to publicize whatever he did that pleased him, preferring to hide those deeds which did not please him. We all participate in this dissimulation at night when we draw the curtains, and crimes are committed in this dim light. Those who like darkness do so because it hides things which they find obnoxious.

كَأَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَا أَمَرَهُ

23 No! But he has not done what He commanded him.

This means that man has tried to go against the order of creation. Everything will occur, however, as it has been ordained.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ

24 Then let man look to his food!

Ta'ām (طعام) does not only mean “food”; it also has a broader meaning and includes everything from which we derive nourishment. It refers to what we can assimilate from our taste of life.

أَنَّا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا

25 That We pour down the water, pouring (it) down in abundance.

ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا

- 26 Then We cleave the earth, cleaving (it) asunder.

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا

- 27 Then We cause the grain to grow in it,

Habb (حَبَّ) means any type of “seed, cereal, berry, or kernel.” It is related to the word *ḥubb* (حُبَّ), which means “love.” *Ḥubb* is the unique link between a mother and her child. The root of love is this seed-like link; it is a conduit. A human can only say he loves if that conduit is completely open. A Christ-like love, totally overpowering and bewildering, is the only true love.

وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا

- 28 And grapes and green fodder,

Qadb (قَضْب) means “green fodder,” that is, any herbage that is edible, and *inab* (عِنَب) refers to grapes which are attractively bunched, inviting man to pick them.

وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا

- 29 And the olive tree and the palm tree,

Why does Allah mention these two trees in particular? Palm trees and olive trees have always been links between cultures. They are both symbolic and practical. Every part of both the olive and the palm tree is usable; the trunks for houses and roofs, the leaves for rope, and the

fruit for food. The Arabs, as well as the early Christians, had little other than these trees which served them so well.

وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا

30 And thick gardens,

وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا

31 And fruits and grasses,

مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ

32 A provision for you and your cattle.

With these ayats we go into another, more sophisticated realm. These ayats speak of plentiful and rich gardens; *matā'* (متاع) means "enjoyment, provision." Provision is that which helps you get from one point to another, from point A to point B, from the womb to the tomb.

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاعَةُ

33 But when the deafening cry comes,

Ṣākhkhah (صاحّة; deafening cry) is a reference to the second cycle of movement or the process of creation in reverse. Whenever cries and shouts are mentioned in the Qur'an, they herald the reversal of the earth and the beginning of the resurrection of those entities that are left behind, the energy forces, the *arwāḥ* (أرواح; the plural of *rūḥ*), which means "soul" or "spirit."

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ

34 The Day when a man flees from his brother,

When that day comes, it will be not only the end of this cycle, but also the beginning of a new cycle. At that instant, man will run away from his brother. *Yawm* (يوم) in the Qur'an does not mean "day" alone, but also "moment," or "instant." The word "brother" means all those persons with whom one has an affinity.

وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ

35 And his mother and his father,

He will also flee from his own mother and father. The implication here is that a person will abandon those whom he loves, his mother and father; otherwise, running away from them would have no meaning in this context.

وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ

36 And his female companion and his children,

His wife and children are also those people whom he loves, with whom he shared and enjoyed life.

لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ

37 On that Day every man of them shall have an affair that will occupy him.

For every one of them on that day there will be a concern which

will occupy and consume them, and there will be no room for anything else. When the whole of existence is shattered and shaken up, when the absolute becomes manifest, then only the individual will remain. This will be beyond the boundaries of time, and man will not be given a chance to be philanthropic or on his best behavior.

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ

38 Faces on that Day will be bright as dawn,

Musfirah (مسفرة) is from *safara* (سفر), which means "to remove the veil, to travel." When one is moving, one is exposed. *Sufūr* (سفور) means "unveiling of the face," that is, having nothing left to hide. "Bright, shining faces" indicate that they are not in *kufir* (covering up, ingratitude), but rather they are open and at ease, in complete self-abandonment. If one is free now, one is free forever; if one is fulfilled now, one is fulfilled forever. It says in the Qur'an, "A garden which encompasses the heavens and the earth" (3:133). This garden is in the heart, and the key to its gate is abandonment.

ضاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ

39 Laughing, rejoicing at good news.

All the messengers were charged with giving the good news (*bushrā*; بشرى), which is that man is an eternal creature whose path goes from Allah to Allah and whose duty is to leave the state of sleep for that of wakefulness. *Mustabshirah* (مستبشرة) derives from *istabshara* (استبشر), "to rejoice, be delighted (at good news)." It means that men will have been given the good news again. At this time, it will be fully confirmed that the good news was the totality of creation, and that man is the representative (*khalīfah*; خليفة) of the Creator. He therefore encompasses the characteristics of the entire creation in his genes. The whole story of the cosmos exists in man; he is the microcosm.

40 And faces that Day, dust will be on them,

Ghabarah (غَبْرَةٌ), dust, comes from the verbal root *ghabara* (غَبَرَ), “to elapse, pass, be bygone,” and in its more closely related form, *ghabbara* (غَبَّرَ), meaning “to soil, or cover with dust.” Dust is something that descends and sticks to a surface to which it does not belong. This ayah says that their faces will be covered with dust, meaning that they will have allowed their eternal, pure reality to be covered with something foreign to it.

تَرَهَّقَهَا قَتْرَةٌ

41 Darkness will cover them.

Rahiqā (رَهِقَ), “to come over or overtake someone,” is the root of *tarhaquhā* (تَرَهَّقَهَا). *Murhiq* (مُرْهِقٌ), which is from the same root, means “oppressive.” The implication of this ayah is that one will be oppressed by this blackness. This is a description of the basic duality, indicating the happiness of those who are in abandonment and the misery of those who are not. These conditions are polarized and exaggerated here into black and white so that they can be clearly seen.

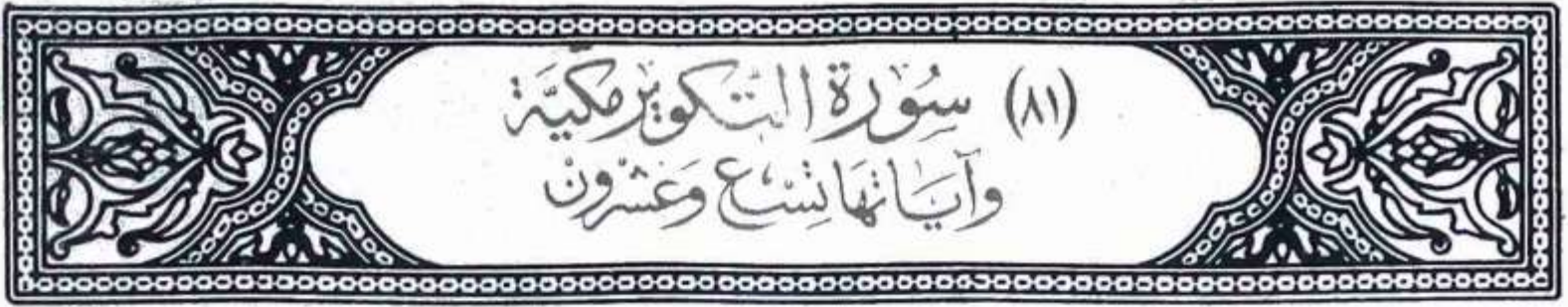
أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجْرَةُ

42 These are the ones who cover up, the wicked.

Those beings who have been encompassed by this gloomy, black tiredness are those who are in degenerate *kufir*. This is the description of an act, i.e. covering up, which does not occur within a normal arena of action; rather it occurs at the level of pure psyche, or *rūḥ* (رُوحٌ ; soul, spirit). This is why even the most sophisticated human language can only allude to it. Knowledge of it can come about

only when the *rūḥ*, which in fact is man's true self, is recognized. That is why it is said that if one truly knows oneself, one knows one's Lord.

This is the whole purpose and meaning of a spiritual path, of reflection. If reflection does not lead to this point, it will at best give an experience of transcendence. If it does not lead to this realization, it may at least make one a better Muslim or a better Christian. But the message from all the prophets, including the prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, is *tawḥīd* (**توحيد**), the independent Oneness of Allah, and the oneness of man's own reality.



SURAT AT-TAKWIR

THE FOLDING UP

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This surah begins on a cosmic scale: "When the sun is rolled up, when the stars shrink, and when the mountains are moved. . . ." Next it shifts to a human one: "And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed." Then it focuses on the inner life: "And when all the secrets are opened." It starts with the cosmos, returns to man, and then refers to the open manifestation of all hidden things in order to expose us inwardly and outwardly so that we find the unity in ourselves.

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ

1 When the sun is folded up,

Kawwara (كَوَّرَ) means "to make into a ball, to compress, to fold something upon itself, to roll up." A *kurah* (كُرَّة) is a "ball." *Takwīr* (تَكْوِير) is the act of something collapsing upon itself in a spherical manner.

The knowledge that the sun is explosive and expansive was obviously already present at the time of the revelation of the ayah since this is a reference to the reversal of this solar process, the end of the creational expansion. As far as the sun is concerned, it is in constant explosion. The same process occurs in a hydrogen bomb, that is, fusion or constant self-explosion. When the self-exploding creation comes to an end, the sun will completely collapse upon itself.

2 And when the stars darken,

Inkadarat (انكدرت) comes from the verbal root *kadura* (كدر), which means “to be muddy, cloudy, turbid, swarthy”. According to some sources, *inkadara* means to shoot or swoop down. Man is expansive; he reflects in his own being the expansiveness of the entire cosmos. The Qur’an is a manual of existence; it is concerned with man’s role and state in creation. The Prophet Muhammad’s own inner reality pulsated out in words, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*, as a revelation for all mankind. Therefore, if the Qur’an is not regarded as a manual of existence, as something we can understand in our current state — or in any other state we may be in — then we have not unravelled it and made it useful to us. We must resonate the Qur’anic reality in our day-to-day existence; we must take from it as much as can be of use to us. At every stage of life, the Qur’an is able to remove some of the tarnish which has covered the source of knowledge in us. That source of knowledge is in us, and the purpose of the Qur’an is to bring us into a state of awareness.

Man intrinsically dislikes collapse, because he is a reflection of the expansion of the cosmos. We are lovers of Allah’s attributes, and Allah’s attribute in creation is expansion. None of us likes to lose; we only like to succeed, and success nowadays means expansion. Sometimes, however, success lies in contraction. Since man is always dying, his success lies in shrinking away to nothing before he dies. Life, his essence, continues so he should not be concerned with his own personal death. The essence lasts forever; why, therefore, should he be miserable? All that is needed is the right attitude.

This ayah refers to the collapse of the stars. The implication here is that the stars are all held together by the centrifugal, electromagnetic, gravitational forces between them, making up one complete entity which is in a state of expansion. When the expansive forces are interfered with — which will occur because of the advent of a certain phase in the process of the whole story of creation — they will collapse. Anything that is created must end in due time, whatever it may be. This surah is a description of how this end will occur on a cosmic scale, starting with the most expansive and general, then shrinking to the scale of the individual.

We can also look at the meaning of the ayah from the microcosmic point of view. As far as the individual is concerned, the sun is his

rūḥ (روح ; spirit), and the *najm* (نجم ; star) is his *nafs* (نفس ; self). When the sun, or the spirit, stops giving nourishment to the *nafs*, or the self, which is the star, and when the star subsequently shrinks or collapses upon itself, the self will submit because at that time it will be darkened, that is, smothered and obliterated.

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ

3 And when the mountains are moved,

Suyyirat (سَيَّرَتْ) is derived from *sayyara* (سَيَّرَ), which means “to set in motion, start up, send out.” *Sayyārah* (سَيَّارَةٌ) means “car.” When the mountains begin to move, they will not do so with a single jolt, but in a continuous movement. How will a mountain move in this way, unless the turning and hurtling process of the earth in space stops? Since we are hurtling through space at so many thousands of miles an hour, when the end comes and the earth is seized and brought to a sudden stop, the mountains will, of course, be wrenched from their places and shattered. One only has to stop suddenly in a car going 20 miles an hour to experience this process. This, then, is a description of the end of our little drama on this tiny earth.

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ

4 And when the pregnant camels are abandoned,

Mountains moving and animals left untended are unusual occurrences. They depict a picture of opposites instantaneously combining. *'Ishār* (عِشَارٌ) is a camel that is ten months pregnant. For the desert Arab in those times, it symbolized a most desirable possession. If camels are neglected with nobody to care for them, it means the normal course of events that usually holds desert life together is no longer in operation. The verbal root of *'uṭṭilat* (عُطِّلَتْ) means “to neglect, leave without care, discontinue, stop.” *'Uṭlah* (عُطْلَةٌ) means “holiday or unemployment,” that is, a break in one’s normal

routine. When the natural creational processes are disrupted, there will be a total breakdown in the life-process.

There are three phases in the total life process: creation, maintenance, and destruction. The maintenance phase is particularly characteristic of a woman's inclination. Women usually want to achieve stability, whereas men's roles are, generally speaking, more creative. A man builds the house and starts up the home, and the woman maintains it, because she is responsible for the process of continuation on this earth. Her role is the key — she is the center of the universe. The word for "mother" in Arabic is *umm* (اُمّ), and also means "source, origin, foundation, essence." *Ummah* (اُمَّة) means "community, nation, people," the linguistic root of which is the same as that of *umm*.

The third phase in the life process is that of destruction, an act of which man is quite capable. The reference in this ayah is to the process of stopping. What has been created will also come to an end and stop. In other words, nothing more will occur at an initial creational level: there will be no more pregnancies. When the world comes to its end, no sane person will go to tend a camel!

وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ

5 And when the wild beasts are herded together,

All wildlife will gather close to each other. *Hashara* (حَشَرَ) means "to gather, assemble, crowd (together)." This again reflects the nature of creation. Everything is by nature expansive. Even though all wildlife tend to move together in herds and groups, they do not press too closely together; they maintain their wildness, their expansiveness. On the day when all systems of life come to an end, they will act in a way that is against their nature, and out of fright they will not scatter but huddle together.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ

6 And when the seas are set on fire,

Sajjara (سَجْرٌ), the root of *sujjirat* (سَجِّرَتْ), means “to swell, overflow,” and in its first form *sajara* (سَجَرَ) means “to fire up, burn, boil over.” Often when something ends, one gets a glimpse of what it was at its inception. In other words, this ayah may mean that there will actually be fires bursting out of the ground at the end of creation just as there were when the earth was first created. The earth began as a fireball which later cooled as the creational process unfolded.

The allusion to water that is on fire may refer to volcanoes erupting from the seas, setting the whole sea on fire or even to the flaming infernos at sea caused by oil-carrying supertankers that have caught fire. Whatever its exact meaning may be, the reference to the sea being set alight implies that the ordinary is replaced by the extraordinary.

Water symbolizes coolness and calmness, but here we are told that it is going to boil over. Things that we take for granted as being different and separate are joined to their opposites. All of these occurrences are events which will take place when the on-going process of life ceases.

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ

7 And when the souls are united,

Nafs (نَفْس ; self) here could mean *rūḥ* (رُوح ; spirit). *Zuwwijat* (united; زُوِّجَتْ) comes from the root *zawwaja* (زَوَّجَ), which means “to pair, couple, unite.” The ayah could mean that the soul will be united with what it gathered together or with what it has known, or that the *rūḥ* will be joined with that with which it appears to be united, that is, the body. In the cosmos, pairing constantly takes place; the opposites meet. Man is made up of two aspects: a bodily form which is part of the entity of the so-called “I” and something indiscernable which is called *rūḥ* (spirit or psyche). We may reflect on the *rūḥ*'s existence by asking, “Where am I in deep sleep? Where am I when I dream?” We say, “I walked up a steep

mountainside while I was asleep,” and yet, the physical body did not move. In other words, the *rūh* is another entity in man which has its own experiences. Perceiving this unification of the two opposites, body and spirit, is one way of looking at the meaning of the ayah.

Another way of looking at it is that we are not in a state of unification because of the diverse states arising from our *nafs*. Our various expectations, desires, and needs must be fulfilled if we are to be neutralized and to experience unity. That is why, in the most gross way, man has to be rehabilitated by what is called “marriage.” Marriage is a means of fulfillment and it is not always something wonderful; on the contrary, it is often miserable. Nevertheless, in most cases it is positive, especially when both parties have respect for each other, knowing that human beings have come into the world alone and will go out of the world alone. If they help each other to reach self-fulfillment during this sojourn, they will have achieved something.

Thus, there are two possible ways of looking at this ayah. When one's *nafs* is shattered, it is joined to its opposite. Everything in life exists at the level of duality; there is good, and there is also evil. Everything that can be imagined, touched, tasted or in any way perceived, exists in one of two modes. All of us are searching for the One, because we can never be satisfied by duality.

The implication of this ayah is that duality will come to an end. In this life duality will come to an end when man reaches a state of complete self-abandonment and when nothing can fulfill him because he is already fulfilled. This will also occur when man understands the true nature of reality at the point of death. In reality there is only God, there has been only God, and there will be only God. This knowledge comes through inner, experiential realization; it is not necessary that it be learned.

The Qur'an is concerned with deep spirituality. It is concentrated and absolute; it is like a spring whose source, when reached, is bitter. If a person wants to reach its essence, he can only do so by being willing to abandon everything — and that means death. He has to be in *fanā'* (**فناء** ; annihilation). If not, he is still caught up in the affliction of duality and the realm of wisdom that is only, at best, superficial and existential. Many men of knowledge, therefore, often end up in a little cave somewhere so as to lessen the effects of duality, and truth-seekers must seek them there.

When a person arrives at the Qur'an, he finds that it is vast. The essence of man, however, is itself vast. Understanding depends on how forceful and honest one is. The Qur'an says, “Read what is easy of the Qur'an” (Qur'an 73:20). Read what? What does this mean? We

read what is already written, what is written in us. This statement is made only to sharpen us, to unravel what is already in us.

In this ayah we read, "And when the souls are united," meaning when we are united with our opposite or when we are neutralized. At the present moment we are not neutralized. We are always craving something, constantly shifting from one aspect of duality to another by changing our external circumstances. This tendency, however, will ultimately be of no avail. We ourselves must change and that is much more difficult than trying to change the world.

We live in duality, and we seek to neutralize, but how do we neutralize? We neutralize our *nafs* by remaining silent, genuinely and positively. In that silence we have direct knowledge of the meaning of the Black Stone which is set into the the corner of the Ka'bah in Mecca.

Few Muslims know the meaning of the Black Stone, even though they perform the rite of circling it and kissing it during the Hajj pilgrimage every year. Black contains all the colors — it symbolizes death, from which comes life. Life cannot be understood unless one is willing to die. The meaning of *jihād* (**جهاد** ; literally, utmost exertion, and by extension defensive war against *kufr*) is not blood and misery; it is the willingness to stand fearlessly for life, the life of the spirit. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, did not desire war and the death it brought. He used reason to avoid it. He was fearlessly rational, because he used his *'aql* (**عقل** ; rationality, intellect), and he departed from the polytheistic heritage of his family as a guide for seekers of the right path to the one God.

Sayyidna Hasan, *'alayhi-s-salām*, used reason with the most treacherous man who ever lived, Mu'awiyah, when he abdicated the *khilāfah* (**خلافة** ; caliphate). Sayyidna Hasan had 20,000 followers, but he knew they were all rascals. He knew that they were not going to make up a useful army, that it was pointless for them to be killed, and that they would renege and desert him.

Disloyalty will often come from those closest to a person. Man is born wanting to be one, and basically everyone is dependent on the one and only Reality, Allah. The saying "he bites the hand that feeds him" arose because when a person perceives himself to be dependent upon another, he will often strike out, "biting the hand" that provides for him, as a means of asserting his independence. The reaction is also due, however, to an inner recognition of our ultimate dependence only on Allah.

Ignorance comes about when one is not being thankful to creation. It is in man's very substance, because everything contains its

opposite. The part of man that wants to live also contains his own ultimate destruction. We all will die and must see the beauty of perfection in this fact. Although we may still echo love of the *Bāqī* (الباقى ; the Everlasting), the perfection of man's life and death lies in the knowledge that they are just a cycle from which awakening occurs.

We will know who we truly are when we arrive at the state of true unification. That understanding is why we are, in reality, all seeking *tawhīd* (توحيد ; divine unity). There is only Oneness, only Allah, but to reach this realization we must progress through stages. First comes the stage in which a person believes in unity and is then able to say "I am beginning to understand!" As long as there is "I," however, we are in *shirk* (شرك ; associating other-than-Allah with Allah). When the "I" drops away, we see nothing other than Allah, nothing other than His attributes, and that is the ultimate peace from which action emanates. This peace is dynamic, not static or dead, nor is there any drama and affliction in it. The outsider may see affliction, but the *muwahhīd* (موحد ; the unifier) sees no affliction; he sees nothing other than love. At that point everything else will be acceptable and will be seen as perfection. The outward existential situation may not be desirable as the human being perceives it, but it is perfection. It may not be desirable for us to take a bitter medicine, but its perfection lies in returning us to a state of health, tranquillity, and balance. This stage, however, is very subtle and should only be revealed in the most intimate company.

The meaning of this ayah, then, is that man's essence is one, and there is only one essence. He starts by *shirk*, by saying, "My essence is one," and then "There is only essence, there is only Allah."

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ

8 And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked

بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ

9 For what sin she was killed.

The Arabs at the time of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*, had such arrogance and outer pride that a woman was always frowned upon. They forgot that man himself was the result of woman! They were afraid women would dishonor them by being unchaste and dishonorable. In looking back at that culture, we see that the ayah talks about the worst thing we suffer from, fear of the unknown. Everything that drains away our energy is fear of the unknown. All of our anxieties come to that one point. If we can say *tawakkaltu ‘ala’llāh*, “I depend on Allah,” and then recognize our condition of slavery in relation to Reality, all our anxiety will stop.

Maw’udah (مؤودة) is a young girl or female baby that has been buried alive. *Wa’ada* (وأد) means “to bury a girl-child alive.” In old Arabic *wa’ada* also means “to emit the sound of a wall crumbling down.” The sound of a wall collapsing suggests that the murder of a baby is a very grave crime, and it implies that the world is coming to an end: a life is being finished without letting it fulfill its rightful destiny. In other words, at the end of time, the true nature of everything will be revealed. The *arwāḥ* (the spirits, plural of *rūḥ*), no longer exercise their worldly right of emitting spiritual light as the sun and the stars do or as the *nafs*, in its essence, does. The *rūḥ*, that spark of inner light, is extinguished by man’s crime, by his fear, by his *kufr*, by his lack of trust in Allah and the generosity of Reality. Now the soul is being asked, and is asking itself, what crime it has committed. By doing so, it is announcing that it committed no crime, that there was no reason for it to be extinguished. It was man’s *kufr* that caused its life to be cut off. The buried girl-child questioning the reason for her death is a *mithāl* (مثال ; a metaphor) of there being no possibility in this experience or the next to suppress something and forget about it forever. We cannot silence something forever simply because it cannot react in this world. Soon everything will be totally out in the open. The spirit is being brought as a witness.

The Qur’an poses the question, “What have you done to deserve being slaughtered?” From the point of view of *sharī‘ah* (شريعة ; revealed Islamic code of conduct), the Arabs had no right to slaughter the girl-children. But what could have been the motive behind it from the point of view of *ḥaqīqah* (حقيقة ; truth)? That motive continues to be a source of dispute even now, although it is covered up as much as possible. According to *sharī‘ah*, however, man is accountable for his actions; he cannot escape them. If he kills someone wrongfully, it is final, no matter what the intention was.

Outwardly, we are accountable to *sharī‘ah*, and in this realm of existence, *sharī‘ah* prevails over *ḥaqīqah*. What a number of people or a consensus of society see — provided they are not hallucinating —

is what is considered to be true. If everyone agrees on the identity of the killer, that judgement is considered to be valid. As far as *sharī'ah* is concerned, the *ḥukūm* (**حُكْمٌ** ; the judgement) governs the action and the action must be considered murder. The rest is between the killer and Allah. If he killed someone one hundred percent *fī sabīli' llāh* (**فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ** ; in the Way of Allah), then even if the people submit him to the sword, he should be happy. He should say, "The sooner I free myself from these people and go to meet my Lord, the better!"

In the next life *ḥaqīqah* will prevail over *sharī'ah*; the subtle will prevail over the gross. In this world, however, the gross prevails over the subtle, and we start with the gross in order to arrive at the subtle. We start by being correct, by applying *sharī'ah*, by feeding and maintaining ourselves well. If we do not do that, we are mad. If we say we do not care for the world, we are only trying to escape our responsibilities. At the beginning of the journey, we do care. We want to have sufficient clothing and a reasonable diet. This attitude is a healthy one. If from the beginning we do not care for physical needs, we indicate that we cannot attain them, that we have no understanding of them, or that we do not see their use. In having this attitude, we are actually denying Allah's creation. How can we, therefore, understand the meaning of inner *kufr* (covering up) if we are in outer *kufr* from the beginning?

وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ

10 And when the pages are laid open,

Ṣuḥuf (**صُحُفٌ**) is the plural of *ṣaḥīfah* (**صَحِيفَةٌ**), which means "a scroll, a page," anything that can be made flat and upon which something is written. It also means "a newspaper," because it is flat. *Maṣḥaf* (**مَصْحَفٌ**) also means "Qur'an." These pages refer to pages of news or to the pages of a man's heart in which his intentions are laid open.

There is no point in hiding our intentions. The more we hide them, the more we will eventually have to remove them in order to be able to release ourselves. We use such things as drink, drugs, and other stimulants in order to give ourselves relief. Human nature is concerned with relief; life is nothing but seeking relief and freedom.

Our basic human attribute is inner freedom. Inner freedom can be reached through outer discipline, but outer discipline has to be lived willingly; it cannot be forced. For this reason, Muslims insist on being around people of the right orientation, on having proper companionship. All seekers seek each other, and people who want to know truth collect together. If a man keeps the company of thieves for forty days, even if he is decent and honest, he will end up by being affected by them because he does not want to be in isolation. *Insān* (انسان), the word for “man, human being,” derives from the verb *anisa* (انس), “to be companionable, friendly, to like to be together.” *Uns* (أنس), from the same root, means “intimacy, familiarity.” Man wants to connect; he is a *muwahhid* (موأحد ; a unifier), and he wants to be in *tawhīd* whether he realizes it or not.

In reality there is neither inward nor outward, only Allah manifesting Himself as inward and as outward. At the moment, we are in confusion because we are in duality and see things only from that perspective. Sayyidna ‘Ali, ‘*alayhi-s-salām*, says, “The best of affairs are in the middle.” The best place to be is in the middle. Most people cannot survive at the extremes. The Muslim must combine *sharī‘ah* and *ḥaqīqah*; we cannot have one without the other. In most of the Muslim world, we are at a loss and are struggling because we are not combining the inward and outward in our daily lives. We talk about *islām*, but we do not live it, and for this reason our youth are at a loss and reject traditional values. We have to be in the middle. In the middle both ends of the horizon are in view and so we are strong.

A vast amount of *sharī‘ah* with no *ḥaqīqah* is like a giant ship heavily laden with goods but with no sail to catch the wind; it sways and flounders in the sea. *Sharī‘ah* exists for making distinctions, for differentiation. The business of *sharī‘ah* is to differentiate among things and let us choose correctly between the alternatives that life presents to us so that we can knowledgeably state what is right and wrong. The distinction must be clear. The nature of *sharī‘ah* is divisive because it is about *ḥukum*, which means both justice and wisdom. Justice means that one kind of action is correct while another kind of action is incorrect. From the point of view of *ḥaqīqah*, everything is always in harmonious perfection because everything naturally generates its opposite. If one is balanced in the middle, he has both extremes at his command.

In the same way, *ḥaqīqah* with no *sharī‘ah* is like a ship with a huge sail but with no goods in it. It will capsize. If a Muslim says, “I am only concerned with the inward,” he is lying. The true Muslim is the man who is in the middle, who is a *barzakh* (برزخ ; barrier

interval or gap), an intermediary link simultaneously combining both the outward and the inward. According to the Ahl al-Bayt, the following ayah is a reference to the Prophet Muhammed, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*: “Between the two is a barrier which they cannot transgress” (55:20). The Prophet is the *barzakh* between the perfect man, Imam ‘Ali, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, and the perfect woman, Fatimah, *‘alayha-s-salām*.

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ

11 And when the heaven has its covering removed,

Kashaṭa (كَشِطَ) means “to remove, take off – a cover.” The implication is that everything manifested is only an outer covering. From our point of view, the whole creation was created for us; otherwise, it would have no significance. What is of significance is man. Man’s existence is only meaningful, however, if he keeps to his purpose, which is to know the cause of his existence. The purpose is to gain knowledge of Allah. The entire creation came by Allah in order for man to *know* Allah. The apparent heavens which are in constant explosion and expansion are, from the point of view of the Creator, mere fantasies: all the billions of galaxies do not amount to even a grain of sand by His reckoning. When the heaven has its covering removed, or is skinned, we will then see its insignificance. The most significant thing, the sky, is described in the most belittling way to show us the independent wealth of Allah. The heavens are only a skin, a facade, a show, which will eventually be stripped away.

وَإِذَا الْجِجَمَاتُ أُعْجِرَتْ

12 And when the fires of hell are lighted,

Everything in existence was originally created from one dense mass and greatly expanded by burning, after which all the stars and planets and all of creation burst forth over a period of billions of years. That dense beginning is the equivalent of absolute power or

qudrah (قدرة). It cannot really be called density because it is beyond density and because one might imagine that Allah Himself was dense; may Allah preserve us from that view. It is a point of power, total and absolute, not related in any way to anything else.

This ayah describes a new situation which is inaccessible to our conscious understanding because conscious understanding cannot comprehend Absolute Power. Great power is understandable, but not Absolute Power. There is an intermediary link, a *barzakh*, between absolute and very high power. Absolute zero temperature cannot be achieved because all the laws of thermodynamics would be disturbed, but one can get very close to it, and from that limited point on one can have a subjective understanding or experience of it.

Similarly, one can get only so close to the knowledge of Reality, beyond which it is: "Not by diligence or striving – a gift from the Generous, the Compassionate Giver to the slaves" (From the *Fayturiyyah* of Shaykh Muhammed al-Fayturi). One can only go so close to this knowledge, and passing beyond that point is not a matter of human endeavor.

This same experience is reproducible by those who follow in the footsteps of a perfect man and who imitate him as much as they are outwardly able to. This proximity can also be attained by those who take on the responsibility of being *ṣāliḥūn* (صالحون ; those who set things right by their example), who put themselves in the shoes of the *ṣāliḥūn*, and who bring about *iṣlāḥ* (اصلاح ; establishment of peace, happiness and order). They take themselves as far as they can toward that point by living as though they were in the constant companionship of the Prophet, *ṣallā-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. They are in the *maqām al-iḥsān* (مقام الأحسان ; the station of excellence). They live in the knowledge that they are constantly watched: they do not see Allah, but they know that Allah sees them.

Attaining such a state is the most one can achieve through his own effort. States beyond this are "a gift from the Generous, Compassionate" and come either in this life or at the moment of death. We can and must do our best: there is nothing more we can do. After that we will become like open conduits, and we will be in harmony with the true meaning of *islām*, the inner meaning of submission. We will be completely and utterly enacting our destiny; there will be no more resistance between ourselves and the decree. As far as it is humanly possible, we must be in a state of perfect submission because that state is the only one in which we can have an experience of the one and only Perfect One. If we are not in that state of perfect inner abandonment, anything else we speak of will be mere religiosity.

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ

13 And when the Garden is brought near,

Those who love the *ākhirah* (**آخرة** ; the next world) already have the key to *jannah* (**جنة** ; the Garden) in their heart. Those who love Allah love the *ākhirah*, because there will be nothing there but the truth for them. In fact, *jannah* is available to us now. The Qur'an is clear about this; it does not say that it will only happen later, after death, because it describes the people of *jannah* as those who say, "We remember all this! It is similar to that which we have already experienced!" Thus, we have access to that condition here and now by avoiding what brings us to the opposite state. This way is the only one; there is no other.

We have all experienced trouble; we all know what it is and how it comes about — by fears, expectation, lusts, and so on. But if we are aware of it spontaneously, then we will no longer be troubled. At that point of recognition we will be at the edge of *jannah*, and the key to the Garden will become more and more clearly shaped in our hearts until our hearts are pure; and since the pure heart will be with the Maker of the Garden, it will be beyond *jannah* itself. *Jannah* will no longer interest us since we will be with its Maker, with our Maker, Allah.

Our heritage, which we are all seeking, is the Garden. We all love the Garden, the state that the Garden gives us, tranquility, fullness, abundance, protection, security, and enjoyment of all the good things of life. A visible, physical garden on this earth helps us to enter into the mood of contentment, generosity, and helpfulness. The Garden of bliss is our real and natural heritage and is to be found by following our hearts. We must be honest about it and recognize that it is there. There is nothing closer to us than truth, and our essence is truth. In our essence is the lover of the Garden, of tranquility and peace. Our essence is neither life nor death: it is that from which both have come, the Creator. This is the *bishārah* (**بشارة** ; the good news).

"And when the Garden is brought near" refers to the beginning of self-abandonment. In fact, there is nothing other than the Garden. The Qur'an says that the Garden's width is the expanse of the heavens and the earth, so why are we in misery here? Obviously we are miserable because we are not receptive to the station of self-abandonment. We can receive only that to which we are receptive. When we become receptive to the Ever-Living Eternal, nothing else will exist for us, and

we will live fully from moment to moment. When the end of time draws near, we will find it easier to experience full self-abandonment.

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ ط

14 Every self will know what it has brought with it.

In our own lifetime we may not see this, but our individual ends will come, and as far as we are concerned, our end is the end of the cosmos. We do not care if there are more or less stars up above. The rational man understands that he sees creation according to his interpretation: he is its center. From a rational point of view, he also knows that his end does not mean the end of the total cosmos. It is quite probable that at our individual death other people will continue their experience of life, and it will not be the end of the outer cosmos, but it will be the end of *our* cosmos, the end of what we experience.

When we remember that the end may come at any minute and we remember that we are suspended in air (one word related to *nafs* is *nafas*, meaning breath), we become more human. The Prophet, *ṣallāllāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, "People are asleep, and when they die they wake up." True seekers want to die while being awake — they want to enter a state of total silence. All the practices of the men of Allah from time immemorial lead man, the seeker, to inner death while still alive. If, while we are conscious, aware, and scintillating with life, we can enter a state of self-abandonment, then we will understand what inner death is. If we cannot reach this state, then we will remain in the turmoil of *sa'y* (سعي), that is, running between Safa and Marwah in Mecca, or moving ceaselessly around and around. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with that because we are made that way; man is born in *kabad* (كبد ; trouble, misery). If he recognizes his reality, then that *kabad* becomes like a game, and the trouble becomes most useful. The word *kabd* (كبد), from the same root, means "liver," man's most important organ because it is the purifier of his blood. The liver checks any potential trouble the body may experience from a build-up of toxins.

When any sort of event befalls one, a person should say, "*al-hamdu li'llāh.*" Such a person is already in the Garden: he is laughing as does a man of knowledge. Man is only qualified to laugh after he has wept; he is only qualified to live after he has died. Before he was

born, he was dead, and the so-called "I" had no life. Man came from death; thus, in order to know his essence, he has to die inwardly, and he has to be in silence.

Recently, studies have been made of people who have died and were immediately resuscitated. At the point of death, they reported experiencing a rapid review of their entire lives. Everything they had ever done instantly appeared before them. Upon entering death, we take with us what this entity called *nafs* has earned in this life. Everything is as good as it ends, which is why the Qur'an always talks about the *ākhirah*. It is for this reason that we want to educate our youngsters to do things which will have a positive effect in the *ākhirah*. In a material sense, we like them to invest in something which has a good return. In relationships, we advise them to keep the companionship of people who are good to them and to whom they also are good. In other words, they should invest in something worthwhile.

We all long for the end because we want a better life at the end, and for this better life we are willing to put up with inconveniences now. The Qur'an says that every self knows what it brings with it into death because we ourselves know that what we are taking with us is in our hearts and our psyches. Even now we are preparing ourselves for the end.

It is only when the experience of death occurs to the *nafs* that "every self will know what it has brought with it." If the sun, the "I," is extinguished, and we are brought to a state of extinction which is what *fanā'* (**فناء** ; annihilation) is, then we will know our nothingness. We will know that whatever we did was out of ignorance, and that, at best, we could have behaved as decent, conscientious human beings. We are only qualified to act if we have surrendered the power to act, if the sun in us has collapsed entirely.

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنُوسِ

15 But no! I swear by the stars

الْجَوَارِ الْكُنُوسِ

16 That run their course and hide themselves.

The surah now moves into another phase. *Uqsimu* (اقسام) means, "I swear by (something)." *Lā* (لا) here is actually a negative article which emphasizes and positively affirms what follows it. Here what is affirmed is the evidence of *khunnas* (كُنُوس ; stars in general). Qur'anic scholars also take *khunnas* to refer to the five planets that are closest to earth. *Jawār* (جوار) is the plural of *jāriyah* (جارية), meaning "vessel, Ark," and in older usage, "running streaming." The verbal root is *jarā* (جرى), which means "to flow, run, happen," and here signifies the stars that run their course.

Kunnas (كُنُوس) is a name that is given to the stars, especially to those planets which occasionally hide themselves in the sun's rays, because they are close to it. The verbal root of *kunnas* is *kanasa* (كَنَسَ) "to lie hiding in wait." The relationship between *khunnas* and *kunnas* comes about because all the planets have a retrograde as well as a direct motion. The implication here is that these stars or planets are hidden in darkness. The planets closest to us are not visible most of the time, but they are there nonetheless. This ayah is indirectly telling us to be open-minded and a little more imaginative, since, as we see these planets some of the time, we know that they are there at other times when we cannot see them. They are then in the *ghayb* (غيب ; the unseen). The ayah is saying, "see how these five planets are not visible most of the time, even though they are your neighbors."

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ

17 And the night when it darkens.

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ

18 And the morning when it breathes —

Then, when the night comes, with its utter darkness and silence, we do not see anything. Night implies silence and incubation, darkness and hibernation. Then it says, "And when the morning breathes," because after hibernation we start "taking in," and as we do this we

inhale. The reference here is to those cycles which go from quiet stillness to life and movement. The juxtaposition of these two āyat shows the duality of existence: one state being inertia, the other motion.

We can also draw a parallel with the earlier reference to the sun and the stars to arrive at the inner meaning of the ayah which states, "But no! I swear by the stars." This refers to those aspects in us, those stars in us, which suddenly appear after being hidden. The luster in us, the generosity, the compassion, and selflessness in us which were not obvious before, suddenly appear, like stars burning with the same fire as that of the sun, which is the equivalent of our *rūḥ*. The night is like a state of darkness that often overcomes us, and the day is like the time when we are bright and cheerful. The macrocosm, which is evident in the Qur'an, is reflected in the microcosm, which is our selves.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

19 Surely it is the word of a noble messenger —

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ

20 The possessor of strength, established in the presence of the Lord of the Throne,

مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ

21 One (to be) obeyed, and trustworthy.

The reference here is to the words of the noble Messenger, a man of power whose power was from the Possessor of power, He Who in His almightiness is firmly esconced on the 'arsh (عرش ; throne, foundation, support). The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa*

sallam, was, however, not obeyed then, and we may ask if he is obeyed even now. What this ayah means is that what he says is the absolute truth. He is obeyed by truth, by reality itself. He is united with destiny, with the absolute Decree. He is obeyed by the orchestration of all existence. If we are not in harmony with this orchestra and only listen to our own inner cacophony, we are disobedient.

At the time when these surats came, the Prophet had only a few followers. The Qur'an says, "A multitude of those of old and a few of those of later times" (56:13-14). The Qur'an always speaks about the few. It speaks about quality not quantity. This is a natural law. From a *shari'ah* point of view, from the creational point of view, this is the truth.

وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ

22. And your companion is not mad.

Bi-majnūn (**بِمَجْنُونٍ**) really means, "he is not veiled, he is not talking obscurely." As the Qur'an says, "it is nothing but a reminder and a clear reading-out" (36:69). There are no aspects of his intellect which are hidden. *Majnūn* (**مَجْنُونٍ** ; from *janna*, **جَنَّ** , to cover, veil, hide) in Arabic means "madman," but the reason it means "madman" is because it refers to someone whose intellect is hidden, whose discriminative quality is not evolved but is covered and shaded over and does not express itself outwardly in the form of *'aql* (**عَقْلٍ** ; rationality, intellect). The ayah means that he is not hiding things, he is not uncertain. He does not say one thing and mean something else; he is not unclear.

This ayah assures us that this Prophet is not mad. We need this reassurance because we have invested in our own system of understanding and when someone tells us that we do not own anything, that we are nothing, that we have come from nowhere and will return to it again, and that we must give up everything, we naturally want to declare this person insane.

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأَفْقِ الْمُبِينِ

- 23 And certainly, he saw him on the clear horizon.

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ

- 24 And he is not avid for the Unseen,

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ

- 25 Nor is it the word of Shaytan, the accursed outcast.

فَإِن تَذَهَبُونَ

- 26 So where then are you going?

An outer meaning of the twenty-third ayah is that it refers to the Prophet's having seen the angel Jibra'il on Mt. Hira, peace be upon them both. The Prophet saw the truth, saw the message as it came to him, and saw the truth on the horizon, which comes to man from a distance, from the other side of his heart, as is described in Surat Ya Sin. "And there came, from the farthest part of the city, a man (i.e., prophet) running" (36:20). This is because if truth had been near, it could have also been clear from the beginning. The implication is that when the message comes, it must come from far away. The mercy of Reality showed Jibra'il to the Prophet in a visible form so that he would not be confused about "inner voices" and "inner visions," which could lead to excesses and abstractions. The Prophet, *salla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, always had a direct, outer sign, in the form of a man, Jibra'il, who appeared to him, because he was in a state of *tawhīd*.

The word *shayṭān* (شيطان) is from the verb *shaṭana* (شطن), which means “to be obstinate, perverse, to be cast off a path, to be distanced.” *Rajīm* (رجيم) means “stoned, pelted, driven away with stones,” and “damned, accursed.” Then the surah continues, “where are you going?” Coming from the womb, going to the tomb, we are caught in this interval. We are simply a vibrating thread between that beginning and that end; there is nowhere to go.

This is the meaning of surrender, of *islām*. It means to surrender to this reality which is in our hearts. We can only do our best, be available every minute, every second, willing to put our faces in the dust from which we have come and to which we return.

If we reach that state, we will be closer to hearing the joy of the song of the Qur’an, and all of it will be clear to us. We can touch it, however, only if we are pure, which means pure of heart, and have no expectations. Our suffering and misery are the result of our own expectations. We believe certain things will happen, and when they do not, we suffer and blame other people. Nobody is to be blamed but ourselves for having had those expectations in the first place. If we come with no expectations, then the whole drama of existence is a beautiful piece of theatre. We enjoy it, do our best, play our part. We cannot experience it in this way except by being pure, so we must start purifying ourselves from the outside-in, the outside being the easier point from which to begin.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

27 This is nothing but a reminder to all the worlds —

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ

28 To whomever of you wants to go straight.

Mustaqīm (مستقيم) is “right, upright, straight.” The root of its verbal form is *qāma* (قام) and means “to stand fast or firm.” Many important words are derived from this root. *Al-qiyāmah*

(**القيامة**), which means “the Resurrection,” is from the same root. *Al-qā'im* (**القائم**), literally, “standing firm, upright, certain to come,” is an epithet of the Mahdi, Imam az-Zaman, *'alayhi-s-salām*. It means that he is forever present. *Qum* (**قم**), also from the same root, means “stand up, be ready” and is the name of what is now a famous city in Iran. The words related to *qāma* imply stability, and if one is stable, one is alert. Alertness does not come when our heads are heavy, dull, and low, but rather when we stand up straight and our heads are held high. If our heads are drooping low, our thoughts will not flow well. It is for this reason that when we do *dhikr* (**ذكر** ; remembrance – here, actual practice thereof in which the Divine Names are invoked) our backs have to be straight and our heads must be held in their highest position.

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

29 And you do not will except what Allah wills, the Lord of all the worlds.

Man cannot wish for anything other than what has been wished for by the Creator. The Creator’s law is that man has a choice: “Surely we have shown him the way; he may be thankful or unthankful” (76:3). If man is in *shukr* (**شكر** ; gratitude) he is content and happy, and if he is happy he is efficient and alive, available, drunk with light. This, then, is the worship of free men who are as near as possible to being absolute, free by being absolute slaves. We cannot have one without the other. The root of freedom lies in servitude.

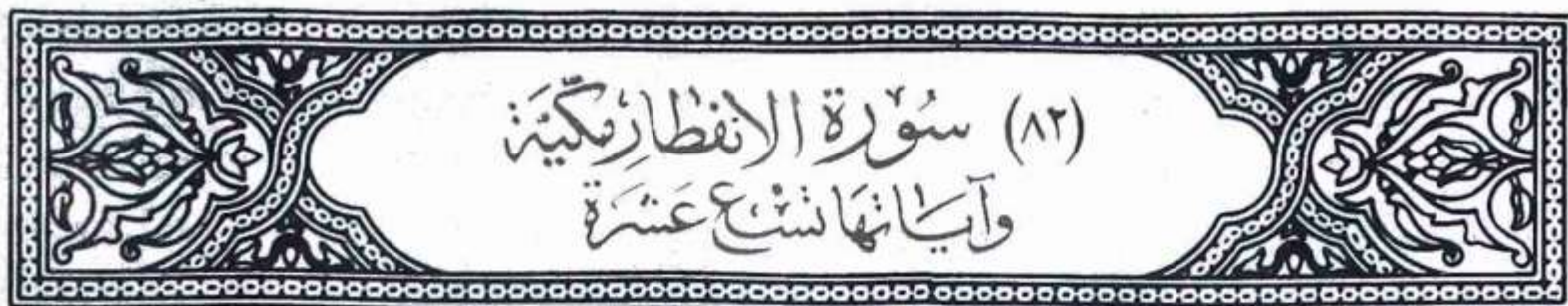
But whoever is in a state of *kufr* (**كفر** ; covering up, denial, ingratitude) covers up and makes excuses for not taking action now. He does not realize that every second is auspicious and every breath a blessing. If we regard each breath as the final one, then all our debts will be settled, we will behave correctly, we will not disbelieve, and we will be generous. We will give only joy to others. If we have no expectations, we will not talk to people who do not want to listen. We will be like the bird who just sings for the sake of its song. The free bird has no expectations; it sings whether one feeds it or not. That is its nature, its mission; that is its reality.

Rabb (**رب**) is that entity which brings every system to its full potential. *Rabb* is “the Creator, the Lord, the Sustainer.” He gives a being what is due to it in order to cause its growth and full blossom-

ing. When we pray, we surrender to that entity, to that power or force which brings everyone to his full potential, and that full potential is *jiwār ar-Rabb* (جوار الرب ; closeness to the Lord).

Allah says in the Qur'an, "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (50:16). Where are we then? Are we in *jiwār* (closeness), or have we separated ourselves from Him? Allah is omnipresent; there is nothing other than Allah. Since this is true, why are we not encompassed and taken over by that Reality? The answer is that we have identified ourselves with this so-called "I." The Qur'an is here only to remind us that this so-called "I" has only come in order to die and that we should give it up quickly and enter into the enjoyment of lordship. Through *tasbīḥ* (تسبيح ; glorification of God), man enters into that which encompasses all, and this *tanzīḥ* (تنزيه ; worship having no association with a created or anthropomorphic thing) is something which is pure beyond imagination, totally untarnished. Man must bring himself to that state and be sustained therein, and that is the meaning of closeness. One must live outwardly to his utmost according to the *sharī'ah*, and be true to his word, because every second counts. In this way, he will reach *ḥaqīqah*.





SURAT AL-INFITAR

THE CLEAVING ASUNDER

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This surah has a theme and pattern similar to Surat at-Takwir, yet it is very different. It reminds us that there will be an end of creation-manifestation and describes how this will take place in a way that we intellectually understand. Our intellect accepts the fact that everything created has come from dense matter that expands and is diluted and then regenerates within itself. We also know intellectually that whatever begins will come to an end and that there is nothing manifest in any form or manner that will not come to an end. This end will come with the unfolding of time, and until this occurs the object of our search must be absolute knowledge which does not change with time, knowledge which is forever true and correct.

This surah, in a pattern similar to Surat at-Takwir, begins with a view of the cosmos and the heavens, and then comes to an earthly level, the graves, which are the final end of conscious reality. Even the reality which we thought of as final will be dissolved.

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ

1 When the heaven is cleft asunder,

Infatarat (انفطرت) comes from the verb meaning "to crack,

to be rent or cleft asunder." *Fitrah* (فطرة), from the same original root, means "innate nature, instinct." The word *fitrah* inherently recalls the idea of "origin," and, as we see from its related word forms, implies that the origin of anything springs from a crack. The Qur'an says that the earth was egg-shaped, and when water came, it cracked in order to facilitate growth from within itself. Visibly and symbolically, everything comes from the initial single source bursting into the manifold stream of creation.

The heavens are held together by all the different forces which maintain the stars and planets in organized orbits. If that system were to crack, this order would be undone. The inference here is that when the system of existence in this realm — both for us and for other beings, such as the *jinn* (spirits) — reaches a point beyond which it can no longer expand, it will begin to collapse. Every system in existence has a limitation except for the essence, which is Allah. That Essence encompasses all systems; it is Boundless and for this reason meaningful boundaries exist. Every limitation comes from the Limitless, and since it comes from the Limitless, it must be limited. Time can be understood only because there is timelessness, the meaning of which is already contained within man. This ayah, then, speaks of the end of time and the beginning of the next experience.

وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ

2 And when the stars are scattered —

This is what happens as a result of the first ayah. *Intatharat* (انتثرت) means "haphazardly scattered." *Kawākib* (كواكب) are "planets." As far as we are concerned, when the heavens crack, the planets closest to us will be scattered. The forces that formerly held them in orbit will themselves be destroyed. A new system must be found after this collapse, because the old system of continuity in creation will have come to an end.

Kawkaba (كوكب), the verbal root of *kawākib*, means "to shine brilliantly," and especially is used to describe the shininess of iron. If a day is described as *kawkabī* (كوكبي), the day is one of particular significance or difficulty. In this case, the word refers to those elements in the cosmos which are outstanding, as far as we are concerned, because they are connected with the solar system, and they shine for us with a brilliance greater than that of the other celestial bodies.

The root of the word *intatharat* is *intathara* (انتثر), which means “to be scattered or strewn about, be dispersed,” indicating that this scattering is haphazard but also part of a pattern. It is a random action, yet it is not a meaningless, abstract randomness. The word *intatharat* evokes the image of scattering seeds on the ground. From the point of view of the scatterer, the actor, this follows a certain pattern, a pattern dictated by factors such as the size of his hand and his normal movement and rhythm, even though from the point of view of the seed or that of the observer, it appears to be haphazard. The act of sowing itself is a scattering, yet it is a scattering according to a certain decree.

Nathr (نثر) is the opposite of *shi'r* (شعر). *Nathr* is “prose,” and the expression *rajulun natharun* (رَجُلٌ نَثْرٌ) refers to a man who is talkative, always scattering his words around. *Shi'r*, on the other hand, means “poetry.” By the act of intensifying and making words compact and concise, poetry is created, whereas by scattering the words loosely on the page, prose is produced.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ

3 And when the seas are made to surge forth explosively —

When the forces or systems that keep the cosmos intact stop, there will be an explosive result. *Fujjirat* (فُجِّرَتْ) is from *fajjara* (فَجَّرَ), which means “to cause to flow, to split, explode.” The existing system will go beyond its original boundary and decay rapidly.

A word that is similar in meaning to *fajjara* is *shaqqa* (شَقَّ), “to split, cleave; to grieve, trouble, harrass.” *Mashaqqah* (مَشَقَّةٌ) means “difficulty, hardship, trouble.” This difficulty arises because of the cracking apart when what we really want is for things to stay together, in *tawhīd*. *Shaqqa* (شَقَّ), “a crack, or break,” implies difficulty. Outwardly, a split or fissure appears to be against *tawhīd*, but in reality it can only exist within *tawhīd*. How could we know that it is cracked if everything were not already connected? Everything is together because there is only oneness, and this shows itself clearly when something splits apart and we are distressed. We do not even like it outwardly, because we are lovers of the One and Only Hand that holds and binds everything together.

The verb *fajara* is a rich source of words, the meanings of which are all logically related, and therefore is worth some further attention. *Fajr* (فجر), meaning “dawn,” is related to *fajara*. The night, that all-enveloping darkness, is broken by the first beams of morning light, hence the word “daybreak.”

Infijār (انفجار) is an “explosion, eruption, or detonation,” indicating that the object to be detonated began as a solid, but by the act of *infijār* has been rendered momentarily mobile.

In the Qur’an *fujūr* (فجور ; wickedness, immorality, profligacy) normally implies transgression, acting out of line, beyond the limits of the path. Transgressing the bounds is bursting beyond them. If *fujūr* is used to describe a person, it means he or she has committed the worst of all human crimes, which is *zinā’* (زناء ; adultery, fornication). When a people is said to be *fājir* (فاجر) it means that they are degenerate and shamelessly debauched.

One of the most important meanings of *fajjara* in the Qur’an is to be found in the following ayah: “A spring from which the slaves of Allah drink, making it gush forth abundantly” (76:6). From the point of view of *ḥaqīqah* (حقيقة ; “the truth”), the implication here is that the spring is within oneself. That spring, that point of *fiṭrah* (original nature) is within the heart of man, but it has to be detonated, made to gush forth, and in order to do that, one must be able to reach it. In order to detonate open the safe in a bank, one must go through all the corridors. The same thing is true for the heart – in order to get to it, we must go through all those corridors which have become horror chambers that we have invented and constructed in our passage through this life.

Hasan al-Basri, may Allah be pleased with him, who received his teaching from Sayyidna ‘Ali, ‘*alayhi-s-salām*, said that the meaning of this ayah refers to the “water drying up” because it is a reversal of the norm. At that time everything will be extraordinary and abnormal; the planets which were holding us in orbit, with which we were connected and which were most influential upon our lives, will be scattered. Similarly, the seas will be empty. From the point of view of the Creator there will be no reversal, but will only seem to occur from our point of view. We will perceive everything to be turning upside-down because we are subject to it. From the point of view of Reality, however, it will be according to a perfect plan, according to the perfect laws which govern this existence.

وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعِثَتْ

4 And when the graves are laid open.

Now the collapse of the world comes even closer. The final resting place is the grave, which is therefore a place of peace. *Ba'thara* (**بعثر**), the root of *bu'thirat* (**بُعِثَتْ**), means "to scatter around, turn upside down, throw into disorder." What we have here is a description of another result of the breakdown in the gravitational and centrifugal forces, among others, holding the world together. The ground of the cemeteries will heave up and the graves will split open completely. What ever every self has been hiding and keeping secret will be exposed in this opening.

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ

5 Every self will know what it has sent ahead and held back.

Nafs (**نفس**) here means "soul," or "self." The root of the word is connected to *tanaffasa* (**تَنَفَّسَ**), which is the verb, "to breathe." *Nafs* is that complex entity which encompasses the pure cause of its existence, the *rūḥ* (**روح**), meaning "spirit, soul." (The word *rūḥ* in Arabic is related to "wind," alluding to its free-flowing quality.) The *nafs* also encompasses all the acquired features that are grafted onto the *rūḥ* as a result of its manifestation. The words *nafs* and *rūḥ* are sometimes interchangeable. Their relationship is like that of the sun to the earth: the self is rendered sentient by the spirit.

When all the outer props have collapsed, as on the *Yawn al-Qiyāmah* (**يوم القيامة** ; the Day of Resurrection), every self will experience its reality, which is a state of pure beingness, according to what its deeds were and what it had nurtured before the outer, gross world collapsed.

Qaddamat (**قَدَّمَتْ**), rendered here as "(it) sent ahead," is derived from the same root as *qadam* (**قدم**), which means "foot," that is, what we put in front of us in order to move ahead toward something new. Why do we wish to transport or move ourselves?

Why do we wish to present ourselves with something new? When we do so, what we perform is an act of worship and adoration. Let us take the example of eating. We eat because we want to live, because we love life and perpetuity. This shows we are striving for the attributes of Allah, the Everlasting. If one's intention is clear, then one's actions will be coherent. If we know that we put a foot forward in order to worship Allah, then it is perfectly all right to say, "I want to eat," or "I want to become wealthy." In order to uphold and propagate the laws of Allah, we must understand our priorities. If we want to undertake an action, we must ask ourselves why. What is put forth is as good as its intentions. If we eat in order to live, serve, and gain knowledge, all the energies around us will come to help us in that regard.

This ayah says that when all the aforementioned events occur, man's intention will become clear to him even though previously he may have barely given a thought as to why he did things. Thus, it is said that it is better not to lift a finger until one's intention is made clear, because actions are only as good as intentions, and one's very life is put to the test. If one starts with what is real, one will make progress. Serving one's family, for example, is a commendable action. Through acting on good intentions, one reaches a point where he thirsts for knowledge, and this brings him to the point of *dhikr* (**ذِكْر** ; remembrance), which in turn leads to inner silence. If one acts in sincerity, that point will be reached regardless, for as it says in the Qur'an, "Certainly He is the Forgiving, the Merciful!"

One usually turns to the Qur'an in desperation, for it is the final medicine. The extent to which the Qur'an is clearly revealed to man is directly proportional to the extent to which he is honest in abandoning himself to it. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, always recommended reading the Qur'an with a tearful eye and reciting it as though it were the voice of eternity.

Akhkhara (**أَخَّرَ**) means "to delay, postpone, hinder, put back," indirectly referring to what has been hidden. We are the result of what we have left behind us, our past. As individuals, as human beings, we are the sum of our past actions, thoughts, hidden, postponed, or revealed. What potentially exists in the future are our intentions and what will in fact come about will be the enactment of our intentions. These two elements interact with each other as well as with the outer environment, and the result of these interactions is the future. If man knows what is behind him and what is in front of him, then he has covered the whole horizon and connected with it.

The ayah means that on that day every *nafs* (self) will completely reveal itself, its true color, tone, and tune. The *rūḥ* (soul) starts as

pure power, and its substance is made of an element with which every other soul can connect. Therefore every soul will see the other clearly, unlike now, when we can hide the parts of ourselves which we do not want others to see. Therefore, the more exposed we are here and now and the more ready we are to live here and now, the more prepared we are for what is to come later. We must concern ourselves with how to live now, fully and totally. If a person genuinely wants to apply this, he will reach the conclusion that the way to do it is by clarifying every intention and coupling it to its correct action and by being completely open, exposed, and ready to be questioned.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّبَكَ رَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ

6 O man! What has deceived you from your Generous Lord?

After giving the news that all of this complex and fantastic world will come to an end and that all that will be left of each one of us is the self, this surah then addresses itself directly to man. *Insān* (انسان ; man) is by nature sociable, friendly, companionable. The deeper meaning of this āyah is “O you who are already a worshipper of unification, by whatever name you may call it, what made you so arrogant as to imagine that you are separate from your Ever-Generous Sustainer and Lord?” When the outer shell of the world comes to an end, what excuse does man have for having elevated himself apart from the One Reality? Man’s essence is generosity and blessing, so what has made him so conceited?

The appeal here is to the real nature of man, which is what will survive once all the worldly trappings have fallen away. What made him not recognize the *rubūbiyah* (ربوبية ; Lordship)? It is love of *dunyā* (دنيا ; this “world”), of being in a state of confusion. The correct answer essentially, however, is that there is no excuse. When the confrontation with the Lord occurred, why did man not do what he was born to do, which was to seek the truth? There is no valid answer.

All that is other than Allah is false. One cannot be deceived by “nothing,” by an abstraction. Whatever attracts man away from the line of truth is the *dunyā*, which is transient, quickly passing away and causing us to be in *ghaflah* (غفلة , forgetfulness, heedlessness). We become glued to this world through our self-imposed illusions,

although we are actually seeking security. The Ever-Secure is already within the heart, and its influence transposes itself into this outer situation in which we adhere to things that are transient. Once there is no longer that element which caused us this attachment, then we are free of forgetfulness and can recognize our Lord.

The greatest glue of attachment is the appearance of "I," the ego. When creation occurred, the *shayṭāni* (satanic) element said, "I am better than he" (7:12), and thus began the rise of attachment to something that did not originally exist. When this apparent world comes to an end, that which appeared to be propping it up will no longer be there. *Shayṭān* will no longer be there either, since that energy that causes separation will no longer be there.

الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّىٰكَ فَعَدَلَكَ

7 Who created you, then made you complete, then proportioned you —

Had man not been created, he would not have had a chance to reach knowledge, nor to have the bliss and satisfaction of inner existence, nor to see hundreds of flowers all exemplifying the same thing and yet different in color and smell.

Sawwa (سَوَّى) has many meanings, including "to even, level, straighten, regulate, put in order, equalize." Why, then, is man in this arrogant state if he sees how potentially harmonious and complete he has been made?

ʿAdl (عَدَلَ) means "straight," and therefore most efficient (the quickest way to connect two points is, after all, a straight line). It also means "justice, fairness and uprightness." Everything is created in an amazingly balanced, just, and ecological way, both in the outer and the inner realms, which are, in fact, one and therefore balanced. Balance is *mizān* (مِيزَان), which is also the name of the Qur'an. Therefore, we see that everything is in the Qur'an and is the Qur'an, because the reality that is read in it is the one that is exuded by creation. We understand our Creator through wondering at and seeing His creation. If we do not see His Hand at work through us, how can we rightfully talk about other, outer aspects of creation?

فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَّا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ

8 Into whatever form He pleased He constructed you.

Ṣūrah (سورة) is a “picture, form, shape, likeness, or copy.” It comes from the verb “to form, create, illustrate, photograph.” *Rakkaba* (رَكَّبَ) is “to fasten, build, to put together.” Its root is *rakiba* (رَكَبَ), which means “to ride.” Looking at creation in its totality, we see that anything can and indeed does take place. It is beyond our intellectual comprehension to understand why a particular cell or being moves in a particular way, and so instead we call it an abstract or haphazard movement. There is nothing haphazard about it; it is only that we cannot understand it. In fact, it is the pattern of our intellectual pursuit that can be either along a path of understanding or along a path of confusion. From the point of view of *ḥaqīqah* everything makes perfect sense and nothing is out of place, but if we transgress the norms of *‘aql* (intellect) and thought, we enter a realm of confusion.

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكذِّبُونَ بِالذِّينِ

9 Nay! You deny the Judgement Day.

Kallā (كَلَّا ; nay) is meant to reassure us here. Put in other words, *kallā* means, “It is certainly the case.” Denial, for man, is quite natural: “Surely man is in loss” (103:2). It is quite understandable that we transgress and forget and are not in *dhikr* (remembrance). This is why Allah is The Forgiving, the Most Merciful and why we turn to Allah in repentance. This is normal. We deny ourselves correct transaction, correct behavior, which is the only way of living, of being prepared, of being in a state of abandonment in which we can appreciate and witness abundance.

This ayah addresses us on a deep inner level. The *dīn* (دِين), in other contexts, is usually translated as “religion.” The word, however, implies a transaction, that of paying a debt to one’s Creator. The root of *dīn* is *dāna* (دَانَ), which is “to be indebted, to owe, to be subject, to yield, and to profess the true faith.” It is in man’s human nature to deny *islām*. Like the salmon struggling upstream, only very

few reach their source. This was true for the people of Mecca for whom this ayah was specifically revealed, and it is applicable to all people at all times. Man's true nature seeks his source. His lower nature denies the contract of mercy which can only be known by the payment of the debt — by the living of the *dīn* — for which he finds himself indebted. Then the pathway to all-encompassing Mercy is made smooth, *ta'abbada* (**تعبد** ; to be paved, made level, smooth), through the song of *'ibādah* (**عبادة** ; worship, service).

وَاتَّ عَلَيْنَا لِحَافِظِينَ

10 And most surely there are guardians over you,

How is *al-Hāfiẓ* (**الحافظ** ; the Guardian) manifested? The name is an attribute of Allāh, the Keeper, the Protector, the Guardian. It derives from a verbal root which means, “to preserve, protect, guard, sustain, remember.” *Hāfiẓ*, in ordinary Arabic, means someone who knows the Qur'an by heart. The Creator would not have created the laws of existence unless He were going to maintain them. Thus, we are assured that the laws do not and will not change for any person, be he a prophet, messenger, or ordinary man. The laws of creation apply equally to all. Many of these laws we take for granted because we are subject to them at all times, such as the law of gravity.

To illustrate this point, let us recall a story concerning Imam as-Sadiq, *'alayhi-s-salām*. He went to his house one day and found a slave-woman with one of his children on the roof, although he had forbidden the members of the household from going there. The woman, in her extreme agitation at being caught in her transgression, stopped paying attention to the child. At that moment, the child fell from the roof to its death. Imam as-Sadiq immediately said to the slave-woman, “You are free!” He came out of the house completely shattered, and when the people asked him why he was disturbed, he answered, “I am disturbed because I caused this woman a great deal of agitation and fear.” He was such a lover of Allah that he did not want to disturb anything in the creation. He suddenly saw the law of Allah in front of him, done, the decree fulfilled, and he could not go against it. All he had was human judgement, and from the human point of view he said, “I caused her great affliction and fright and as a result she lost hold of my child and this caused his death.” Again, from the

human point of view, when he was questioned about the death of his son, his answer was, "Now he will be brought to *rubūbiyah* (ربوبية ; Lordship) and will become perfect. The angels will bring him to his fruition according to the decree."

A true lover of Allah must know the meaning of "Every moment He is in a state (of glory)" (Qur'an 55:29); otherwise his *islām* is at best mere superstition, not the fullness of direct knowledge.

كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ

11 Noble recorders.

Noble powers and forces, angelic or otherwise, lead us in the direction of the creational pattern and decree. These powers are referred to as *ḥāfiẓīn* (حافظين ; guardians, protectors) for their task is to reflect one of the attributes of Allah, *al-Ḥāfiẓ*. The words "Guardian, Keeper, Protector," refer to Allah, the one and only true Guardian. Man's actions are recorded spontaneously, and his reward is instantaneous, to be found then and there *in* himself. Both the serious and mild sicknesses we suffer from are the direct results of our actions. Our reward *is* our action, and the meaning of our action is its intention. We are manifested intentions; we are now the sum total of all our past intentions. If they were free — *fī sabīli-llāh* (في سبيل الله ; in the way of Allah) — then we are free. We are as tarnished or as pure as our intentions, and that is what dictates the state and condition of our hearts.

If a man's intentions are as pure as they can be, and yet he acts ignorantly because he does not have enough outer worldly knowledge, others will consider him a fool or even a criminal if some people may be made to suffer from his actions. Allah, Who is the All-Wise, forgives him, however. In this world *sharī'ah* (outer law) prevails over *ḥaqīqah* (the eternal truth). Everything follows the laws of Allah, and only Allah is in charge. If a man of pure intentions is put in jail for outwardly rendering disservice to others, it is correct according to the *sharī'ah*. A real man of Allah would, in jail, be perfectly content with Allāh's decree upon him.

Kirāman kātibīn (كرام كاتبين ; noble recorders) means that the highest act of generosity is to be on the path, according to which man has been created. The angels, or the powers which keep

existence going forward smoothly in this world, are *kirāman kātibīn*. They are those powers and energies within man, around him, and by him, that record from within. Every single cell in his body echoes his entire beingness, containing the history of all that has happened, all that is happening, and all that is going to happen.

If man has been in a state of denial, *kufr* (کفر ; covering up, denial), the possibility of its outer expression is that the cells will devour each other like cancer. Cancer is an outer manifestation which actually is a mercy, because it is signalling the dichotomy that is occurring, possibly without one's knowledge. This does not necessarily mean that the person with cancer has been a dreadful person, but that he has simply been acting, inadvertently, in ignorance. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa 'ālihi wa sallam*, often prayed for the people who treated him badly and asked that they not be punished, since they acted in ignorance.

Kātibīn (کاتبین) comes from the verb *kataba* (كتب), which means "to write, inscribe, compose, destine." There is an implication of "gathering" in this word. *Kitāb* (كتاب), therefore, not only means "book," but also "what is done." If a man is in a state of awareness, he can "read" what is done. This is what the Qur'an means. The angels, or forces, are noble in that they are at the limits of their prescribed capabilities in their respective domains. It is written that they are to write, and they do so.

The cosmos is under total control, but not in the sense of a tyrannical, centralized power imposing itself from the outside. The control is already intrinsic to the system. Allah contains all systems and is the Beginner and Sustainer of all systems. Since the system is complete within itself, it will break down if the boundaries are transgressed. Every system breaks down once the boundaries are transgressed. To take one example, the secret of Gandhi was that he brought about the breakdown of an established system. The system he found intolerable was held together by the use of the most detested action imaginable to an Indian: imprisonment. In the East imprisonment is the final act of degradation. What Gandhi did was to reverse that system by making imprisonment desirable and this change in attitude destroyed the system. Soon everyone wanted to go to prison; the system could not cope with it and ultimately caved in.

12 They know what you do.

Those entities or powers to which we are connected and bound by the One Reality know what we do. Obviously this is so, although the intensity of the knowledge is different. Everything we do will effect everything else in this total ecology. The forces which govern the subtle cosmic fiber know. That is why we say, "The Knower is Allah," and "Allah has knowledge." Saying "Allah knows" could imply separation, indicating that "I am here" and "Allah is there." The men of Allah consider this to be a state of *shirk* (شرك ; association of other-than-Allah with Allah.) It is a form of arrogance to say, "Allah knows," because it is as if the Truth needed our confirmation.

Allah is *al-'Alīm* (العليم ; the Knower of all). If we increase in *'ilm* (علم ; knowledge, wisdom), then we will be closer to *al-'Alīm*, and therefore ignorance will be reduced. As the cup becomes fuller, the empty space in it decreases and a time comes when what is in the cup and the cup itself are understood as being one system, because for there to be contents there must be a container. This is the meaning of the line in the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al Habib, in which he says: "Unite the drink with the cup and be annihilated by it."

Although the two systems appear to be different, the one fluid and the other solid, man is the link, the *barzakh* (برزخ ; interspace), so he must connect the inside with the outside. From the point of view of the *'ārif bi'llāh* (عارف بالله ; knower of Allah), there is no such thing as outside and inside. There is only Allah, One Reality, manifesting itself in various forms of creation.

13 Most surely the righteous are in bliss.

This surah began by describing the big impact at the end of the world, the description of which includes our own end, and then gives us good news of bliss. The root of *abrār* (ابرار ; liberal, just, kind) is *barra* (برّ). *Barr* (برّ) is "an expanse of land," but

it means more than just a desert. It implies space, openness, and clear vision. *Barr* is the opposite of *baḥr* (بحر ; the sea). On the *barr* everything is evident, but in the *baḥr* everything is hidden below the surface. The sea has connotations of something that is deep, whereas a plain, on the other hand, implies something that is very shallow. Usually when the *baḥr* is next to the *barr*, hardly anything can be seen on the *barr* except endless flatness reaching out in all directions, while in the *baḥr* the most amazing life can be found. In fact, the most amazing seas in the world are those which lie next to barren places, such as the Red Sea, which has unparalleled delights for the deep sea diver. The beauty of the underwater world is unimaginable, but when one comes out onto the shore there is nothing but empty, endless desert.

Na'im (نعيم ; happiness, peaceful, tranquil) is from *na'ama* (نَعَم) "to live in comfort and ease, to be happy, soft." *Na'am* (نَعَم) means "yes." The *ni'mah* (نعمة) of Allah, is His "blessing or bounty." It is in man's nature to say "Yes!" to the bounty of Allah. Those who are *abrār* are in *ni'mah* (comfort), that which physically sustains one.

وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ

14 And most surely the wicked are in burning fire —

When a person goes against his nature or reality, he is wicked, in that he is committing a crime against himself. A *fājir* (فاجر) is someone who sends himself into transgression, someone who has deviated, who has gone beyond the bounds of the *dīn*, beyond the limits of his higher nature. From this point of view, those *fujjār* (فُجَّار) are in hell. The experience of hell means turmoil, constant agitation, the death of stability, and these states can be tasted not only after death but also in this life.

يَصْلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

15 They will enter it on the Day of Judgement.

The *fujjār* will reach the Fire on the Day of Judgement, the day on which debts must be paid. Every instant is one in which we could be paying our debts. If we are willing to do this at every moment, we will be in balance. If we try to hide them instead, the *Yawmu-d-dīn* (**يوم الدين** ; Day of Judgement) becomes the day of our death, or the Day of Reckoning. This is a lesser Day of Judgement. The greater Day of Judgement will come when there is nothing left to be hidden. *Yawm* (**يوم** ; day) means not only a twenty-four hour period, but also a state of mind. As human beings, our *yawm* is twenty-four hours, but Allah's *yawm* is different; it can be 50,000 years, as the Qur'an says.

وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ

16 And they will not be absent from it!

Ghā'ib (**غائب**) means "absent or hidden." At the moment of truth no one will be able to absent himself. At the moment of truth, whether it be now or later, everything will be taken into account, and there will be no escape. We will see that whatever we planted out of good intention will directly bear fruit. Each person will be the true witnesser, and this is the true meaning of *shahādah* (**شهادة** ; direct witnessing). If we do not constantly face our intentions here and now, we will have to deal with them later all at one time. The way to this understanding lies in recognizing what our intentions are and what they have been. Those who want to succeed in this world always want to know what their bank balance is. They do not want to be told five days later that the balance was several decimal points out. They want to know right away so correct action may be taken.

Even for the ordinary businessman, the key to success is Allah. If a person loves Allah then he has no option but to succeed in this world. He will account for every instant as it passes and not postpone it. Only mad people do not want to review their bank accounts for two or three years because they suspect that they have been abusing them. But if they knew that the balance of it was in their favor, then they would want to see it all the time. In the same way, if a person has been generous to people, he always wants to be among them, because they will treat him similarly. If we account for ourselves every instant, then we are clear.

Imam al-Hasan, *'alayhi-s-salām*, taking from the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, his grandfather, says, "He who is afraid of Allah will never be afraid of the slaves of Allah, while he who is afraid of the slaves of Allah is not afraid of Allah." This is because the slaves of Allah, meaning all human beings, are reflections of one's own self. And if he fears Allah, then as Imam al-Hasan also says, "He who wants to please Allah will find that the creation is pleased with him, and he who wants to please the creation will find that Allah is not pleased with him."

If we were willing to openly account for everything to Allah, as though we were rising out of the grave, as though our intentions were exposed in our chests, then we would be free from entanglements and would find ourselves more efficient. Our *'aql* would become sharper, because it is a faculty that has to be developed. If we act as if we know the Imam Mahdi, *'alayhi-s-salām*, is there in the *ghayb* (غيب ; absence, the unseen), then it is like acting in his presence. He is there and we should always be ready to hand over the whole of our existence for him to review.

We delay and put off confronting ourselves mostly because we do not want to disturb our familiar illusions, but every action has its equal and opposite reaction. Everything in life has its courtesy, and the more we know it, the more efficient we become in that situation. This knowledge, in fact, resides in our hearts. Courtesy has everything to do with how willing we are to face our balance sheets.

وَمَا آذْرِيكَ مَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

17 And what will make you realize what the Day of Judgement is?

What do we know about the Day of Reckoning? Why can it not be right now? It is for this reason that when a Muslim is unsuccessful, we know that he is not in *islām*. If a man is not successful, something is wrong. It is not a judgement upon him, for that is between him and Allah, but the path is one of pure science. The real man of Allah does not waste time. If he is unsuccessful, it means that he acted wrongly; he did not have the right discrimination, did not judge correctly, did not take counsel correctly; he was attached to something, or was unsuccessful for any number of other reasons.

Abandonment does not mean inertia. Every one of our Imams

had a different flavor; one of them spent most of his time in *sajdah* (سجدة ; devotional prostration), because there was nothing else he could do at that time. Imam as-Sadiq, 'alayhi-s-salām, did nothing but give discourses, and it is said that as many as 4,000 people passed on knowledge they had received from him, while Imam al-Kazim, 'alayhi-s-salām, from whom poured gems of wisdom, was constantly in and out of prison. Each one had a different nature but the truth they vibrated was the same.

If we are willing to face everything within us at any moment, we will find that when we see and recognize all the dreadful things we have hidden, like snakes or scorpions, we will know how to deal with them so they do not sting or bite us. We thus enter into awareness. That is why we say that people who have come to the inner circles of the men of Allah are transformed forever. Through having had one split-second of awakening, they know their true nature, their true reality. That is why the man of Allah who is a master says, "If anyone has seen me, I have done my work." When a man really knows the state of his heart, when he is genuinely, absolutely, totally aware, then he has reached his goal.

Yawmu-d-dīn is only a day, an instant, a split-second, and it is a condition. Are we reckoning with ourselves now? It is impertinent to pose questions about the Hour. The Companions asked the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, about the *rūḥ* (the spirit), but they did not ask about their *nafs* (selves), because they did not want to see the falseness inside them. They asked instead, "When is the Final Hour coming?" We do not see the moment because we are excited about tomorrow. This anticipation results from the desire to escape from the amazing unending depth of the moment which we are frittering away. We must learn to see the beauty of the apparent evil, the amazing depth of the present and its meaning, as well as to see how it came about and what path was taken to make it come about in this particular way. We must learn to see perfection and to see without judging.

ثُمَّ مَا أَذْرِيكَ مَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

18 Again, what will make you realize what the Day of Judgement is?

The ayah is repeated here in order to drive the point home. What

more signs do we need? The path is an absolute science; it is the path of *ṣafā'* (صفاء ; purity, clarity), the path of clarity.

يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ

19 The day when no self controls anything for (another) self, and the command that day is Allah's.

If a person accepts that condition of having no control over anything or anyone else right now and relinquishes power and ownership, then *Yawmu-d-dīn* is *Yawmu amri-llāh* (يوم أمر الله ; the Day of Allah's order or action for him). Now we are in *shirk*; we associate partners with Allah in that we say, "It is between Allah and me." This *yawm*, this day, is divided between Allah and us, because we are confused as to which is the decree and which is just our own whim. We do not know what is *wahm* (وهم ; illusion) and *hawa* (هوى ; desire), or what Allah has written. Allah has written things to be followed according to definite laws. If we transgress them, we will be destroyed, inwardly and outwardly.

Yawmu-d-dīn is defined as the "Day on which no self will control anything for (another) self." In other words, each person must be completely and utterly responsible for himself right now, without making the excuse of having responsibilities for others prior to taking responsibility for himself, for ultimately there is only one self. Each person is responsible for everything; no one is separate, but first we must know who we are. If we have done that, then we can greet the Day of Reckoning with light hearts.



SURAT AL-MUTAFFIFIN

THOSE WHO GIVE SHORT MEASURE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

وَيْلٌ لِلْمُطَفِّفِينَ

1 Woe to those who give short measure!

The root of *mutaffifin* (**مُطَفِّفِينَ**) is *ṭaffafa* (**طَفَّفَ**), which means “to make deficient, give short measure, to be stingy.” It implies a deliberate injustice in a transaction. *Taṭfīf* (**تَطْفِيفٍ**) means “niggardliness, stinting,” and *ṭafīf* (**طَفِيفٍ**) means “deficient, small, little, insignificant.” If someone is asked, “Are you ill?” he can answer, “My illness is *ṭafīf*,” meaning it is minor.

الَّذِينَ إِذَا كُنُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ

2 Who, when they take the measure (of their dues) from men, take it in full –

The form root of *yastawfūn* (**يَسْتَوْفُونَ**) is *istawafā* (**اسْتَوْفَى**), which means “to receive in full, complete, bring to

its full value, fulfill.” The root from which this form is derived is *wafā* (وَفِيَ), meaning “to be perfect, fulfill, gratify, suffice.” *Wafā* (وَفَاءٌ) means “fulfillment, fidelity, loyalty.” In the story of the prophet Ibrahim, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, who was sometimes called “Ibrahim *wafā*,” (*wafā* meaning here his *īmān*, his faith), it is said that when he was being flung into the fire he cried out, “*Ḥasbi Allāh.*” This is the meaning of *wafā*.

وَإِذَا كَالُواهُمْ أَفْوَازَهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ

3 But when they measure or weigh out to others, they cause them loss.

Kāla (كَالَ) means “to measure.” *Yukhsirūn* (يُخْسِرُونَ) comes from the verb *khasira* (خَسِرَ), “to incur a loss, lose, go astray, perish.” When the *muṭaffifīn* are in a balanced situation of give and take, they cause loss for the other party in the interaction and gain for themselves.

These three ayat mean the same thing: *muṭaffifīn*, *yastawfūn*, and *yukhsirūn* reinforce each other with regard to man’s tendency to want to win all the time. They give a description of our tendency to try to be clever in our transactions. It is in our nature to want to win and gain in every situation, and it is in the nature of the *mu’min* (مُؤْمِنٌ ; believer), or the Muslim, to recognize this tendency and try to redress it when he finds himself in any transaction with other people who are potentially equal to him. Inflation occurs when one tries to get more and give less. It is in the nature of any situation now, just as it was in Madinah during the time of the revelation of the Qur’an. If we relate to a community or society, then we take cognizance of this tendency in man to take more and give less, and if a person is aware of it *while* he is doing it, then the chances of his not being too greedy are greater, and he will remember to be fairer in his transaction. Awareness of the imbalance is likely to bring about justice. If we are aware of the injustice, then we may be aware of the innate, lower nature of man within us.

The first ayah says: *Wayl* (وَيْلٌ), meaning, “Woe” to those defrauders. Any action that is not in balance is fraud. Imam Ghazzali says that we must recognize that trade will not occur unless there is imbalance in it, that is, there is always an element of profit present.

Therefore, if we want to be honest traders, we must recognize at all times this inherent tendency to an imbalance in the transaction and accept that one of the parties will have the upper hand. The best circumstance occurs when both of the parties feel they have concluded a good deal and that feeling does not change as soon as one of them leaves the shop. Honest trade must stand the test of time. It has to have the fairest balance possible, so that there is the least inflation.

To illustrate this point, let us remember the man among the followers who had a goldsmith's shop. One day he left it in order to go to the mosque to pray, and he told his young nephew to sit in the shop until he returned. As the shopkeeper was coming back after the prayer, he saw a man, an obviously well-to-do trader, walking in the opposite direction carrying several gold bangles, which the man recognized as having come from his shop. He approached the man and asked, "Are you pleased with what you bought?" The man replied, "Yes, I am very, very pleased." Then the shopkeeper asked him, "What did you pay for them?" The man answered, "I paid 200 dirhams for this one, and 400 for that one. I can sell these in my home town for double what I bought them for, so I am very happy with them." But the man said, "No. I am not happy because this rascal of a nephew has cheated you. I told him the prices of these things — please, I beg of you!" So the shopkeeper dragged the man back to the shop, paid him back some money to make up for the difference, and sent his nephew away. He had set a price on his wares, and he was satisfied with that price. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, "Sell, and make a profit, even if it is just a modest profit." In this way there is dynamism and circulation, and people do not get attached to what they own.

So *muṭaffifīn* refers to all of us, because the potential for fraud is in all of us. If the potential for being a criminal were not in us, we would not be able to understand criminality. If the potential for vulgarity were not in us, or the potential for fear, then we would not understand their meanings either. If divinity were not in us, how would we be able to talk about the Divine Ocean? All of these are in us, and so we should not say that the goldsmith's nephew was selfish. If this story were only historical and referred only to the people of Madinah, then we could not concern ourselves about it. The truth is, however, that we contain this potential all of the time, and it is the story of mankind.

الْأَيْظُنُّ أَوْلِيَّكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ

4 Do they not think that they will be raised up again?

This ayah shows the way out of being imprisoned and enchained by this tendency towards selfishness and greed in us.

Ba'athia (بعث) means "to resurrect, awaken, send, bring on." Here it means that they shall be called to account for themselves. Who will be called to account to whom? We will all be called to account for ourselves. This of course refers to the afterlife, but it concerns this life as well. Either way, its import is that we will have to account for what we build up in us, here and now and in the afterlife as well. This accounting will take place whether we like it or not. If we turn on a tap, whatever is in the pipes gushes out; and the more we open it, the more flows out. Thus, we will simply build up more greed, more hatred, or whatever is in us, because the system of creation in its entirety is a mercy, and its nature lies in increase. That is why Allah says, "My mercy encompasses all things" (7:156).

Whether we like it or not, whether it is good or bad, Allah creates in man the biggest, most vulgar animal, but he also creates in man the most wonderful character. It is up to us to choose to follow one of these directions. We must not lose sight of the imprint of the *sunnah* (way) of the creational reality.

لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

5 On a Mighty Day —

Explicitly, this is a reference to the Day of the End, or the day when we are left with only our *rūḥ* (spirit, soul), on which has been imprinted our intentions and our actions. This Great Day can also be the day on which we are willing to completely take account of ourselves, the day of our utter surrender, the day of our *islām*. If we want to be freed from our own self-imposed chains, we should be able to settle accounts at any time. We should in fact be willing to settle our accounts even before we actually incur them. We can do this by questioning the intention. By knowing our intentions before performing an action, our accounts are always clear.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ط

6 The Day men will stand before the Lord of all the worlds.

Yawma yaqūmu (يوم يقوم) is the Day on which we will stand up to the Lord of the worlds, to the Highest, and be willing to face our accounts. If we are truly in *islām* all the time, then we are always facing *Rabbi'l-'ālamīn* (رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ; the Lord of all the worlds). *Qāma* (قام), amongst many other meanings, is “to stand up, to rise from the dead” and implies that the actor is prepared to interact with that thing for which he stood up.

This ayah refers to the end of time in order to jolt us out of our present lethargy. It means that there is an end, and that at the end we will be left with nothing but our intentions.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَّارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ ط

7 Nay! Surely, the book of the wicked ones is in *Sijjin*.

The book of those who are off the path is in *Sijjīn*. *Fujjār* (فُجَّارٌ ; degenerates, libertines) comes from *fajara* (فَجَرَ), which means “to cleave, break up, act immorally, indulge in debauchery.” Dawn is called *fajr* (فَجْرٌ), because it breaks up the night. A man is called *fājir* (فَاجِرٌ) if he is off the path. This means that he is corrupt, decadent, out of line. All of us are pearls on the same string, and a pearl is only meaningful if it is connected on a string.

The root of *sijjīn* (سِجِّينٌ), the register of immoral actions, is *sajana* (سَجَنَ), which means, “to imprison.” Thus, *sijjīn* is an exaggerated, more permanent and lasting imprisonment. In some commentaries of the Qur’an, it is explained as being another name for *Jahannam* (جَهَنَّمَ ; Hell). It is a deep and long-lasting imprisonment. “The book,” is what the culprit is writing with his life. He is the author of his own biography, through his actions, which are instigated by his intentions. The prisoner himself decides how many more chains and shackles he will have.

The book is what is written, and what is written is manifested by every one of us through our actions. If our biographies are full of greed and avarice, as mentioned in the second and third ayat, and we act only for personal gain and to establish control over others, then we will be imprisoned by our actions. A man may desire to rule a whole kingdom thinking it will bring him happiness, but as soon as this desire is fulfilled, he will want to encroach upon the neighboring kingdom as well. Is this desire not a shackle? Being shackled has nothing to do with the object itself, but rather with our feeling towards it. *Sijjīn*, our imprisonment, refers to our mental situation and it concerns our happiness, our inner freedom, and our fulfillment, which are only by-products of the extent and sincerity of our *islām* and abandonment.

وَمَا آذُرِيكَ مَا سَبَّحِينَ ط

8 And what will make you realize what *Sijjin* is?

The verb *adraka* (ادرك) is “to reach, overtake, grasp, perceive, realize, mature.” It implies a knowledge that is deeper and more innate than acquired discernment such as *fiqh* (فقه ; knowledge, understanding, or jurisprudence in Islam). One of the earlier meanings of *faqīh* (فقيه ; expert on Islamic jurisprudence) was an expert who could tell if a she-camel was pregnant or not. He had insight which could be translated into an outer use.

Fiqh is the knowledge of the application of *ḥaqīqah* (truth), which is what the *sharī‘ah* (Islamic code of conduct) is. *Adraka* is a bit more subtle. What the ayah is saying, in using that word, is that through profound reflection understanding will come. We all know what shackles are, what it is like to be under the weight of expectations and disappointment. We must question our own hearts. How did *sijjīn*, or our imprisonment, arise, and why is one person’s different from someone else’s? It is because we prescribe our particular situations for ourselves.

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ

9 An inscribed book.

The root of *marqūm* (مَرْقُومٌ ; written) is *raqama* (رَقِمَ), which means “to write, to mark with diacritical points, to imprint, number,” but it also has the meaning of being “specifically prescribed.” It is absolute. *Raqam* (رَقْمٌ) means “number.” So the book, or what it refers to, is quantifiable, written with precision, and not just qualifiable.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ

10 Woe on that Day to those who deny!

The implication here is that if someone denies the reality, or the story of existence and creation, then he is a *mukadhdhib* (مُكَذِّبٌ ; a liar). Then woe to him on the day when he can no longer change himself and see the ultimate reality, which means the day of his death. The meaning here is that whoever denies *ḥaqq* (حَقٌّ ; the truth), which manifests itself as justice, has denied that Allah created everything by *ḥaqq*, with justice and in balance. If a person acts out of balance, then he is lying. A man who says, “I don’t deny truth, I uphold it,” and yet acts to the contrary is in a state of *kufur* (covering up, denial). There is no point in his saying, “I am a *muwahḥid*” (مُوَحِّدٌ ; a unifier), since he acts as a *mutaffif* (cheater, defrauder) and does not question the justice of his own actions. *Mukadhdhib* means that someone’s acts are contrary to his words; there is a split. That is *kidhb* (كَذِبٌ ; a lie, deceit, falsehood, untruth).

الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ

11 Those who deny the Day of Judgement.

The Day of Judgement, of the *dīn*, is the day when we are willing to pay our debt. It is the Day of Reckoning, when our absolute form, which is the spirit, is laid bare. This form cannot be described now, because it is the subtle force which keeps us alive. Our understanding can only go so far and no further, because it comes about by the container of the so-called "I," which at that point will be dissolved entirely away.

وَمَا يَكْذِبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كَلُّ مُعْتَدِثِيْمٍ

12 And none denies it except the sinful transgressor.

I'tada (اَعْتَدَ), the root of *mu'tadin* (مُعْتَدٍ), is "to cross, exceed, act outrageously." Related to this word are both the word '*adūw* (عَدُو), which means "enemy, foe," and '*adā*' (عَدَاء), which means "enmity, hostility, antagonism, aggression." One transgresses by not seeing the oneness within himself.

The word '*adūw* (enemy) does not necessarily imply hostility between two parties but indicates that they are foreign to each other — there is no unity between them. It does not mean that they hate each other, but rather that they do not know each other. Thus ignorance is also the enemy; we are enemies of that of which we are ignorant. From the word *i'tada*, we can infer that our transgression and denial is a result of our ignorance, and thus we see how we can become enemies of ourselves. And when we have done this, we are *athīm* (اِثْمِ ; sinful). *Athima* (اِثْم) means "to commit a sin or crime," and this is done by our ignorance and enmity which causes us our disconnectedness and lies. *Athama* involves doing what we are not permitted to do. *Ithm* (اِثْم) means "gambling." Gambling, then, is considered *ithm* because by engaging in it we call upon injustice. We address a system other than what is prescribed by reality, which is mercy and justice and, therefore, we commit a crime. By addressing ourselves to a system of injustice we are making ourselves a part of it. When two people call out different numbers, and then one of them suddenly wins money, and the other loses, it is called "chance." In fact, there is nothing accidental. There is always action and reaction, which are equal and opposite.

إِذْ تُنَادِي عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ط

- 13 When our signs are recited to him, he says:
tales of the ancients.

This refers to a situation that is repeated even now when modern people say that because this surah came down in Madinah hundreds of years ago, it cannot apply to our present condition; it is all just a tale of the past.

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

- 14 Nay! What they earned is rust upon their
hearts.

Rāna (رَانَ) means, “to take possession – of the heart,” as well as, “to seize, overcome, descend, prevail.” What they earned was made easy on their hearts. As was said earlier, whatever path we choose is made easy for us. If we are criminals, this way will be made easy for us because we will somehow always justify our own actions. If our hearts follow any direction whatsoever, then they have become possessed by that. That is why it is said that by keeping the company of certain people for forty days, a man will become like them, for people comprise an ecology. We must not think that we are different from anyone else, isolated and separate. For some very sensitive people, it might take only two hours to become like the people with whom they associate. In fact, in this culture, those who are in the profession of public relations are called “out-going,” “extroverted,” or “gregarious,” which means that they are like the chameleon, instantly taking on the color of the people with whom they seek to work.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَّجُورُونَ ط

- 15 Nay! Surely, that day they are veiled from
their Lord!

The meaning of this ayah is that in the next life they are veiled, and there is a barrier between them and the final, total recognition of Lordship, of Sustainership. This means that they have not acquired enough knowledge to prepare themselves sufficiently in this life in order to enter that other additional exposure and purification which will take place in the next life. They have not prepared the way for themselves to move on in the next experience; they have not acted in such a way as to purify their state and to be able to continue gaining knowledge. The Qur'an says, "Your next creation will be according to what you know," and what one knows is one's state here and now. So the people who have denied, the people who have been in *kidhb* (deceit, falsehood), the people who have been constantly unjust and out of balance here will be in a state of separation in the next life because they have been in that state here; they have lived in denial, hidden behind a veil.

ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا الْجَحِيمِ

16 Then they will surely enter the burning fire.

Waṣala (وصل) means "to connect, join, enter, reach." Originally it meant "to call." The word is not related linguistically, but it echoes the word *ṣalā* (صلى) by a similarity of letters, which means "to barbecue," or "to grill."

The root of *jaḥīm* (جحيم) is *jaḥama* (جحم), which means "to light a fire" and it is used because the fire which they will enter is the one which they had originally ignited in this life. *Jaḥīm* means "fire," and here it refers to the hell with which we are threatened by doomsday-mongers, as well as the hell that we understand as normal human beings. When our hearts are agitated, when we burn with anger, or when we seethe with desire, we experience aspects of hell on earth. Here it means that these people will reach the Fire by grilling themselves in their own self-ignited hell.

ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ تُكَذِّبُونَ ط

17 Then it will be said: This is what you denied.

Then they will realize that this is the truth they denied, for if truth is not realized at the present moment, it will be realized at the moment of death. This means that it already existed, but they denied it. The fire of agitation, anger, and hate was already here, but they denied it. The truth exists at all times; it is not subject to time. It is only personal and individual greed, or hunger, or desires that change with time. Truth does not change with time, but what we desired as children is not what we desire now, for example. All worldly desires are relative, passing, cyclical, whimsical. The truth of desire is its whimsicality; the truth of its nature is its transience. The truth about man is that there is always the potential of lingering doubt in his heart. It is not to demean him: "I swear by Time; most surely, man is in a state of loss" (103:1-2). This is the truth of it, and we must become aware of that truth in order to move into the One and Only Truth that encompasses it.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْإِبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيِّينَ ط

18 Nay! Surely, the book of the righteous is in 'Illiyyin.

Kallā (كَلَّا) in this ayah is like a warning and means "Certainly!" The ordinary meaning of *kallā* is "no." In each case in which this word appears, it intervenes between two ideas which normally clash. It is not the same as *lā* (لَا), which simply means "no."

Abrār (اِبْرَارِ) means "righteous, just, kind" and comes from the same root as *barr* (بَرِّ), which means "desert, expanse of land." *Abrār* then refers to "those who are in a state of expanse," "those who are correct." It also denotes loyalty. Not every *barr* is a desert, but every desert is a *barr*, a plain. *Barr* can be any open expanse which is not cultivated. *Barr* is a place in which there are no obstructions, nothing is hidden. The *barr* of the Arabs of the Arabian Penin-

sula is absolute empty space, whereas their sea (*bahr*; بحر) contains everything.

“Those who are correct are in ‘*Illīyyīn*.” ‘*Illīyyīn* (عَلِيّين) comes from the verb ‘*alā* (علا), meaning “to be high, elevated, tower up, to rise, excel,” amongst other things. This means that the correct ones are so light and removed from the gross state that they are in ‘*Illīyyīn*, elevated in lofty places. Allah is *al-‘Alī* (the Most High); it is one of His Divine Names. The *barrī* (بري) is one who is truthful to his heritage, and since his heritage is Allah, he is with Allah. What has been written for him, or what he has written for himself, is exalted. Anything that is high, containing the attribute of greatness, is ‘*alī*.”

وَمَا آذْرِيكَ مَا عَلِيُّونَ ط

19 And what will make you realize what ‘*Illiy-yun* is?

This means, “Wonder about it, think about it!” We must think about that extremely subtle source from which we have come and not talk about the *rūḥ* (روح ; the spirit) unthinkingly. What is that subtle essence which said: *Kun fa-yakūn* (كن فيكون ; “Be! And it is.”)?

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ

20 An inscribed book.

This refers to a written book, that is, a known, evident and clear situation, or a known and evident reality.

21 Those who are close (to Allah) will witness it.

This refers to those who are close to reality. Reality, or Allah, is not found in one particular place where we have to go in order to be near. It says in the Qur'an: "I am closer to you than your jugular vein" (50:16). What is stopping us from knowing Allah is ourselves. We are far because of the so-called "I" which constantly asserts itself. We must kill our "self" first while still alive, through surrender. We must be willing to totally surrender, from our hearts, if even for one moment. All the practices of the people of Allah are nothing but techniques to enable us to reach that state, to sit still with no thoughts, and to be pure energy.

"Those who are close . . ." Why are we far? We are far because of all the things which we interpose between ourselves and our Creator. This is a very simple, easily understandable condition. It has to do with pure action; it is a leap we must make. For this reason, when people first entered into *islām* they quickly became very close to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. They did not have to go to a university for five years to get a higher degree in "Islamic Studies," because one is either living in *islām* or out of *islām*. How can people study *islām* from outside? It is not possible. It is for this reason that *islām* will never be understood by people except those who are totally and utterly in it.

People are curious, for example, about the "Islamic Resurgence," but they will never be able to understand its profound meaning. "Islamic Resurgence" lies in the fact that man is always seeking his Creator, so it will always "resurge." "Islamic Resurgence" does not come from two or three ex-officers in Egypt who have been put behind bars, nor even from the Iranian Revolution. "Islamic Resurgence" means evolution and that has to come about because man wants to know. It is not enough for man to be pampered materially as he has been for the last fifty years in the West. He will not be satisfied with it. As one prominent Imam of the East says, "The West is the culture of the refrigerator," implying that the center, or heart, of the house is no longer the warm burning fire in the hearth, but rather, the refrigerator in the kitchen. His words also refer to the heart of the woman of the house. It is frozen. How can these people, therefore, possibly understand?

The Companion Salman al-Farsi, *'alayhi-s-salām*, heard about the

Prophet and said to himself, "This man will give me knowledge, he will teach me about Allah." On the way to see him, however, he was captured as a slave and Abu Bakr bought him. He became a Muslim and in almost no time at all the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, was heard to say of him, "Salman is of my family." Others had similar experiences which are really a result of the condition of the heart. If the heart is in such condition as to be willing to give up what it does not own, the most sought-after and precious thing, life itself, then the heart is in its purest state. Now, the word condition, from the point of view of the people of Allah, means station, not a mood. A mood is a passing phase, something which we occasionally taste. If the heart is surrendered in submission, it can see the Book, because the Book is engraved therein.

إِنَّا لَابْرَارٌ لِّفِي نَعِيمٍ

22 Certainly, the righteous are in bliss.

Those who are in that state of righteousness are in *na'im* (نعيم ; happiness, delight, comfort, peacefulness). Now *ni'mah* (نعمة ; blessing, favor), which is related to *na'im*, has a very subtle meaning, and the closest English equivalent is "grace," because grace is the subtlety of what comes to us later on in the creational cycle. All of us say *na'am* (نعم), which means "yes," to *ni'mah*. That is why the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, "If I had known what was good for me, I would have chosen only those situations which would have been beneficial to me," revealing his two major attributes: he was a man both of humanity and of divine purity. These two aspects are what make us a *barzakh* (برزخ ; an interlink between realities).

عَلَىٰ الْأَرَآئِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ

23 On couches gazing —

The state of reclining on couches means being in a neutral situa-

tion, implying that there is neither distraction nor any awareness of outer discomfort.

Yanzurūn (ينظرون) means “they see,” “they witness.” In the Qur’an, the first thing that is said about the highest mission of humanity, which of course is the mission of all the prophets, is, “Surely We have sent you as a witness,” (33:45). The ayah then continues “and as a bearer of good news and as a warner.” In this one ayah is encapsulated the three basic missions of a prophet.

The witnesser is neutral. He is not going to step in and stop a fight because he is just an observer. Seeing, witnessing, implies that he has knowledge. When we exclaim, “Oh, I see!” we express insight and knowledge. In this ayah they are in knowledge, because they are *muqarrabūn* (مقربون), they are close. They are the eye of witnessing itself. When Amir al-Mu’minin Sayyidna ‘Ali, ‘*alayhi-s-salām*, was asked, “Have you seen Allah?” he replied, “Have some respect! Be correct! How can I worship a Lord Whom I have not seen?” He meant that he had seen Him with his heart, in *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (حق اليقين ; truth of certainty), not with his eyes.

تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ

24 You will recognize in their faces the brightness of bliss.

We will see the joy radiating from their faces. They will beam the joyfulness of *tawḥīd*, because they have been connected all the time.

يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ

25 They are given to drink a nectar that is sealed —

Saqā (سقى) is “to water, give drink to.” *Raḥīq* (رحيق) means “nectar.” The nectar that those who have reached the goal drink of is complete. This means that there is nothing more that can be added to it or subtracted from it. It is complete fulfillment.

Makhtūm (مختوم) means “sealed.” One can only seal something that is complete. The Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*, was the “Seal of the prophets,” meaning that with his advent everything that has come before has been perfected and sealed.

خَتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ

26 The sealing of it is musk, and for that let the aspirers aspire.

Misk (مسك) means “musk,” and musk, apart from being an aromatic perfume in its own right, functions as a fixative. Thus here, the seal is a fixative. Musk is derived from the glands of the musk-deer whose natural properties are still a scientific puzzle to us. We still do not know how musk manages to fix a scent, but without it a perfume’s smell would just disappear. When the ayah says, “its end is musk,” it is a statement implying that it is fixed. The echo of this ayah is that the end of the journey, the end of the situation of recognizing *ni‘mah*, lingers on, is fixed, and sealed. It evokes a permanent state of *ni‘mah*.

“For that let the aspirers aspire.” If we are in competition in this manner, then all we have is our *nafs* (نفس ; self). We can win the race in this world only by exhausting our *nafs*. When we attain the highest degree of knowledge, we reach Allah, Who was the Beginning all along. We appear to ourselves as mobile biological entities who are gradually consumed and oxidized. The more we drop our *nafs* and surrender ourselves, however, the more we find that this surrender leads us to apparent infinity and nothingness, which existed at the time of creation. Zero and infinity, nothing and the infinite — we can only go stepwise to a certain point beyond which we cannot reach. For at that point infinity is no longer approachable by steps or stages. At first we can get close to Allah step by step through our own efforts and awareness, but we reach a point where we need a quantum leap.

وَمِنْ أَجْهٍ مِنْ سَنِيهِ

27 And the admixture of it is from a water coming from above,

Tasnīm (تسنيم) is translated as “a water coming from above” because it is the name of a river in the Garden which comes from the highest part of heaven. The root of *tasnīm* is *sanima* (سنم), “to be tall (a camel), to ascend, mount.” *Sanām* (سنام), from the same root, is the camel’s hump – the highest part of a camel.

The Garden is often referred to as having rivers which are fed from under the ground. The reference here is to another river, or energy-stream, that comes from above, from on high. Thus, this ayah is saying, “Let them go fast toward that state . . .” That state is one of elevated closeness to Allah.

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

28 A spring from which drink those who are close (to Allah).

The drink that issues from this spring is not an occasional one, but a continuous one. A spring implies something that always issues from a particular opening. When a person is close to the source from which all these things emanate, he is close to Allah, to the knowledge of the source, and to the essence from which all these attributes emanate.

‘Ayn (عَيْن ; spring, fountain) also means “eye, scout, important man, leader, property, capital asset.” When it rains for more than five days, the Arabs call this period an *‘ayn*, because it is like a spring from heaven. *‘Ayn* is also used in connection with one’s resources, funds or wealth. When Sayyidna ‘Ali, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, advised his governor in Egypt, he said, “And you should appoint *‘uyūn* (plural of *‘ayn*),” meaning, “You should insure that those whom you have appointed, who are supposed to insure justice, have people to observe and inspect them.” This does not imply spying, for spying is done secretly, whereas this statement implies open observation. When someone knows that inspectors are going to observe him, he behaves correctly and is thus stopped from acting wrongly. Sayyidna ‘Ali told his governor to appoint *‘uyūn* in order to extend his field of vision.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
يَضْحَكُونَ

29 Surely, those who are guilty used to laugh at those who believe.

Ajramū (اَجْرَمُوا) comes from the verb *ajrama* (اَجْرَمَ), “to commit a crime, harm.” The rise of the ego is the crime. The assertion that we are separate *is* the crime. This ayah refers to those who have committed a crime, and the crime is basically against themselves. Those who commit crimes against themselves are very capable of committing a crime against others. A crime committed against oneself may not be evident to the doer, while a crime against others is more obvious.

The *kāfir* (كَافِرٌ ; he who covers up the truth, either inwardly or outwardly) laughs at those who are in *īmān* (اِيْمَانٌ ; belief, trust). Those who have trust know that life is not meaningless, that there *is* justice and *ḥaqq* (حَقٌّ ; the truth, reality). Laughter is basically self-congratulation. When we laugh we are at peace within ourselves, we are at the source, and everybody wants to be at the source. Those guilty of causing harm laugh at those who believe to reassure themselves, sinking back into their self-satisfaction.

وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامِرُونَ

30 And when they passed them by, they winked at one another.

Again, they do this to reassure each other, to be able to say, “Oh, we know they are the fools.” Man always wants reassurance. People wink to communicate to one another that somebody has done something wrong, has gotten off the path, or has gone a bit mad. In this case the wink refers to someone who has become a Muslim. Winking is a more subtle reassurance than laughing, for laughter can be more easily confronted.

وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ

31 And when they turned back to their people,
they turn back exulting.

Ahl (اهل), “family, people, followers,” symbolize the security and comfort of familiarity, as in the earlier example when the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, “Salman [al-Farsi] is of my family.” He was not a blood relative of the Prophet’s family but, as we know, some of us are closer to our friends than to our own brothers. When Arabs want to welcome someone, they say, *Ahlan wa sahlān*, “Welcome, you have come to your family,” or in other words, “Be at ease, relax, belong!” If we cannot belong in an existential way, then how can we belong in a total, abstract way to our Lord, to Allah? If one is at ease in a mosque, then one will be at ease when closer to Allah.

Fakihīn (فَكِهِينَ) means “jesting, exalting, making merry.” Again, this is an implication that at all times and in all circumstances we want to have reassurance. We are ecological beings; we want to be in the right environment. If we are liars, like those described in this ayah, we will return to our people in order to gain reassurance and tranquility.

وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُّونَ

32 And when they saw them, they said: Surely,
these are in error,

We are either moving toward the fossilization of our egos, or else we are freeing ourselves of them. We cannot be neutral and stationary because in reality there is no neutrality. We are either progressing or regressing. From the moment of our birth, we are continually regressing. Each moment we are biologically closer to the grave. Inwardly, spiritually, it is up to us to either regress or progress. Progress is made not only through struggle, but ultimately through true self-abandonment. The struggle, therefore, is one against the lower nature. The essence of Reality, however, is already within us.

وَمَا أُرْسِلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ حَافِظِينَ

33 And they were not sent as guardians over them.

Who are these people in denial? The specific reference in this ayah is to those who are lost, those who deny the truth, the *mutafifin* (**مطففين**). They only concern themselves with the existential situation, denying the *ākhirah* (**آخرة** ; next world), absolute judgement and justice. They cannot, however, keep the truth hidden. Although they are in darkness, it does not mean that they can control the truth.

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفْرِ يَضْحَكُونَ

34 So this day those who believe will laugh at those who disbelieve.

This refers to the Day of Judgement, when everything will be open and revealed. On this day the people who were in *īmān* will be joyous, they will see *tawhīd* and will reunite with what they knew before. Those who are in a state of trust laugh at *kufr*. The time when we discover our *īmān* fully will be a minor day of resurrection for us. We will laugh so much that it will not even be visible on our faces. Our laughter will be so deep that it will be beyond laughter. It will be a moment when we reconnect with the glimpse of real *tawhīd* we had in this world. Laughter is the expression of reconnecting with something we have known before.

عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ

35 On raised couches, gazing.

They will see the truth which they believed in when there are no more outer disturbances, when the truth is clear, when nothing stops

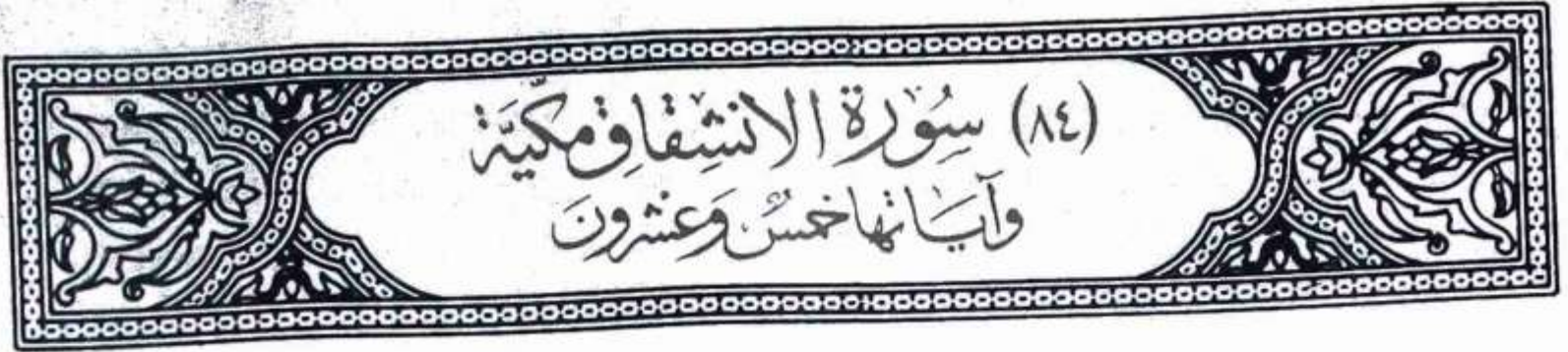
them from seeing the truth. This sight will confirm their belief and will bring about a state of pure relaxation, which is the inner state of laughter. Laughing brings about contentment and is in turn an expression of contentment brought about by recognition.

هَلْ تُؤْتُونَ الْكُفَّارَ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

36 Surely the disbelievers are rewarded for what they used to do.

Thawwaba (ثَوَّبَ) is “to reward.” The first root form of *thawwaba* is *thāba* (ثَابَ ; to return) which, to the Arabic speaker’s ear, sounds very similar to *tāba* (تَابَ ; to repent, renounce, turn away from), which also connotes returning from ignorant, misguided ways to healthy knowledgable ones. *Thawāb* (ثَوَابٌ) is “a reward” for obedience and one way to that is through *tawāb* (تَوَابٌ), “doing penance.”

This ayah asks us to reflect deeply upon our intentions, to see why we did what we did, thus finding that we were rewarded one hundred percent according to our intentions. If our intentions are pure, then the reward cannot harm us. “Is the reward of goodness ought but goodness?” (55:60). How then can we hide our intentions? Everything in life is perfect because perfection is within us.



SURAT AL-INSHIQAQ

THE SPLITTING ASUNDER

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ

1 When the heaven splits asunder,

This surah begins with a description of the end of the cosmos. *Inshaqqa* (انشق), the root of *inshiqāq* (انشقاق) means "to be cleft asunder, to be split," and implies that the sudden break was not preconceived. The force with which the system is torn apart is so great that there seems to be no pre-set pattern of the final collapse. This apparent haphazardness of the end is linguistically contrasted in the Qur'an with the carefully determined beginning of creation (21:30) where the verb *fataqa* (فتق ; to tear apart at the seams) is used. *Fataqa* is not haphazard, for the seams along which creation burst forth were predetermined, as the verb implies.

وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحَقَّتْ

2 And obeys its Lord and is true.

Obedience and *ḥaqq* (حق ; truth, reality) here mean that something (i.e., the heavens) has followed its destiny, proving its

truthfulness by its actions. *Udhn* (**أذن**) means “ear,” from *adhina* (**أذن**), which means “to hear, listen, allow.” It means it has heard, and thus is connected with the source of the message. “Give me *idhn*,” means “Give me permission,” which is another aspect of unifying with destiny.

وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ

3 And when the earth is stretched,

Madda (**مد**) means “to extend, stretch, expand.” If a person races against someone who is stronger than him, and he asks for *madad* (**مدد** ; from the same root), he means a “headstart.” The nuances of the shattering of the earth are revealed clearly in the context of the two ayat which precede and follow.

وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ

4 And casts out what is in it and is empty —

The earth has extended itself, flattened out completely, and has thrown out all that is in it. Its balance is disturbed and broken up. The forces of gravity and all the interconnections that go with it are no longer dominant.

وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحَقَّتْ

5 And obeys its Lord and is true.

Again by obedience it thereby proves its destiny. Its *haqq*, its obligation, is to bring about a certain stability and to disappear again. This description becomes very clear in relation to what will happen to other aspects of the earth, such as the mountains. These ayat are a general description, but we also have a specific description of the two

occurrences. We find that after the second occurrence, or the second shout, things will seem to go backward in time. Time will be reversed and the sun will rise in the west rather than the east. Solid objects will become fluid and everything will flow like sand, with solids reverting to their gaseous states, going back in time.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ
رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

6 O man! Surely you must strive to your Lord a hard striving until you meet Him.

After being given the description of the end in which creation will be shattered, we see that the shattering and the breakup will be reflected in the consciousness of man. To strive, toil, or labor also means to seek a livelihood or sustenance in the worldly sense. One of the great men of Allah in North Africa used to knit one cap a day. He would do it in the morning, for half an hour, and then take it to the bazaar. The merchants all knew him and wanted to sell his work. The first man who saw him would take it and sell it. Then this great man of Allah would say, "Now I've shaken the palmtree!"

There must be a shaking of the palmtree, just as Maryam, the mother of Sayyidna 'Isa, peace be upon them both, did before she gave birth to Sayyidna 'Isa, and the dates fell upon her to satisfy her hunger. There must be striving, for we are toiling whether we like it or not. We are all toiling toward the knowledge of *rubūbiyah* (ربوبية ; Lordship). We have to move on, we cannot help it.

Even if we do not develop our hearts and our intellects, we are developing physically and becoming calcified and old biologically. That is part of man's reaching his full potential which, from one point of view, is simply the process of aging. Although we may not have paralleled this growth with compatible aspects of correct behavior, one aspect of ourselves will have moved towards *rubūbiyah*, and that is the physical aspect which is being loyal to its Creator by dying, by *wafāh* (وفاة ; death). *Wafā'* (وفاء ; from the same root) is the fulfillment of an obligation, payment of a debt, loyalty and completion. *Tawaffā* (توفى) means, "He proved his loyalty [to the decree by dying]." We will meet and know that end, and we will know that there has only been the *Rabb* (Lord).

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ

7 Then, as for him who is given his book in his right hand,

This ayah takes us to the end of time. The mention of the right hand implies direct, aware, positive action and transaction. Traditionally the left hand always implies the negative. The ayah, therefore, shows that at the end of time the man of correct action will be shown the clarity or purity of all his past actions.

فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا

8 He will be reckoned with by an easy reckoning,

His account will be made easy. His passage from this phase of consciousness in this world to the next will be made smooth, and the transformation will be an easy one. It will be like waking up from a deep and heavy sleep.

This does not mean, however, that this person is going to have to confront a board of examiners. His transformation will be easy because he will be fully awake and ready for it. His toiling has been on the right track, *fī sabīli'llāh* (في سبيل الله ; in the Way of Allah).

وَيُنْقَلِبُ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا

9 And he will go back to his people joyful.

He will go back to what he deserves. *Masrūran* (مسرورا ; joyful) derives from the verb *sarra* (سر) which means “to be happy, glad” and in another form, “to keep a secret, conceal, confide.” It implies that real bliss is a secret. *Sarīr* (سرير) is a “bed or dais,” something upon which one reclines and is thereby made com-

comfortable. *Sarīrah* (سريرة) means “secret” or “innermost,” and denotes the heart. So the one who was given his book in his right hand returns to what is familiar and therefore comfortable to him, to those people with whom he wanted to be. He will return to his rightful place.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ وَرَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ

10 And as for him who is given his book behind his back,

This describes someone who did not want to face himself, who did not even want to see himself. He did not want to examine his account, to see what he is, or who he is, or how he came about. He knows somehow that he is nothing. He reshaped himself in this life but his actions were in error. He does not want to take his book of accounts, so it is thrust upon him as though by force, behind his back.

فَسَوْفَ يَدْعُوا ثُبُورًا

11 He will call for destruction,

Thabara (ثبر) is “to destroy, ruin, perish.” *Thābara* (ثابر) is “to be diligent, persevere”; it implies destruction, as in the case of someone who is completely surrounded and can no longer think or act. He is frozen and his senses can no longer operate. Suddenly he knows from then on that in that realm he has no investment, nothing to work with. At that point he calls out for destruction. He knows that only his destruction awaits him.

وَيَصْلَى سَعِيرًا

12 And enter into burning fire.

He knows that he is in *Jahannam*. This person has already had partial *sa'ir* (**سَعِير** ; burning fire) in his previous life through those accoutrements with which he surrounded himself in order to reinforce his system of loss.

إِنَّهُ كَانَ فِي أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا

13 Surely, he was joyful among his people,

He tried to be with his family, with his lot. He tried to reinforce what he believed in, which was in fact disbelief, by being with them.

إِنَّهُ ظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ يَحُورَ

14 Surely, he thought he would never return.

بَلَىٰ إِنَّ رَبَّهُ كَانَ بِهِ بَصِيرًا

15 Yes! Surely his Lord does ever see him.

Certainly Lordship overwhelms everything, for everything is within His sight. Nothing ever escapes Him.

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالشَّفَقِ

16 But no! I swear by the sunset redness,

While this surah speaks of the end of the world, this ayah speaks of the end of the day, the end of time when we are able to act, when we can clearly see what lies ahead of us. *Shafaq* (**شَفَق**) is the red-

ness of the sky from sunset until nightfall. The origin of the word comes from a verb meaning "to fear." In Arabic, to have *shafaqah* means to have compassion, but the basic meaning of it is fear. It implies the end of the day. From then on people do not move about freely and they are more careful. Thus the call here is to witnessing the end of the day and the beginning of the night, the beginning of the unknown, the next life, the beginning of the next consciousness.

وَاللَّيْلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ

17 And the night and that which it drives on,

This is the night and what the night contains, encompasses, hides. "Night" means both the night and any area we do not know of, or any situation or boundary about which we are not completely clear. At night, other laws apply and things are no longer clear.

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ

18 And the moon when it grows full,

The light at night comes by reflection, it is not direct, as with the sun. The light shines most brightly when the moon is full, when it is functioning in its greatest capacity as a reflector.

لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَن طَبَقٍ

19 That you will certainly enter one state after another.

Allah is saying that He calls to witness all these changes and phases. Man's life will come to an end. This day will come to an end and the next phase will begin. This implies that a life lasts only one day, which is why in the Qur'an the people of the next life say that

this life was like just one day. The ayah refers to the different phases and systems at work in this existence, and shows that one system is connected to another. Some people read into this ayah a description of man's penetration of outer space, and say that it heralds his journey into space.

In its essential meaning, however, it is saying that one system is based on another, that the system of night is based on the system of day, and one follows the other successively. This is true in the visible world as well as in the invisible world. The promise here is that we will go through these layers, we will ride along these passages, one after another, one day after another, one level of consciousness after another, one life after another.

فَمَا لَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

20 But what is the matter with them that they do not believe?

Allah is saying that now that man is going to experience all this, now that he has directly witnessed day and night, and is informed about the destruction and the next creation, how is it that he does not trust, that he does not have *imān*? How is it that he does not take refuge in that knowledge to bring about peace for himself?

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُرْآنُ لَا يَسْجُدُونَ
السجدة

21 And when the Qur'an is recited to them they do not prostrate?

When reality, the collected, collective book that contains all the knowledges that have been shown to us, is made into a direct reminder and is recited outwardly where it is already experienced inwardly, why does man not prostrate in *sajdah* (سجدة ; prostration) and abandon himself physically? If the inner knowledge that he does not exist comes to him, then inwardly he must recognize his nothingness, his total and utter destitution. Inwardly he is already in abandonment and sooner or later it will reflect outwardly.

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُكْذِبُونَ

22 Yes, certainly! Those who cover up belie the truth.

The answer is that those who deny the truth, who are disconnected, deny that they are under the one, ever-extended, ever-effulgent, ever-changing mercy. This, however, is their loss.

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يُوعُونَ

23 And Allah knows best what they hide.

Wa'ā (وَعَى) means "to collect, retain in the memory," while *wa'y* (وَعَى), from the same root, means "consciousness, awareness, attentiveness." The word *yū'un* (يُوعُونَ) here refers to what they hide in their breasts, what they are holding back and keeping to themselves. Allah knows what is hidden and what is evident. What is hidden are the eternal laws, but what they are calling forth is their own mistrust.

فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

24 So announce to them a painful punishment,

Here *bashshirhum* (بَشِّرْهُمْ) is reversed: "Give them the news of a painful chastisement." These people who cover up must contain the seed of the consciousness of the knowledge of *tawhīd*. But they deny it inwardly, therefore their denial has to manifest outwardly as well.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ

- 25 Except those who believe and do good – for them is a reward that will never be cut off.

The surah then ends on a positive note. It says that these are the laws: the world will come to an end, men toil whether they like it or not, and they will move from one phase to another. As we see all these phases, which are the signs of the creational change, we see that these changes are within the non-changing, and those who trust in the oneness that encompasses all and translate that trust into right action will have their reward of *mamnūn* (**ممنون** ; never being cut off). *Mann* (**من**), from the same root as *mamnūn*, means “favor.” Here the favor is unlimited because it concerns timelessness. It means that in the next life their reward will be beyond description. Whereas this world is limited, the next world is not because it is in the hand of the Unlimited.



SURAT AL-BURUJ

THE STARS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ

1 By the heaven full of stars,

The surah begins by calling upon phenomena that directly concern us in this life. Swearing by the constellations we are called upon to bear witness. *Burj* (**برج**) is anything that is apparent, conspicuous or elevated. It also means "tower, castle," and "sign of the zodiac." The heavens can be divided into different zones, and in the ones closest to us are the twelve houses of the zodiac, or constellations. The use of the word *samā'* (**سما** ; sky, heaven) here implies the heart. One of the inner meanings of this ayah refers to the different stages through which the heart progresses toward the realization of *tawhīd*.

وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ

2 And by the Promised Day,

Maw'ūd (موعود ; promised, appointed) comes from the verb *wa'ada* (وعد), "to promise, predict, threaten." On the Day of Reckoning everything will be open and evident.

وَشَاهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ

3 And by the witness and the one who is witnessed.

Members of the Ahl al-Bayt often use this to mean that Allah is the Witness and Allah is the Witnessed, for there is only Allah — *lā ilāha illa'llāh* (لا إله إلا الله ; there is no god but Allah). It is also said that the *shāhid* (شاهد ; witness) is *yawm al-jum'ah* (يوم الجمعة ; the day of gathering together, i.e., Friday). The Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said that the *shāhid* is *yawm al-jum'ah*, and *mashhūd* (مشهود ; witnessed) is *yawm al-'arafāt* (يوم العرفات ; the Day of 'Arafat on the Hajj). Being a *shāhid* is repetitive. Each of us is a witness, constantly, repeatedly, every minute of every day, every week, every Friday. This also means being a witness in the collective sense, because the day of gathering (Friday) is a rehearsal for the time when all the souls will be gathered after the Resurrection.

Mashhūd is the Day of Knowing, or recognition of the one truth. It is the day of *tawhīd*. We witness that once in a lifetime. Friday witnesses us, and we witness 'Arafat. To know once is enough, and then the *shāhid* can also be the *mashhūd*.

قَتَلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأَخْذُودِ

4 Destruction take the companions of the trench,

This is an historical reference to an event which took place in the Yemen. It concerns a prophet though it is not known whether he was a Christian or not, but he was from Ethiopia and he had a group of followers. This is the story as it was related by Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali, *'alayhi-s-salām*.

The way of life at that time in the Yemen was against belief and the way of *'ubūdīyah* (**عبودية** ; worship). The people imprisoned the prophet and his followers, dug a pit in the earth and built a big fire in it. They then assembled them and said, "Whoever among you believes in that Ethiopian prophet should jump in the fire and burn yourselves, because if you believe in Allah, then Allah will save you! Go and die! And those who do not believe in that man should stay out of it." It is related that all the people who were with him jumped into the fire, and they were all saved by Allah, in Allah's way. There was a woman among them who had a child, and when she and the child went into the fire there was nothing but coolness and peace, just as it was with the Prophet Ibrahim, *'alayhi-s-salām*, when he was thrown into a fire by the idol-worshipping people of Mesopotamia. Those who jumped in were in a state of absolute and utter trust.

There is a similar story of one of the disciples of Sayyidna 'Isa, *'alayhi-s-salām*. They were walking along the seashore, when Sayyidna 'Isa began to walk out on the water and said, "Come along after me!" But the disciple did not follow and Sayyidna 'Isa called out again, "Come!" But the disciple still hesitated and said, "How can I?" 'Isa again said, "Come!" Suddenly the disciple's trust in his Master was complete and he walked out on the water. As he approached Sayyidna 'Isa, however, he began to think he was very important since he was performing a miracle just like the Prophet of Allah. As soon as these thoughts arose, gravity overcame him and he started to sink. It is said that the prophet of Allah, Sayyidna 'Isa, *'alayhi-s-salām*, then extended his hand and said to him, "You fool, stop being *you!*" At that moment of self-abandonment another system, from which one is usually barred, takes over.

النَّارِذَاتِ الْوَقُودِ

5 The fire fed with fuel,

أَذْهَبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُودَ

6 When they sat by it,

Some people look upon this ayah as a reference to America because the biggest canyon in the world, the Grand Canyon of Arizona, is in America. Sometimes I call this surah the surah of America, because of the fire they are stoking and on which they are sitting, that is, the whole nuclear situation, and it is from within the earth that they are bringing it. The biggest fire or explosion we can make is the detonation of the atomic bomb, whose elements we extract from the earth.

وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ

7 And they are witnesses of what they do to the believers.

People are themselves witnesses of what they are doing to the *mu'minūn*, of what they are doing to people who simply want to be left in belief, waiting for the next life, doing their best in this life. These tyrannical people afflict the believers because they want them to become like themselves. That is what the people of the Yemen did to the believers of the prophet whom we spoke of earlier.

We all want unification. The *kāfirūn* want to unify everyone in their system of *kufr* which, as the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, is one system. It is like the case of a father and mother who have toiled all their lives saving their money, but in the end the child does not want what they have to give him. This is the worst thing that can happen to bourgeois parents. The father and mother want to extend their system to their child and if the child rebels, they are made so unhappy by unfulfilled expectation that they destroy him psychically.

In the instance of what happened in the Yemen there was mass destruction. The people of the status quo, who wanted to perpetuate their narrow system of existence, afflicted others. They built a fire right in the midst of that prophet's followers because they wanted to destroy them, obliterate them completely so that they would not be bothered by them any more, and so that their own system would be complete, with no disruptive elements threatening its continuity. By doing this they too were unifiers.

وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْغَرِيبِ الْحَمِيدِ

- 8 And they took vengeance on them only because they believed in Allah, the Mighty, the One Who is Praised,

Niqmah (نِقْمَةٌ ; vengeance) is the opposite of *ni'mah* (نِعْمَةٌ), which means "benefit, blessing." *Niqmah* is a visible, destructive affliction. The *kāfirūn* of the Yemen took revenge and tried to destroy these people simply because they wanted to trust in Allah and believe. They said, *al-ḥamdu li'llāh*, "Praise belongs to Allah." They wanted knowledge of Allah because it is the rarest and most precious commodity in creation, and it is the most exalted knowledge available to man.

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

- 9 To Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is a Witness over all things.

This ayah refers to the earlier one: *wa-shāhidin wa mashhūd*, "And by the witness and the one who is witnessed."

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا

فَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

- 10 Certainly, those who persecute believing men and believing women, then do not turn in repentance, for them is the punishment of *Jahannam*, and for them is the punishment of burning!

Fatana (**فتن** ; to subject to temptation or trials, enamor, torture and torment), here specifically means “to afflict,” or “persecute” in the sense of overcoming, destroying, and causing harm. Those who have acted against the believers, even without having realized what they were doing, as well as those of us who have carried out an action that was not on the straight line of *tawhīd* and then did not make *tawbah* (**توبة** ; repentance), will be afflicted by *‘adhāb* (**عذاب** ; torment, suffering punishment). *‘Adhdhaba* means “to cause harm or pain, punish, torment.” At the same time *‘adhuba*, from the same root, means “to be sweet, pleasant, agreeable.” Here is a vivid example of how opposite meanings are contained in the same word.

Haraqā (**حرق**) means “to burn.” This means that the scene which we witnessed in the earlier ayat is in truth its reverse. It actually says that those who were burnt in the pit were the victors, while those who burned them up will end up being the ones who will be burned in reality. They will get the punishment of what they themselves cause, so that they are actually enacting their own punishment upon themselves.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ مَجْرَى
مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ

- 11 **Certainly, those who believe and do right actions, they will have Gardens, rivers flowing under them – that is the great victory!**

And those who, like the people of the fire-pit, have had *īmān* and translated it into appropriate, connected actions unified with their intentions, will have Gardens fed by invisible rivers. That lushness is manifested even now in the brightness of their faces. That is the great and ultimate victory. *Fawz* (**فوز**), which means “victory,” implies that one is victorious by having reached safety, and that it is the ultimate goal of the aspirant.

إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ

12 Certainly, the might of your Lord is great.

Baṭasha (بطش) means “to seize violently.” It refers to the times when something comes upon us fiercely, unexpectedly. If we say *baṭasha bihi* (بطش به), we mean he assaulted him, whether in anger or out of vengeance. *Shadīd* (شديد) means “strong, vigorous, severe, stern, harsh.” This attack may suddenly and unexpectedly come either at the moment of death in this life, or in the next life at the time of judgement.

إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِي وَيُعِيدُ

13 He is the One Who originates and brings forth anew.

Reality is the origin of everything and everything will return to it. The ayah may refer to the beginning of a good thing as well as the end. It may refer either to the beginning of a person’s life, his individual consciousness and the final return of his individual consciousness to the total, vast consciousness of Allah, or to the beginning of physical life itself and the return of life to its source. In addition, it can include the beginning of an affair, its end and its ultimate return in the next life. These are only some of the possible meanings of this ayah.

وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ

14 And He is the Forgiving, the Loving,

Wadūd (ودود ; loving) comes from one of the many Arabic words meaning “to love.” *Ḥubb* (حُب ; love) is the light of pure *wudd*, or *widd* (وِد ; love, affection). Both the words mean love, but if *widd* is pure and shines forth openly, it then becomes *ḥubb*. When one’s teeth are straight and beautifully arranged

they are call *hibab* (حَبَب ; from the same root as *hubb*). The whole of creation hinges on love.

ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ

15 Lord of the Throne, the All-Glorious.

'*Arsh* (عَرْش) means "throne," from the root '*arasha* (عَرَش), which means "to erect a trellis, as in supporting vines." The entire creation rests on this foundation, this subtle structure of matter upon which Allah has "settled" creation, permeated with His absolute Divine Power. He "sits" within it, as a king sits on a throne.

فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ

16 Doer of whatever He wills.

Allah's will will be carried out. His actions will be made evident. Allah's actions follow the laws of creation, and the laws of creation are suspended, are built upon the '*arsh*. In the story of creation as expounded in the Qur'an, we find that originally the throne of Allah was suspended on water, which implies that creation hinges on fluidity rather than solidity.

هَلْ آتَيْكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ

17 Has the story of the hosts come to you,

فِرْعَوْنَ وَثَمُودَ

18 Of Pharaoh and Thamud?

This is another example of a nation or people who rebelled against the message of truth and as a result were destroyed. The same thing happened to the people of Khudud, of Yemen. In this instance, the people were completely under the direct control of Pharaoh. *Junūd* (جنود ; “troops, hoards, armies”) refers to the angels who have no way of interpreting anything, or of moving in any direction except in a clearly single-pointed line. The reference to the people of Pharaoh and Thamud gives us another example of the way “great” civilizations and cultures are destroyed, even though they had higher knowledges.

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ

19 No! Those who disbelieve belie the truth in denial.

Those who deny the truth lie. This means that they lie to themselves. They cover themselves and protect themselves from connecting with the truth which is both outside and inside them. They are the ones who deny themselves.

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ

20 But Allah encompasses them on every side.

Allah is *al-Muḥīṭ* (المحيط). The *muḥīṭ* of a circle is its circumference. To encircle something is to contain it, and therefore to control it. The ayah means that Allah is in a place where they are not looking, a place of which they are not aware, to which their vision does not extend. The Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, used to say, “I can see you from my back,” meaning that he was aware of what people were doing behind him. He was in total awareness. This was not extrasensory perception, it was something normal and attainable by others. People who are so gross as to inflict injustice upon others cannot be aware of true justice, which ultimately rules both here in this life and in the life to come. The law of Allah is upon them right now. They are already in the courtyard.

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ

21 Yes, indeed! It is a glorious Qur'an!

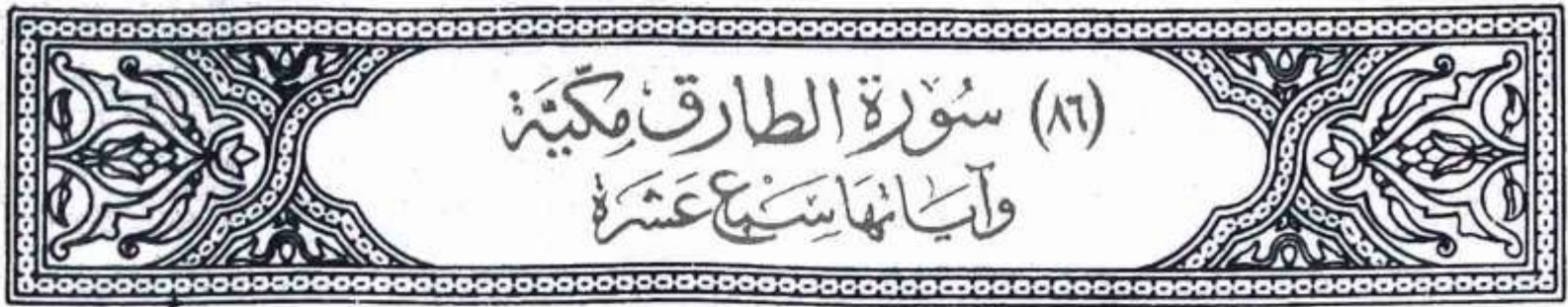
It is a Reality according to a non-changing Book. It is written and done; it is laid down according to non-changeable directions. It is not haphazard. Even rebelliousness is not haphazard since that choice of rebellion is already predetermined. A man may try to rebel against being rebellious, but it is like two mirrors facing each other, making myriad reflections until the reflection becomes single-pointed and fixed. First it will not be a true reflection, but later it will become true. Then it will be like a star in comparison to the sun of the Muham-madi light.

What is written and what has been expounded in this form is a general description of creation which one must make an effort to read. That effort, however, must follow a certain fixed path, one which goes not according to our whims but according to a boundary, for everything has a boundary.

فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ

22 In a guarded tablet.

“In a guarded tablet” means preserved forever. It was not destroyed by Sayyidna Musa smashing the tablets. In the Qur'an it also says that the copies of it are preserved forever. Each person is a carbon copy of the *lawḥ maḥfūz* (لوح محفوظ ; guarded tablet). Each of us carries the same copy of consciousness. The copy of Qur'an is in the heart, but we must make an effort to read it. That reading means living it, and that living it is actually unifying the inward and outward. If we are not doing this, then we are reducing the Book to mere printed sheets of paper. It is as if we have a box of vitamins which we never use even when we are sick. The guarded tablet is preserved forever, and it is this eternal quality that gives it mercy. It is persistent; it is forever. Even the laws which govern what appears to be transient are fixed and unchanging. The living horizon, the system in which the laws apply, changes, but the laws themselves, seen or unseen, do not change for as long as this existence continues.



SURAT AT-TARIQ

THE NIGHT-VISITOR

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

We can see five sections to this surah. The first part is all-encompassing and cosmic, referring both to the outer cosmos and the inner cosmos. It begins by swearing by the evidence of the outer heavens and the inner heavens, and then it specifically focuses upon the isolated human element, man, which constitutes the second section, and mentions how he has come about. It then goes on to the next life, which makes a third section. Then in the fourth part we are again reminded of the interconnectedness of the outer and the inner, the heavens and the earth. The fifth section speaks of the plot of Reality and the control of Allah over all His creation, describing how everything is molded into oneness, a harmonious unity throughout.

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ

1 By the heaven, and the night-visitor,

By the vastness of the heavens, and the specific part of the heavens that is visible! By the infinite greatness of the heavens and the one star that comes into them, clearly showing itself! By your inner heavens and the sudden awakening of light within you! By the vastness which is not fathomable until you see something that guides you! These are all ways of paraphrasing the first ayah. *Taraq* (طارق)

means "to knock (on a door), to come upon, reach," and "to come by night."

It also implies a night-traveller. Usually the doors of a house are open during the day, and it is only at night that the courtesy of the *sharī'ah* (outer law) dictates that everything be closed. So the night-traveller has to knock on the door to announce his arrival. The vastness like that of the heavens, and then the narrower specificity of the night-visitor implies unfathomability, and then something which is fathomable.

وَمَا آذُرِيكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ

2 And what will make you know what the night-visitor is?

What do we know about that knock? What do we know about that which comes by night? The night of ignorance can only be shattered by the *ṭāriq*, by the knock of knowledge. What we know about this *ṭāriq* comes suddenly from that infinite vastness that was not fathomable before, that was neither tangible nor measurable.

النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ

3 The star of piercing brightness!

The star of piercing brightness has a clarity and direction which makes its appearance an event. It pierces through what looks as if it cannot be pierced. Some take this as a reference to the appearance of laser beams. A laser beam is a spark that pierces through the thickest possible material without being changed itself, like a thread that goes through fabric and joins one side to the other side.

إِنْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ

4 No self exists without a guardian over it.

It is as though it were telling us that within every soul is a piercing star, a star that beams, a beacon that constantly emits light and that will penetrate through whatever shields we try to put on ourselves. It has an inner meaning in that it implies that every person has a personal guardian, a *ḥāfiẓ* (حَافِظ ; a keeper, guardian, custodian). There are guardian angels who keep record of whatever man does and whatever he intends to do, which is then returned to him at the end of time. His actions and intentions are recorded on the one and only record, which is himself. There is no escape.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ

5 So let man consider of what he is created —

If man thinks he is separate from all this, if he thinks that the question of heavens or stars, the inner and the outer, and everything in creation is something extraordinary, then he should look at what he is physically. He must come back to this reality and start from where he is, from the outer layer, the body. He will see therein how the whole creation came about. Such examination will light the torch of illumination so that he can pierce through the whole creational condition. But to pierce through this he must look first at what he is created from, physically and literally.

خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ

6 He is created from water gushing forth,

From the physical point of view, the most predominant element in man is water. *Dāfiq* (دَافِق) means “gushing, pouring forth, overflowing,” because existence cannot be discerned unless it pours

forth. There is no solid reality to it for it is based on fluidity. In references to the beginning of creation, we find that its foundation was based on fluidity, on water, and therefore man's creation is based on fluidity, his living is based on fluidity, his mind is based on fluidity – nothing is fixed. Everything about him is overflowing, his thought, his day-to-day existence, his worries and anxieties; they are all in dynamic flux. Man is seeking security which he translates into solidity, and that is his downfall. He thinks his security is in solidity, in walls and buildings, and in ownership, because he is seeking the one and only secure, firm base from which this apparent infirmity has come about. But such security is not possible for everything has its particular *sunnah*, or pattern.

يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ

7 Coming out from between the loins and the ribs.

This refers to the two opposites. The literal meaning of *ṣulb* (**صُلْب**) is “hard, stiff, rigid,” though it also means both “loins” and “back.” The word *tarā'ib* (**تَرَائِب**) means “breastbone, ribs,” and comes from the verb *tariba* (**تَرَب**) which means “to be dusty, covered with dust.” From it also comes *tārib* (**تَارِب**) “a contemporary, an equal, a match, a peer.” Man springs from the meeting of the two opposites. One of them is solid, and one of them is fluid.

إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ

8 Certainly, He is Able to return him (to life).

In the previous ayat we are told, “Look at you! From the vast, empty skies suddenly comes a star. From ignorance comes light. From the confusion of the heart comes the spark of knowledge in it. O man, you who are in constant, dynamic fluidity, you are made from water that has come out from between the middle of a man and a woman.”

Then Allah says, “Certainly, He is Able to return him,” meaning that what was created here in this life, Allah could just as easily create

in another form. Therefore, the quiet night can be disrupted by the night-traveller knocking on the door, and what was alive in this form can return to its pre-form state. This ayah leads us to topical deduction: for every thing in creation, its opposite exists, and by the same token there must be another creation. This creation is tarnished by that which protects it, being the idea of self or the ego. The next creation has to be the mirror-image of this one.

يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ

9 On the Day when secrets are exposed,

Balā (بلا) means “to put to the test, try, afflict.” *Balī* (بلى) means “worn, threadbare, decrepit, decomposed, rotten.” And *balā'* (بلاء) means “affliction, distress, torment.” The affliction of a secret is that it becomes common. *Surr* (سر), from the same root as *sarā'ir* (سرائر ; secrets), means “umbilical cord,” and *masarrah* (مسرة) means “joy, happiness, pleasure, glee.” It implies that the new-born child heralds his joyfulness of being independent of his mother, and on being dependent on Allah alone, although in reality he was always dependent only on Allah.

We will be afflicted to test whether we have real trust in Allah, and it will be a severe, absolute test. On that day, in that situation, what is unclear and unopened, a secret, will clearly be shown: that is the meaning of being tested. Being tested is not to see whether we will achieve a certain mark, but rather to show us *our* reality, our grade of purity, sincerity, and *tawhīd*, our degree of non-hypocrisy or hypocrisy. Now we do not know this because we may have fooled ourselves, but at that time we will see how much we were dependent on Allah, and how much we were dependent on other than Allah. The secrets that we are hiding now will be truthfully revealed then.

فَمَالَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ

10 He will have neither strength nor helper.

We are forced to come back to our own situation and start from where we are, recognizing our own weaknesses and hypocrisies, recognizing the duality from which we have come, and recognizing that the purpose for which we have come is to know the meaning of Allah, the Strong One, the Helper.

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجَمِ

11 By the heaven of the returning rain,

We must reflect upon the creation of heaven and earth, and the manner in which the rain comes repeatedly, according to the season. From one point of view, it could mean that the heavens will return back to their reality, that the heavens were not held together before, and that they will return to their original nothingness.

وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ

12 And the earth splitting apart (with plants),

The earth will also crack and disintegrate back to its original nothingness. The meaning of *ṣad'* (صدع) is "a split, or crack," and here refers to the earth being split by the growing plants.

We can also look at these two ayat (11 and 12) as symbolizing our inner heaven and our inner earth. The earth then means the breast and the heart within the breast, and the heaven refers to our knowledge that constantly comes back to us at different stages of opening.

There is nothing in heaven or on earth that is not doing *tasbīḥ* (تسبيح ; glorification of Allah), that is not in *dhikr* (ذكر ; remembrance). This is the *dhikr* of the heavens and earth from a literal, physical point of view, while from the point of view of man, remembrance returns repeatedly as rain to wash away our outer and inner pollution, and the earth, the heart, responds to that.

إِنَّ لِقَوْلٍ فَضْلًا

13 Certainly, it is a decisive word —

The word, the speech of Reality, to which we are connected, is what separates ignorance from knowledge and this world from the next. By extension, it distinguishes between those who have lived on the path of *tawhīd* in this life and those who have not. There is a clear, decisive line which cleanly discriminates, and this line is the Qur'an. Just as at the beginning of the surah, when the vast heavens look clear and empty, and suddenly the piercing light of the star appears, so is man born to be discriminating. The power of discrimination, of discernment between the true and the false, comes from the One and Only Powerful Lord Who creates and destroys all things *bi'l-ḥaqq* (**بالحق** ; in Truth).

وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ

14 And it is no joke.

Hazala (**هزل**) means “to be emaciated, thin,” and *hazila* (**هزل**) is “to joke, jest.” *Hazl* (**هزل**) is “a joke, amusement.” We must not mock because creation is very serious, and the ultimate joy is the recognition of its absolute seriousness.

We joke or mock at something which is negative because we do not understand it. We want to justify something that is *not* real and so we assume a cynical posture. Cynicism denotes a lack of energy and is one of the worst attributes we can have. We take refuge in a particular understanding or system, and when we are confronted with something which challenges it and which we cannot answer, we become cynical. It is an escape-mechanism and cynicism is the tunnel. *Nifāq* (**نفاق** ; hypocrisy, dissimulation) is related to *nafaq* (**نفق** ; tunnel, underground passageway). Thus it is a way out, as is joking; it is an escape. Either we relate to what confronts us and accept it, or we are cynics, escaping from any serious implications.

انَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا

15 Certainly, they plot a plot,

The message of this ayah is to the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, and to the believers, to those who uphold the truth and are carriers of the message. *Kayd* (كيد ; ruse, artifice, plot, trick) implies “scheming quietly,” whether for right or for wrong, justly or unjustly. This ayah therefore may mean either that man plots against himself through his ignorance, or that man plots against the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. Those who deny because of their ignorance will plot inadvertently, so it does not mean that they will be like thieves plotting a bank robbery. Rather, theirs will be an inner plot in that their hearts will plot against the truth.

وَإِنِّي كَادِئًا

16 And I too plot a plot.

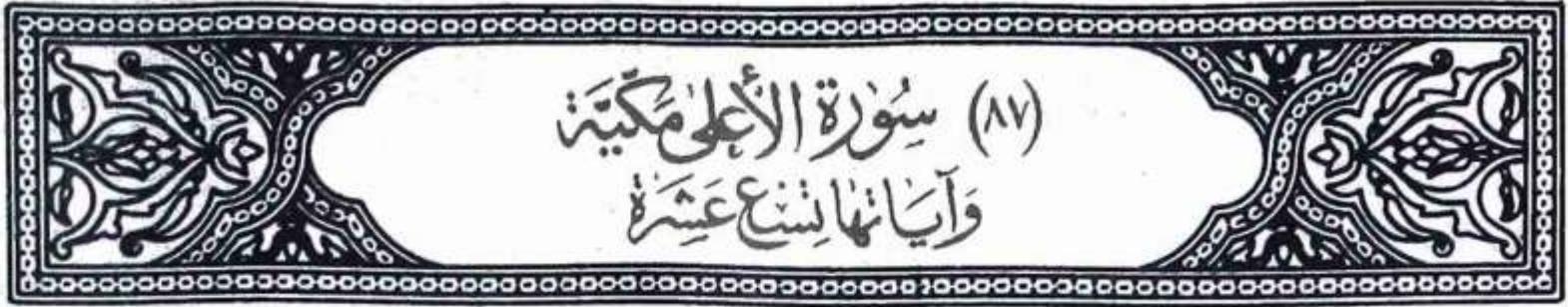
فَمَهْلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَهْلُهُمْ رُوَيْدًا

17 So grant the deniers of truth a respite; let them alone for a while.

But Allah says that He also plots. He is the best of plotters – His schemes will always prevail. He encompasses all, He is the Creator of all. Humans are only second-hand plotters, so His plot will always prevail. Ultimately, they prove their faith to Him by their death; it is by their physical death that they prove their loyalty to Him, for then they return to Him, whether they like it or not.

The only choice man has is to recognize that he is on this path. Everyone is in *islām*; everyone is in submission under the laws that govern existence, whether they like it or not. Everyone is a Muslim

whether he chooses to be or not, whether he has announced the *shahādah* (assertion of faith), or not, whether he bows and prostrates or not. Everyone is in submission to the laws which govern existence. The difference lies in the fact that some people have chosen to recognize these laws, unifying their wills and their intentions with Allah's will.



SURAT AL-A'LA

THE MOST HIGH

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى

1 Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High,

Sabbaha (سَبَّحَ) is "to praise or glorify" God. It is related to *sabaha* (سَبَّحَ), which means "to swim, to flow with, to float." Submission is the state of the Muslim: he surrenders, he submits. The more he submits, the more he resonates with harmonious energies. The ayah refers to the higher Name of the Lord, implying pure essence. We are being told to devote ourselves to the knowledge of the higher essence of our Lord and Sustainer, of that Entity which has created us. Everything in existence participates in that free-flowing glorification and echoes His essence. Everything has come from the Essence, and thus echoes the One and Only Reality.

The word *Rabb* (رَبَّ ; Lord) appears here and indicates an attribute of Allah, that of *rubūbiyah* (رَبُوبِيَّة ; Lordship, divinity). This is a permanent reality: it is the Book. Everyone is in *tasbiḥ* (تَسْبِيح ; glorification), everyone is glorifying Him, because there is only love and the ultimate state of love is that of glorification. It is a state of complete and utter connectedness. This pri-

mordial creational state is in the Book, the earliest Book from which all creation has come, from the scrolls of Ibrahim and Musa.

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ

2 Who creates, then makes complete,

Man begins the glorification of his Lord by observing with awe the things immediately surrounding him. He begins ultimate glorification, he dives into the final glory of *jalāl* (جلال ; majesty) and *jamāl* (جمال ; beauty), by looking at the glory surrounding him to the extent that his individual make-up and his cultural environment enables him to understand.

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ

3 And Who makes (all that exists) according to measure, then guides (them to their goal).

Everything exists according to a measure and a balance. The knowledge of that measure is the beginning of *hidāyah* (هداية ; guidance). When we look around us at physical creation, we see that it is in an intricate balance, that *tawhīd* holds it together, that everything is interconnected and lives by, feeds on and gives into everything else. There is room for everyone. That is why we say, do not fear for your provision, nor your children's. There is room for everyone in this creation.

Hidāyah (guidance), comes by knowledge of the *qadar* (قدر ; the divine decree). If we have knowledge of the decree, then we have knowledge of the laws that govern creation. We have been guided into that knowledge by our essence, from the beginning, before creation.

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَىٰ

4 Who brings forth the herbage,

فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَىٰ

5 Then turns it to russet stubble.

Mar'ā (مرعى) means "pasture." Even the earth's adornments do *tasbīḥ* (glorification), and that is why the pasturage grows in seasonal cycles. The next season in the cycle makes the herbage turn to dry stubble. It is transformed from green, living pasture to the dusty, dried-up stalks of death, but at every phase the cycle is based upon *tasbīḥ*.

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَىٰ

6 We will make you recite so that you will not forget.

The knowledge of Reality is a high resting-place and it does not admit the dominance of any low consciousness. The knowledge of the Real is eternal because the Real is forever. Once we know, we will not forget.

As one moves along, experiencing inner openings, one may occasionally have fears. When the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, is addressed, all those who follow him are addressed as well. We are reassured that there is no forgetfulness. Forgetfulness comes when there is *ghaflah*, (غفلة ; heedlessness, forgetfulness), and *ghaflah* comes when there is no *khashyah* (خشية ; fear). The most important thing is remembrance, that is, of what is already here to be remembered. How can we possibly be heedless or forgetful of what is already here? If there is any forgetfulness, it is only apparent and not real. Ultimately, we will recall what is useful and necessary. The knowledge is already here and will in its own time, in the right way, in the right place, be revealed.

إِنَّمَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْغُيُوبَ وَمَا يَخْفَىٰ

- 7 Except what Allah wills — certainly, He knows what is manifest, and what is hidden.

What appears to be forgotten is the will of Allah, but how can there be forgetfulness of the will of Allah? There is only Allah, so forgetfulness is non-awareness. Allah knows all the manifestations, what appears and what is hidden, what is visible as knowledge, and what is invisible as knowledge.

وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ

- 8 And We will ease your way to a state of ease.

We will put man on the path of ease. This is the *hudā* (هدى ; guidance). The path of ease is the path of non-resistance, the path of submission, and on it man will find ease of knowledge. It is man's fault alone if he puts himself into a state of loss.

فَذَكِّرْهُم بِذِكْرِهِمْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَىٰ

- 9 So remind, for certainly the reminder is of benefit.

In the same way that the *Rabb* (Lord) acts throughout His creation, our pasture is among men who want to know — that is our grazing ground. This ayah says, "Remind them, because the reminder will be of use or benefit to them." The one who reminds them also wants to see the outcome. He wants to have outer reinforcement because it is man's nature to want to see his intention reflected in outer action.

He wants to see that faith has results, that people are coming into the fold, that there are more believers, and that they are acting upon their belief and living it totally.

Occasionally, the prophets appear, for the sake of humanity, as though they are in doubt and are hesitant. This is because they do not exist in the abstract. The prophets have come for our sake in order to relate to us, and we can all relate to human frailty. Therefore, occasionally these reassurances are given.

سَيَذَكِّرُنَا خَشْيَتَهُ

10 He who has fear will heed.

He who has *khashyah*, fear of transgressing and thus increasing the fire in which he is burning, is the one who will remember.

وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى

11 And the most unfortunate one will avoid it —

The *ashqā* (اشقى ; those who are troubled, unfortunate, shattered, in misery and anguish) will be unable to heed it and remember, and so will be made to suffer even more.

الَّذِي يَصِلُ النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى

12 The one who will be flung to the great Fire.

This means that by his ignorance and heedlessness he is now feeding the small fire. If Allah mentions “the great Fire,” then the small fire must exist also, and those who are blocked up inside themselves are in it. The great Fire is thus called in the sense that it has no end; it is unfathomable and eternal. Its nature is to be in permanent agitation. So this ayah means that he who is not in *khashyah* now, who is not in *tasbīh* and is not moving on the path of *hidāyah*, is creating, contributing, and investing in the great Fire.

ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَىٰ ط

13 Then he will neither die in it, nor live.

This means that neither life nor death is ever fixed in the Fire. It is a nebulous in-between dimension, and man wants certainty and clarity. That is why for everything we do existentially, according to the *sharī'ah*, there must be a written record. We have to unify the outer and the inner. In the case of marriage, there should be a voice, a verbal assertion and manifestation of the intention. A man may know that the woman wants to marry him, and she may know that he wants to marry her, but she should say, "Yes," so that it is sealed outwardly, and the inner and outer are unified. In order to establish Madinah, to establish a community, one must record contracts, loans, etc., in writing, so that there is no doubt in the beginning when the transaction is made, nor later when the parties are called upon to remember the terms of the transaction. There is no escape from *ḥaqīqah* (truth), so there must be no escape from *sharī'ah*. The state of that final Fire is one in which there is no certainty.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ

14 He is successful who grows in purity—

He who has come to know, he who has outwardly paid his *zakāh* (**زكاة** ; tax of two and one-half percent on all personal wealth and valued property) regularly and thus grown in purity, will be the victorious one, and will reap the good harvest he has diligently cultivated by his purity. He who has moved along the path of vastness and constant increase is he who has planted the right thing at the right time. *Falāḥ* (**فلاح** ; success) speaks of the one who turns the earth, who plows it and cultivates it. (*Fallāḥ*, **فلاح** ; from the same root, means "farmer.") If he did not do this, nothing would come from the earth. He has to break it up and work it. He who has purified his innermost being is the one who has won. He is the one who is on the path of guidance.

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

- 15 And remembers the Name of his Lord, and prays.

The Name is an indication. He remembered the Name, the signpost from within, that gives him the discrimination to see clearly where he will enter further into a state of loss, where he will be more attached, more connected, more fearful, more insecure. By the remembrance of the Name of his Lord, he avoids what brings him loss. He has thereby found a direction. By knowing what is not correct, he is able to go towards that which is.

بَلْ تُوْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا

- 16 But no! You prefer the life of this world!

We as human beings with ever needful bodies want to have security in this world, so we prefer this life to the one that is to come. This life is the easy life, the shortcut. Easy here, however, means difficult in the long run.

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

- 17 Although the Next World is better and most lasting.

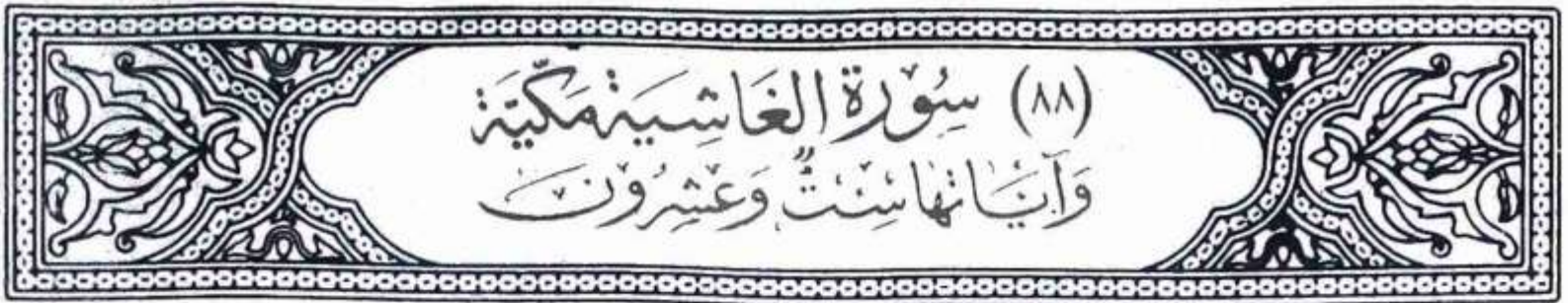
إِنَّ هَذَا فِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى

- 18 Certainly, this is in the earlier scrolls —

صُفِّ اِبْرَاهِيْمَ وَمُوسَى

19 The scrolls of Ibrahim and Musa.

This knowledge, this information, this book which we read, as a result of the glorification, as a result of placing ourselves in the one and only stream and of being cognizant of this stream, is an ancient knowledge which was revealed by the earlier prophets.



SURAT AL-GHASHIYAH

THE OVERWHELMING EVENT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This surah is divided into two sections: the first is about the *Yawm al-qiyāmah* (**يوم القيامة** ; the Day of Rising), the Next World, the Fire and the Garden; the second is a deep and all-encompassing message of *tawhīd* given to us so that we may reflect upon what is nearest to us in the creation in order to see its perfection and oneness.

هَلْ آتَيْكَ حَدِيثُ الْغَاشِيَةِ ط

1 Has there not come to you the news of the overwhelming event?

Hadīth (**حديث**), which comes from the root *ḥadatha* (**حَدَثَ** ; to happen, to occur), indicates an event. *Ḥadatha* also means “to relate, to inform.” An event conveys knowledge. A *hadīth* is the narration of an event.

Ghāshiyah (**غاشية**) comes from *ghashiya* (**غشى** ; to cover, as with a skin or sheet, overwhelm, be dark). The *Yawm al-qiyāmah* is also called *al-ghāshiyah* because it covers everything under its domain. Also, on that Day, everything in creation will be jolted and shaken and humanity will faint, will swoon. Indeed, in Arabic the

word for “fainting” is *ghushiya ‘alayhi* (غُشِيَ عَلَيْهِ), which is the passive of the same verb. *Ghashiya bi’l-‘asah* (غُشِيَ بِالْعَصَا) means “he beat with a stick.” It implies that when a person is hit he is totally overcome because the pain that arises overcomes all his other sensations. In a similar way, the rise of the Day of Resurrection and the new consciousness which accompanies that state will cover and overcome all other states.

The ayah then is asking us if we have received the news of that all-encompassing, all-covering event that overwhelms and afflicts everything under its domain? When that *ghāshiyah* occurs, all that we know as existence will be over.

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ

2 Faces on that Day will be downcast,

The word faces here refers to the faces of those who had not been prepared for the event. *Khāshi‘ah* (خَاشِعَةٌ) means “downcast, humbled, low,” referring to the faces of those who have not been prepared, whose actions and intentions were not unified.

The face is the first point of impact and contact between us and the outer world, since it contains the organs of hearing and seeing and because its outer aspect is the reflection of the inner being. Ultimately, the outer surface, the skin, will show and betray what is contained underneath. We have seen people come among the lovers of Allah with their faces completely gloomy, but after a while in that illuminated company, their faces change and become joyful, showing an outer symptom of their innermost being. Inwardly they become more relaxed, more at home. They find that what has been echoing in their hearts about reality *is* real; they are no longer in isolation and they receive confirmation. Therefore, they relax and their faces show it. We say that light comes from their faces, just as it says in the Qur’an. “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth” (24:35). The Light of Allah is always there, and the light coming from a person’s face means that his outer appearance is reflecting the light within.

عَامِلَةٌ نَاصِبَةٌ

3 Toiling, worn out,

'*Āmilah* (**عاملة**) means "toiling, laboring, working." The word "toiling" here specifically means toiling incessantly and in perpetual turmoil.

Nāṣibah (**ناصبية**) comes from the root *naṣaba* (**نصب**), which means "to place, to fix, to erect." It also means "to trouble, to wear out, to exhaust." *Nāṣibah* is used here because on that Day those who are destined for the Fire by their past actions will try to vindicate their transgressions but to no avail, due to the fact that they will no longer be in the zone of action. *Nuṣb* (**نُصب**), from the same root, is "an idol." Idolworship is exhausting because it does not lead to satisfaction. *Naṣṣāb* (**نصاب**) means "a fraud, one who deceives, one who deflects from the Truth," just as an idol is a deception from Reality. Those who are at a loss on the *Yawm al-qiyāmah* will be in turmoil and in agitation, but it will do them no good.

تَصْلِي نَارًا حَامِيَةً

4 Entering into a hot fire,

They will be afflicted, they will be roasted (*ṣalā*, "to roast, broil, burn") in constant turmoil and agitation. Descriptions of the Fire are *āmthāl* (analogies, examples, metaphors) for man, who can only perceive the Fire in images of the physical world. These descriptions are of a realm of consciousness which is beyond our everyday experience, but they use our commonplace language to describe it. How could one describe to a person sitting in a cave facing the inner wall what the world outside is like? We are in a cave, hearing descriptions of another state of existence, another state of consciousness, which is, at best, only a shadow of that reality.

تُسْقَى مِنْ عَيْنِ آيَةٍ

5 Made to drink from a boiling spring.

We must again imagine the culture of the desert Arabs and their constant lack of water. For hundreds and hundreds of miles there may have been only one little oasis, one spring. Nourishment was scarce for them; the sources of nourishment were the springs and the camels.

A boiling drink does not quench one's thirst and only increases one's agitation. In every way man is a seeker of tranquility, nourishment and stability, but on that Day some men will be denied all these things.

لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيحٍ

6 They will have no food but thorns,

Darī' (ضريع ; thorny plant) is derived from the root *dara'a* (ضرع), which means "to be humble, submissive, humiliated, abased." *Darī'* is also the name of a plant that grows in Hell, said to be more bitter than the aloe. When the blessed Prophet was asked, "What is the *darī'*?" he answered, "It is a thorny plant that tastes most bitter, smells dreadful, and that has no value." Some of the plants in the desert which the camels always avoid are referred to as utterly inedible because they are so thorny that even the camel will not eat it. *Darī'* causes us turmoil and difficulty with no benefit, and does not bring about germination and growth. This is the meaning of agitation; it is not fit for the soil of the *ākhirah* (the Next Life) because it has not passed the test of loyalty to the Creator, the purpose for which man was created in this life.

لَا يُسَمِّنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ

7 Which will neither fatten nor avail against hunger.

He who is at a loss in this life has exhausted his capital without replenishing it. Because he made no real investment in this life, he will be in the agitated fire in the next life. The *kāfir* arrives on that Day without resources because he has not spent his time in the pursuit of the knowledge of Allah. He squandered all that he had, and in the next life he will experience what he brought upon himself in this life.

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاعِمَةٌ

8 (Other) faces on that Day will be happy,

Nā'imah (ناعمة) comes from the root, *nā'ima* (نعم), which means, "to enjoy the comforts and conveniences of life, to be joyful," and it denotes that which is easy and relaxed. These peoples' faces will reflect ease because they will have no concerns.

لَسَعِيهَا رَاضِيَةٌ

9 Well-pleased because of their striving,

They will return to their Lord well-pleased and content. They had the certainty that the next life truly exists, and when they return, they will return contented due to their efforts and toil in this world. They will show their contentment, their *riḍā'* (رضاء).

فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ

10 In a lofty Garden.

Āliyah (عالية) is derived from the root *'alā* (على), which means "to be high, elevated," or "to be higher or taller." The state of the Garden is described in the Qur'an as having different

stages of elevation, just as the Fire is described as having its different degrees.

Let us take as an example a decent man, a man of Allah, who always lived correctly within the *sharī'ah*, who did his best in this life, yet who died with unfulfilled desires. They were legitimate desires, acceptable from the point of view of the *sharī'ah*, but nevertheless, he died in a state of unfulfillment. How is he going to reach that state of purification? What Reality does is to create a stage of the Garden that could satisfy and neutralize his unfulfilled desires so that he is able to move beyond the state he is in. In the next consciousness, in the next life, his desires will be achieved, and he will move on to desirelessness, to that absolute state, the *jannatin 'āliyah* ("the lofty Garden"), that state beyond desires. "*Qalb salīm*" (**قلب سليم** ; a heart which contains nothing but love of Allah), said Imam as-Sadiq, *'alayhi-s-salām*, "is on the way to that state of desirelessness."

لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لِأَغْيَةٍ ط

11 You will not hear in it vain talk.

Lāghiyah (**لاغية**) is derived from the root *laghā* (**لغى**), which means "to speak, to be null, to talk nonsense." *Alghā shay'an* (**الغى شيئا**) means "to nullify or cancel something." Desires can be cancelled. If someone wants something which is given to him, then that desire is cancelled by its fulfillment and new desires arise, usually taking hold ever more firmly until the nature of desires and the *nafs* is understood.

A lofty Garden implies a state of permanency, and in it no vain talk is heard. In that Garden there is nothing upon which you cannot depend; desires are not dependable because they always change with time. So in that loftiest of Gardens, there are no desires, for they have all been neutralized.

Laghw (**لغو**), from *laghā*, means "nonsense," because there is only one sense. So if we become aware of our nonsense, then we recognize our sense. *Lughah* (**لغة**) means "language," and one of its root meanings is "to cancel, to nullify nonsense." Ultimately, there is nothing to be said. If there is anything to be said, it is *lā ilāha illa'llāh, Muhammadun rasūlu'llāh*, (There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah).

فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ

12 In it is a gushing spring.

In that higher heaven, in that higher state, there is a gushing spring, implying that it is near the source, from whence the springs of knowledge flow downwards.

فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ

13 In it are raised couches,

وَكَأَنَّ مَوْضُوعَةٌ

14 And goblets ready placed,

There is every replenishment available, and every desire is fulfilled. All the outer needs have been cared for, all the yearnings of the outer consciousness, any desires we may have – the cup of satisfaction has filled us up. We are fulfilled, in absolute contentment, and in this state nothing arises.

وَنَمَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ

15 And cushions set in a row,

Maṣfūfah (مصفوفة) comes from the root *ṣaffa* (صف ; to set, arrange in a row or rank). Here it implies orderliness; everything exists according to a rhythm and a sequence.

وَزَرَابِي مَبْثُوثَةٌ

16 And carpets spread out.

Mabthūthah (مَبْثُوثَةٌ) comes from the root *baththa* (بَثَّ), meaning “to disperse, scatter, spread out.” Rich rugs and carpets are scattered all around in a garden patch within which are clusters of people and groups in different stages and states, in different degrees of sublime tranquility and comfort.

The preceding ayats are a description of the Day of Rising and the *ḥisāb* (حِسَابٌ ; the Final Reckoning). They describe what happens to those people who are at a loss and to those people who have gained, the people who are *muqarrabūn* (مَقْرَبُونَ ; close to Allah), and the people who are fodder for the Fire.

The second section of this surah is a message to the desert people of Quraysh, the people of the blessed Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. The message is intended to sharpen their reflective capacity in order to bring them to knowledge of the Glorious Creator by their meditation upon the ayats and signs created by the Lord.

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ

17 Will they not then consider the camels, how they are created?

This message will be clearly understood by those who look at the creation and reflect upon it. The message was given to those people whose lifeline, whose existence, was dependent on the camel. *Ibil* (إِبِلٌ) means “camels,” and is a collective noun which does not appear in the singular. The entire culture of that time revolved around the camel, and in fact, many of the words in the Arabic language, especially the common language of the day, were associated with the life and habits of the camel.

For example, one of the meanings of *faqīh* (فَاقِيهِ ; a man expert in the knowledge of the *sharī‘ah*), which comes from the root *faqīha* (فَاقِهٌ ; to understand, comprehend), was he who had ex-

pertise and knowledge of the camel. The *faqīh* would look at a she-camel and could judge how far along she was in her pregnancy, seeing what others could not of her inward state, and connecting it with the outer. The *faqīh* was the consultant hired before a camel was bought. Nowadays, the *faqīh* is the man who translates the inner into the outer, the man of the *sharī'ah* who tells others how to behave correctly.

'Aql (عقل) is another example of a word that reflects the influence of the camel on the Arabic language. The verbal root 'aqala (عَقَلَ) means "to confine, detain, to hobble the feet of the camel with 'iqāl." 'Iqāl (عَقَال) is the cord that is used to secure the feet of a camel so that it cannot run away and will remain subdued. Nowadays the 'iqāl is used to hold the *kufiyyah* (headscarf worn by Arabs) in place. 'Aqala not only means "to confine" but also "to be reasonable, intelligent, to have the faculty of discrimination." By containing oneself, one's reason is able to function better. This ayah is asking us to reflect on this amazing, unifying animal upon whom life depends in the desert, to look at its adaptability, at its *tasbīh*, to see how it glorifies its Creator and interacts with its environment perfectly, how it stores water, how it goes for weeks without water, to see its patience, the adaptation of its foot to desert journeying, and to see how it carries its hump high up where it stores its energy-supply. Every aspect of the camel is useful and is in a state of worship.

Do they not look at that which is closest to them, this magnificent creature, upon whom their livelihood, their whole life, is completely dependent? Do they not see how it has been created, how perfectly it is in *tawhīd*, how it is connected in every way with its environment? If we do not reflect upon the closest thing to us and see it as part of the total perfection of the universe, then how can we talk about perfection in the abstract?

وَالِى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ هُفَفٌ

18 And the heaven, how it is raised up?

Do they not look upon the heavens and see the oneness of heaven and earth within the separation between them? Do they not look at the inner heavens, do they not see that man's inwardness constantly yearns for the sublime, for the higher values, for the better perfume,

the superior camels, the better life? Do they not see how everything is veering towards the High, the Ever-Exalted?

وَالِى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ

19 And the mountains, how they are firmly fixed?

Do they not see how the mountains have been anchored, how they have been set into the earth? Do they not look at their own hearts? The heart of the man of Allah who is certain of knowledge is his mountain; his heart is unshakable, immovable. Then, do they not look at the mountains, how they are firmly fixed, and the sky, how subtle it is? Do they not look at heaven and earth, at their diversity and differences, and at the infinite, subtle balance between them as well?

وَالِى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ

20 And the earth, how it is spread out?

Suṭiḥat (**سطحت**) is from the root *saṭaḥa* (**سطح**), which means, "to spread out, unroll, to make smooth." Do they not see how the earth has been made easy and available to them? Do they not wonder? Wondering and trying to make sense out of a thing is the first step towards knowledge of it. Early man started wondering about causal relationships; he saw the leaves rattling and the rain that followed, and he thought the rattling of the leaves brought the rain. Then he discovered that it was the other way around. The reason scientists today are finding refuge in their science is because they are seeing a small part of this interconnectedness. Scientists know that the moment the observer starts observing a situation he is interfering with what he is observing. There is no longer a so-called "objectivity" in which an observer "objectively" observes a thing that exists "outside" and separate from himself. There is already a discernable, measurable interference as soon as an observer "observes," because in reality there is no separation.

Thus we start with what is nearest, and we look into its magnificent, ecological, inexplicable balance. It is balanced with something outside it, with its environment, the skies, the earth. If there is that potentiality in man to wonder, to reflect, then all the aspects of the camel are contained within him. The entire mechanism that keeps the camel going is within us, or else we would not be able to understand it. Its patience, its ability to bear heavy weights, its ability to carry on through all kinds of difficulties, its resilience — the secret of the camel is in every heart.

We can only truly be concerned about those who reflect on the creation, otherwise, how could there be remembrance of Allah? This is the message to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, and therefore to us as well.

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ

21 Therefore, remind, for truly you are a reminder.

Remind! Bring the memory back! *Dhakkir* (ذَكَرَ) comes from the root *dhakara* (ذَكَرَ), meaning “to remember, to keep in mind, to remind.” Remind them that they have come from Allah. Remind them where they were before. They were hidden by Allah in the unseen. Now each one is in the seen world, but he will revert to the unseen, and at that time he will see.

To remind is to call attention to what one already knows. Their knowledge is already there, in their *fiṭrah* (innate nature), in their hearts. The blessed Prophet is only a reminder, he is only here to be a reflector, an echoer of each person’s truth.

لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ

22 You are not a watcher over them.

The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, has no power over anyone. He cannot implant *īmān* (faith, trust, belief) into some-

one's heart. Even the prophet Lut had a wife for whom he could do nothing. We will find, we who have parents, friends, and wives, that we cannot do anything for them. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, was not here to produce results. He was a reminder, a reflector of the truth that existed within them.

الْأَمَنُ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ

23 But whoever turns back and disbelieves —

What about he who turns away? Lut said, “I reminded them at night, I reminded them during the day, I reminded them secretly, I reminded them publicly, but to no avail.” Lut reflected every possible state and situation, he tried to give every possible language-signal, and it did not work. Then he said, “It does not matter; the man who has taken faith as his path is safe, and his safety is according to the depth of his faith, and that is according to his certainty. As to the rest, they are roaming about in loss.”

فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ

24 Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment.

He who turns away and denies the truth is already in affliction and agony, in *'adhāb*, and he will eventually reach the *'adhāb al-akbar*, the greatest punishment.

إِنَّا إِلَهُنَا يَا بَهُمْ

25 Certainly, to Us is their return.

The ultimate resting place is with their Lord and they will return.

ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ

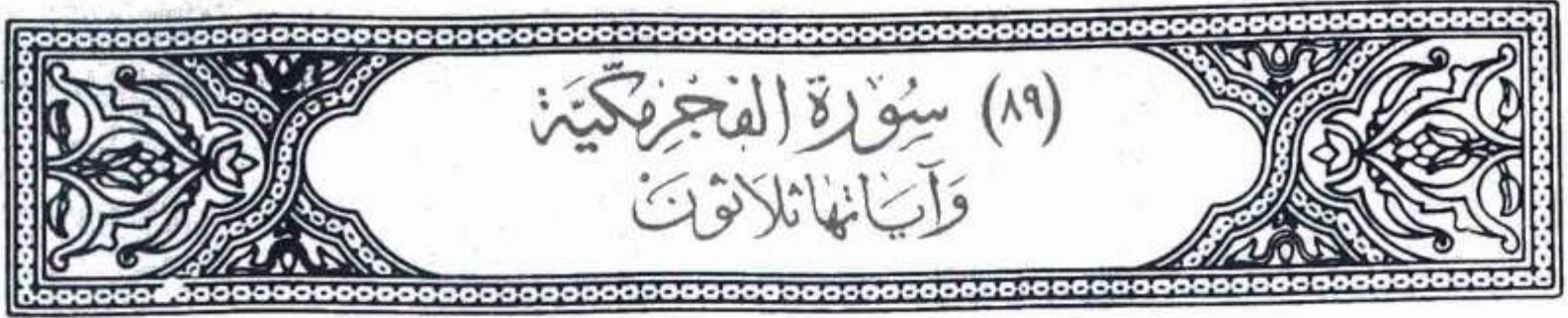
26 Then certainly, upon Us is the taking of their account.

They do not want to be accounted for in this life. They do not want to see their balance sheet now, so they will live the results of their balance sheet in the next life. Their account there will be according to what they have accumulated here.

So the second part of the second section of this surah describes the path, the path of inner recognition, the path of direct *yaqīn*, the path of *'ilm al-yaqīn* (علم اليقين ; the knowledge of certainty). But how do we reach *'ilm al-yaqīn*? An example of *'ilm al-yaqīn* is having the information that there is a fire in the forest. The next stage is *'ayn al-yaqīn* (عين اليقين ; the eye of certainty), which is actually seeing the fire in the forest with our own eyes. The final state is *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (حق اليقين ; the reality, or truth of certainty), which is that of burning in the fire, of becoming one with it.

In this surah there is a description of this path's beginning. When we look at what is closest to us we find that in everything there is an ayah, a communication, a sign. We can take what is most important to us as being an ayah, whether it is our trouble, our turmoil, or our joy. We must start with what is near to us and wonder about it, contemplate, reflect upon it.

After we have seen what is closest to us, then we should look at what is a little further away — the sky, the heavens — and then look at what is beyond them to the inner heavens as well. We should then look at the mountains, at what holds them fast, at what is firm and then back to the earth. Can we not remember that we have come from that Reality? We have no control over anything. The highest state that can be reached on the path, which is the beginning of awakening, is *shahādah* (شهادة ; “witnessing or testifying” that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger). The *shahādah* cannot come unless we are reflective, and then we will know that there is a *ḥisāb* (reckoning), that there is also a return, and ultimately, that we are each our own record.



SURAT AL-FAJR

THE DAYBREAK

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

وَالْفَجْرِ

1 By the daybreak,

Fajr (فجر) means “daybreak, dawn,” and connotes a beginning. Reality is bursting upon us like the opening of the day, the beginning of light, the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of physical wakefulness.

وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ

2 And the ten nights,

Traditionally, these nights are considered to be of the first ten days of *Dhū'l-hijjah* (ذُو الْحِجَّةِ ; the sacred month of Hajj). The ninth day is when the pilgrims stay at 'Arafāt (عرفات) from noon until sunset, standing in anticipation, waiting for the knowledge that already exists both inside and outside them. The mention of

nights rather than days is similar to that of Allah's appointing forty nights for the prophet Musa, 'alayhi-s-salām (Qur'an, 2:51). It may imply the great benefits derived from prayers, reflection and calling upon Allah at night, when all the outer activities of life are at a low ebb and there is, therefore, greater possibility for inner mobility and opening. Also, every night has its day, and man's journey which begins in darkness and ignorance will hopefully end with the clear perception of knowledge.

وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ

3 And the even and the odd,

Shaf' (شفع ; even number) is from *shafa'a* (شَفَعَ), which means "to double, to attach, to mediate, intercede and intervene." The ordinary translation of *shafā'ah* (شفاعَة ; from *shafa'a*) is "intercession," but what it actually indicates is the presence of another person who has greater power or knowledge, and thereby brings comfort, guidance or success to another. The implication is that there are two people involved. If *shafā'a* is applied to a female camel or ewe it means that by giving birth the animal has been made part of a couple. All things that can be observed, all creational experiences, hinge on two; even though in reality there is oneness behind them. There is only one reality, yet all its aspects come in twos – day and night, knowledge and ignorance, *sharī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah*, obedience and disobedience, the *rūḥ* (روح ; soul) and the *nafs* (نفس ; self), and so on. The night prayers begin with several pairs of cycles and end with a specially designated prayer which consists of one *rak'ah*, the *witr* (وتر ; odd number). Duality finally merges into one in the *witr* prayer.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسِرُّ

4 And the night when it departs.

Sāra (سار) means "to start, march, journey, go away, depart." *Sayr* (سير) means "journey, motion, procession." From it

comes the word *sīrah* (**سيرة**), which means “conduct,” referring mainly to the conduct and behavior of the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. All creation is in constant motion as everything moves and changes. Night and day are in motion. When at the end of the journey in this life there is an awakening and the darkness of night departs, then our ignorance will depart as well, and we will eventually awaken to reality.

هَلْ فِي ذَٰلِكَ قَسَمٍ لِّذِي حِجْرٍ

5 Is there not in these an oath for those who have understanding?

Hijr (**حجر**), in this context, means ‘*aql* (**عقل** ; understanding, reason). The ayah is saying, “Is this not enough evidence, are there not enough signs in all these phenomena for people who have intellect?”

Having told us that at the end of ignorance there will be knowledge, that at the end of loss there is bound to be gain, that at the end of the night there will be day, that at the end of sleep there is bound to be consciousness, and that the nature of the creation is always in constant movement from one opposite to another, a movement towards wakefulness and therefore certainty – having told us all this in abstract terms, Allah then gives us specific historical evidence.

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ

6 Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with ‘Ad,

إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ

7 (The people of) Iram with its lofty columns,

الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ

8 The like of which were not created in the (other) lands.

The people of 'Ad were a very powerful tribe. Their cities, their dwellings and their strength were based on what appeared to be very strong foundations or strong pillars, but it is known what befell them though they were unique, powerful and arrogant.

وَتَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخِرَ بِالْوَادِ

9 And Thamud, who carved out rocks in the valley,

The tribe of Thamud was famous for their buildings made from marble and rocks, and for their houses, which were supposed to be very safe and indestructable. Some are still in existence; they are high-quality stone carvings in the mountains, which appear to be very secure. The people, however, disappeared mysteriously, leaving no trace but their dwellings.

وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ

10 And Pharaoh, Lord of the stakes

There are many different interpretations for the term *awtād* (اوتاد), which is the plural of *watad* (وتد). It means "stake or tent-peg." A man's wealth was measured in some ancient cultures by the number of pegs he had in his tents; the bigger a man's tent, the more powerful he was. Therefore these people had great strength and power as evidenced by their enormous tents and the number of their tent-pegs. But these people also used to torture people with pegs; it is related that Fir'awn (Pharaoh) tortured his wife to death by tying her down to pegs.

الَّذِينَ طَفَّوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ

11 Who went beyond the bounds in the cities

فَاكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ

12 And made great corruption in them?

One characteristic common to the people of destruction is their transgression, corruption and decadence. They corrupt the spiritual path and they distract others from the purpose of existence, which is knowledge.

فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ

13 So your Lord poured down a portion of punishment upon them.

Punishment does not occur in a haphazard way. It is the action of man himself that brings about his doom. The trouble is with the *mutrafūn* (مترفون), as the Qur'an clearly states elsewhere, as in *sūrat al-Wāqī'ah* (56:45). The *mutrafūn* are people living in excessive luxury, surrounded by opulence and unnecessary material objects. These people are protected from life artificially and are cushioned too softly, and as a result, do not live in awareness. They are in a state of separation, and do not connect life with death — the beginning with its end. They are not aware that at any minute they may die. People living in this artificially protected way are naturally corrupt. When there is decadence and corruption, nature will automatically bring about renewal and regeneration. A society therefore falls into decay by its own transgression. Everything has the seed of decay within it, and if we nourish that seed, decay will spread and take over.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ بِالْمُرْصَادِ

14 Certainly, your Lord is watching.

Bi'l-mirṣād (بالمرصاد) comes from *raṣada* (رصد), which means “to keep one’s eyes on, to lie in wait, to observe.” This ayah is saying, “Your Lord, Whose job it is to bring what is under His domain up to its full potential, will catch the nations that have transgressed.”

After this succession of ayats concerning events in history, Allah now introduces the case of man in the present. First we are shown the whole of creation in its cosmic totality, then we are given historical examples of the fate of transgressors, and finally we come to man.

فَإِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَ
نَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّيَ أَكْرَمَنِ

15 So, as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and lets him lead an easy life, he says: My Lord honors me.

وَإِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ
فَيَقُولُ رَبِّيَ أَهَانَنِ

16 And when He tries him, then straitens his means of subsistence for him, he says: My Lord disgraces me.

Ibtalā (ابتلا), from *balā* (بلا), means “to try, to put to the test, to afflict.” The purpose of man’s existence is to be

subjected to *balwā* (بلوى ; affliction, trial) in order to be refined and polished properly so that he is in true *islām*, submission, true self-abandonment and freedom, in the pure slavehood of his freedom and the freedom of pure slavehood. The life of this world is nothing other than *balwā*. If a man has wealth, it is trouble for him to keep it, to maintain it, and, if he is truly in *islām*, to spend it wisely, knowing that wrong use will be counted against him. If a man does not have wealth, he suffers the affliction of its lack, the fear of being unable to provide for himself and others, and so on. So everyone experiences insecurity, both the wealthiest and the poorest.

Material goods are important; man cannot function without the basic essentials. If a person is not fed and has no roof over his head, it is difficult for him to dive into the inner meaning of existence. But man's mind never stops at one level of satisfaction — it desires more and more.

When man has the affliction of outer ease, he sits back and says, "My Lord has been kind and generous to me." On the other hand, if his provision is restricted, it tests his patience, his resilience, and his ability not to be anxious. Man imagines that the straitened circumstances are meant only to bring him low and to degrade him.

There are several terms in Arabic which are translated as "generosity," though each differs subtly in shading. *Karuma* (كرم) means "to give whatever is being asked." *Sakhā* (سخا) means "to give what is needed and necessary," and *jāda* (جاد) means "to give without being asked." The meanings of these terms are attributes of the Creator. *Īthār* (إيثار) is "giving others what one needs oneself." This is a very high act of selflessness. Only man can perform it, for Allah has no needs whatsoever.

كَلَّا بَلْ لَاتُكْرَمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ

17 Nay! But you do not honor the orphan,

Whether man experiences wealth or poverty, he is not grateful and he does not see the meaning and learn the lesson behind his condition. He is not generous with the orphan. *Karuma* (كرم) means "to be generous," and in the context of the orphan, it means "to give him due consideration and deserved compassion." *Yatīm* (يتيم) means "orphan, someone without a parent, someone who needs sup-

port and protection, someone who has no visible guardian.” Our first father, Adam, ‘*alayhi-s-salām*, was *yatīm*. Our Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, the master of all, was *yatīm*, and if we recognize and live the meaning of the helpless *yatīm*, then we are following in the timeless tradition of not being dependent on a parent, but rather, on Allah.

وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ

18 Nor do you urge one another to feed the needy,

The root of *miskīn* (مسكين) is *sakana* (سكن), which means “to dwell.” *Sukūn* means “silence, quiet, peace.” The *miskīn* has absolutely nothing and has completely abandoned himself to a state of utter helplessness. This is in contrast to the *faqīr* (فقير), the needy one who is still active. He may beg, he may still hold onto the hope that someone will give him something, and so extend his hand. This ayah implies that the majority of humanity is at a loss, and does not move in the forward-moving stream of generosity.

وَتَأْكُلُونَ التُّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَمَمًا

19 And you eat up the inheritance (of others) with devouring greed,

وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا

20 And you love wealth with excessive love.

We all love wealth from whatever source it comes, and the ordinary being clamors for it and craves it, groping for a material security which in itself usually brings about even greater feelings of insecurity

through fear of its loss, and thereby compounding one's anxiety. Man generally wants to hear good news of an increase in his wealth, such as receiving an inheritance or gift. We all love to have more wealth and we are usually selfish about it because man is selfish by nature. He reflects the opposite of his Creator, the Generous, until he recognizes that every breath is a gift, and that every breath is vital and urgent.

We have seen the common denominator of man – his smallness, lowness, treachery, and covetousness. Now the Qur'an urges us to use this life to uncover what is within ourselves in order to discern who we are, by accepting both the animal within us and the Divine Reality within us.

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا

21 Nay! When the earth is crushed with crushing upon crushing,

Kallā (كَلَّا) is an admonishment. We usually do not consider the fact that at the end the earth will return to nothingness. It means, "And when the earth is shattered by its vibrations and cataclysms, explosions and earthquakes . . ." In this way it will be annihilated. As creation arose, so will it end.

وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا

22 And your Lord comes with angels, rank on rank,

To paraphrase this ayah: "And when the orderliness in the heavens and all the powers unseen by us come, in perfect formation." The angels and the forces of the cosmos are in their natural order, line after line, and there is no longer the possibility of man's interference and action.

وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ تَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ
وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرُ

- 23 And hell is made to appear on that day. On that day man will remember, but what will that remembrance avail him?

The *jahannam* (**جهنم** ; hell) will be near, evident, clear, and the eternal Fire will be obvious. At that time man will remember, but what will be the use of his remembrance then? The zone of action, the possibility of behaving correctly and purifying himself in this world, will be over. He will cry, "I wish I had acted in the right way during my life," which means that at that moment he will recognize the reality of life, and it will not be what he had thought it was, but it will be too late to make amends.

يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي

- 24 He will say: O would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for my life (to come)!

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ

- 25 But on that day none will punish as He will punish;

وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثَاقَهُ أَحَدٌ

- 26 And none will bind as He binds.

No one can be held responsible for anyone else's actions. A person's actions dictate what his condition and his state will be in the next life. No one else will be able to stand in his place. Everyone is accountable and will be rewarded accordingly. It is a unique state. On that day, in that state, in that new consciousness, man's condition of punishment and bondage, which will be according to his previous actions, will be like no other condition. Allah's hold on him will be unique and particular to him alone.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ

27 O self at rest!

ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً

28 Return to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing (Him).

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي

29 So enter among My slaves,

وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

30 And enter My Garden.

Reality calls upon the *nafs* which is in tranquility and at peace, *an-nafs al-muṭma'innah*. This is the beginning of spiritual awakening. If we do not have tranquility, how can we remember that which is deep within the ocean of our innermost heart? If we are in agitation

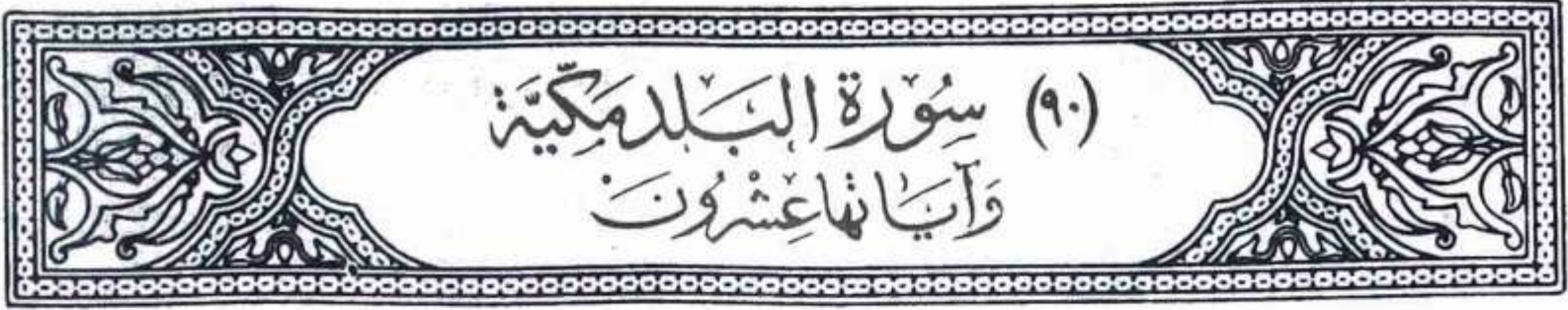
outwardly, if we are constantly in turmoil, how can we hear the echo of timeless knowledge embedded in our hearts? So the call begins with the tranquil and contented *nafs*.

Radiyah (رضية), the next stage, means "contented," contented with understanding and with the knowledge that this is perfection and it could not be otherwise. We may not like the situation we are in, but that is irrelevant here. In the next stage, *marḍīyyah* (مرضية ; well-pleasing), we will know that everything else is content with us as well. Inwardly we are in a state of absolute tranquility while outwardly we are still people of action, because we cannot escape that. There is no escape; we have to struggle. This life, *dunyā*, is the zone of *balwā* (trial), in both its good and bad aspects, both outwardly and inwardly. Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* says in a tradition, "What is wrong with My slaves? They are constantly praying for Me to give them comfort in this *dunyā*, but I did not create this *dunyā* for comfort."

Imam Husayn, *'alayhi-s-salām*, defines the stages of the *nafs*. He says: *an-nafs al-muṭma'innah hiya muwahḥidah*, "The tranquil *nafs* is the *nafs* that is in *tawḥīd*." We attain true tranquility if we are in *tawḥīd*. *An-nafs ash-shākīrah*, the thankful *nafs*, is *an-nafs al-marḥūmah*, the *nafs* which has been granted mercy. At this stage we recognize that there is only Allah's mercy. He also says *an-nafs al-khāṣṣah hiya'l-ārifah*, "the select *nafs* is the *nafs* that has *ma'rifah*," that is, the *nafs* that has intimate knowledge of Reality. He defines *an-nafs al-āqilah*, the *nafs* of reason and the understanding self, as *an-nafs ar-rāḍiyah*, and the *nafs* which orders one to do evil as *an-nafs al-jāhilah*, the ignorant *nafs*.

Traditionally, we often read the classification of the *nafs*, ranging from the lowest state, *an-nafs al-ammārah*, to the highest state, *an-nafs al-kāmilah*, as stepping upward through seven stations. The second step is the blaming self, *an-nafs al-lawwāmah*, which is the self which occasionally becomes aware of its own tendencies to do evil. This is the beginning of consciousness. Then come *an-nafs al-mulhamah*, the inspired, untethered *nafs* without direction, followed by *an-nafs al-muṭma'innah*. After tranquility comes contentment with knowledge, *riḍā'* (رضاء): *an-nafs ar-rāḍiyah* has knowledge of the perfection of the Decree. When one is content with creation, creation will be content and in harmony with him, and that is *an-nafs al-marḍīyyah*, the sixth stage. From that state comes the state of perfection, *al-kāmilah* (كاملة).

At this point Allah says, "Now enter into My arena, and be hidden in the one and only Garden of *tawḥīd*, in that inner bliss and glory of abundant abandonment and abandoned abundance!"



SURAT AL-BALAD

THE CITY

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ

1 Nay! I swear by this city –

وَأَنْتَ حَلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ

2 And in this city you are free to dwell –

وَوَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدٌ

3 And the begetter and whom he begot:

The opening ayah of this surah swears by the evidence of Mecca, that is, it swears by the focal point to which everyone prays and has

prayed from the time of Sayyidna Ibrahim, *'alayhi-s-salām*; by the fact that the seal of the prophets came to unify the *ḥaqīqah* and the *sharī'ah*; by the very possibility of life on this earth; and by the one who was born in the city with the message that man should glorify his Creator!

Hill (حِلّ) is related to *ḥalāl* (حلال ; permitted, lawful), and in this context means “a legitimate resident” of this town. The second ayah could also read, “Whatever is in this town is for you – it is open to you, O Prophet of Allah!” Although the address is directed to the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, it applies to anyone at any time. Allah, the Divine Reality, is swearing by the appearance of *islām* in Mecca at that time, as well as by its appearance now throughout the world. It also heralds the appearance of the Prophet, the reappearance of prophethood, and the return of the one who came before and the one who came after, the cause and the effect, the father and the son. Allah is saying to the Prophet, “This is the same teaching that came before you and that will come after you; it is a reiteration of the same teaching.” It is the continuation of the Adamic thread, Adam and his righteous son, and Adam and his rebellious son; the one who was killed, and the one who transgressed the bounds. The forces that killed Cain (Qabil in Arabic) were covetousness and jealousy, the first a cause and the second an effect. From the cause comes the effect, and from the effect comes another cause. As human beings, we are all the sons of Adam, and each one of us is *yatīm* (orphan), as was Adam. He had no father just as our Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, had no father. We are all cut off from our source, seeking to connect.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

4 Truly, we have created man in affliction.

This is the meaning of man's state; he is in *kabad* (كَبَد), “affliction, distress, toil, and trial.” *Kabad* also means “liver,” and the job of the liver is to constantly suffer in order to purify the blood. Its duty is to continually toil.

Man's state is one of turmoil. He is in a state of confusion in which he constantly struggles, from which there is no escape or peace. Life is constant dynamism. An atom cannot be discerned unless it is in

turmoil, so how can this most amazing, complex being be completely at peace? To be completely at peace is to be as a stone, to be dead.

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يُقَدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ

5 Does he think that no one has power over him?

In moments of taking on the attributes of his Creator, such as greatness, or glory, or any of the others of which man is capable, does man ever imagine even for a second that no one can overcome him? Does he think that he is a totally independent entity?

يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا

6 He says: I have squandered much wealth!

This ayah refers especially to those who use their wealth as their main support in this existence. He who has at his disposal a great deal of wealth and worldly power thinks that this world is his final abode and his total security.

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ

7 Does he think that no one sees him?

Does man think that he is not seen, does he think that there can be anything in existence that escapes unseen? How can man not see the unity in all of this existence and beyond? How disconnected is he that he cannot envisage the fact that there is one thread running throughout the entire creation?

الْمَجْعَلُ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ

8 Have We not made two eyes for him,

How can there be two without one? How can we discern two-ness unless within us there is one unifying field? How can there be the outer two eyes by which we see the visible world, unless there is within us a single inner eye, the eye of our *rūḥ* (روح; soul), the eye of our *qalb* (قلب; heart), the secret eye within us which manifests through our heart (عين القلب; 'ayn al-qalb, the eye of the heart). Do we not have two visions, do we not have two lives, do we not have two consciousnesses, that of wakefulness and that of sleep?

وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ

9 And a tongue and two lips?

From one tongue through two lips a sentence manifests. By the inner faculty of sight, by means of two eyes, vision takes place. From One Source, by means of two opposites, Reality manifests. There is One behind the two. Without the two no Reality manifests.

Look at the example we are given! A person needs two lips to speak, even though there is only one tongue behind them. He cannot say that one of his tongues said something, but he can say that his inner eye saw something which his outer eye did not see, or vice versa. He cannot claim that his tongue did not say something which he has uttered. From the point of view of the *sharī'ah* he must say that his tongue said it. The tongue, however, cannot function unless it is through the use of the two lips. There are many other interpretations.

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

10 And guided him to the two highways?

Najd (نجد) means "a highway, highland or plateau." *Najdayn* (نجدين) and *ṭarīqayn* (طريقين) both mean "the two paths," and indicate both the path of correct living, abandonment, submission, the willingness to die and to let go, and the parallel path in which one clamors for this world and seeks to hold on to it, to own, control and depend upon it, saying that this and only this is our abode. The two paths also signify either the completely outward or superficial way of looking at existence, or the more inward way of wanting to arrive at the subtle meaning of things. These are ways of form and meaning, the *ṭarīq aṣ-ṣalāḥ* (طريق الصلاح ; the path of rightness) and the *ṭarīq al-kharāb* (طريق الخراب ; the path of ruination).

So in this surah we first see the situation of man, his turmoil, his trouble, the *kabd* (affliction), which exists in order to reduce his inner trouble as well as to purify his blood. Next we are shown the two choices that he has. In the following ayah we come to a key issue.

فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ

- 11 But he does not attempt (the ascent of) the steep uphill road.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ

- 12 And what will make you comprehend what the steep uphill road is?

'*Aqabah* (عَقَبَة), which means "a steep incline or obstacle," is related to '*aqb* (عَقَب), which signifies "back, behind, consequence, or result." '*Aqabah*, then, is an obstacle which although it lies before us is not apparent now.

As for the inward meaning, '*aqabah* here refers to man's *nafs* (self), that is, the obstacle that causes man's lack of vision, his lack of wakefulness, and his lack of trust in and true reliance on Allah. Does he not want to overcome this obstacle? Then why does he not do so? What do we really know about this obstacle? What is the meaning of this obstacle of obstacles?

فَكَرَقَبَهُ

13 (It is) the freeing of the neck,

This refers to the obstacle of man not being in *'ubūdīyah* (**عبودية** ; worship, devotion), of not being in true worship and true submission, of not overcoming the first layer of *nafs*, which is done by accepting *lā ilāha illa'llāh, Muhammadun rasūlu'llāh*. This is the freeing of one's neck. If we cannot free our own necks, the least we can do is to set a slave free, which is how this ayah is sometimes translated. *Fakka* (**فَكَ**) means "to open, unravel, release." *Fakku raqabah*, then, also has the outer meaning of releasing those who have been enslaved outwardly, releasing those who have been in outer slavery to their needs, or those people whose necks have been encircled by what is not befitting of man.

أَوْ أَطْعَمَهُ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ

14 Or the giving of food on a day of hunger

يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ

15 To an orphan near of kin,

This ayah refers to feeding or giving when times are hard and when there is hardly enough for one's own survival. When times are easy, everyone is generous, but when we are caught in the *dunyā* (**دنيا** ; the life of this world), when we are really strangled by its hold, it is then that we have to watch ourselves to keep from being selfish. Otherwise, if everyone pampers us, if every one is nice, where is the *'aqabah* for us? In other words, we must watch ourselves when we are off balance, for when we are in balance in a protected place, there are no problems to test us. In those times when there is hunger, we must give.

أَوْمِسْكِينًا زَامْتَرَبَةً ط

16 Or to the poor man lying in the dust.

Matrabah (متربة), “lying in the dust, poverty, destitution,” is from the verb *tariba* (ترب ; to be or become dusty). The *miskin* (مسكين ; destitute, a totally bereft person), is reduced to dust; he has nothing, not even hope.

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ
وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالرَّحْمَةِ ط

17 Then he is among those who believe and exhort each other to patience, and exhort each other to show compassion.

The meaning of ascending the *'aqabah* is to overcome our low human tendencies, to overcome our *nafs*. Then, when we have overcome the obstacles of our selves, and when we are conscious of them, then we must “exhort each other to patience, and exhort each other to show compassion.”

Thus when man accepts the evidence of the Creator and recognizes that the nature of His creation is in *qabḍ* (قبض ; constriction), when he recognizes the nature of duality and the oneness which encompasses it, and recognizes the meaning of the main obstacle, which is the *nafs*, and recognizes that in his outer actions he must give and be generous during times of difficulty, then he will be among the company of the believers, among those who advise each other to be patient, steadfast, and to show mercy.

أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ ط

18 These are the companions of the right hand.

The people of the right hand are the people of right action who will be given their book of deeds in their right hand on the Day of Judgement, signifying that they are destined for the Garden. These are people who have taken positive action to save themselves.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَاهُمْ
أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ

19 But those who disbelieve our revelations, these are the companions of the left hand.

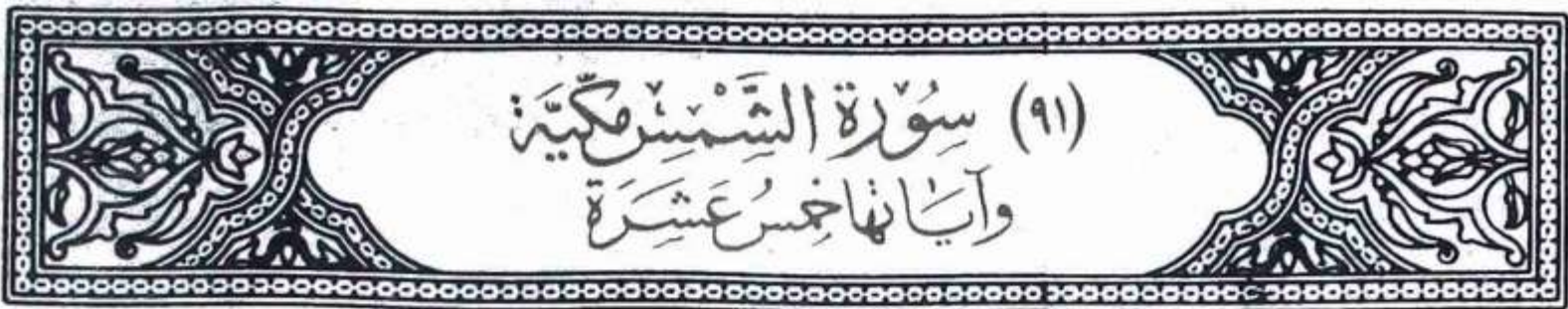
This refers to those who deny the signs, who deny the Book of Reality, and who end up denying the Reality – Allah – may He be exalted!

Shu'm (شؤم), related to *mash'amah* (مشأمة ; left hand), means “a bad omen or calamity.” They are the people who will be left behind. They are the people of the left, the people of loss, who are trapped in their own self-generated fire.

عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّؤَصَّدَةٌ

20 Fire will be an awning closed down over them!

They will be locked in the fire, because they deny the truth which is within them, even though it is being sung outwardly all around them. They will be trapped in their own fire and will finally be consumed by it.



SURAT ASH-SHAMS

THE SUN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا

1 By the sun and its heat,

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَّيَهَا

2 And the moon when it reflects the sun,

This surah begins with Allah swearing an oath by the effulgent sun. The sun always symbolizes the Truth, the primal source of energy, while the moon represents the reflection of that energy. The sun of knowledge of our Path is the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. Those of us who follow in his footsteps on this Path are like the moon in that, at best, we reflect part of that prophetic light from our garden surface. Reflections follow the light of day and echoes follow sound. This is the relationship between Allah, the Creator, and man. Allah desired to create and so He created man, that

entity which encompasses the meaning of all His creation. We see this relationship in the sun and the moon, light and its reflection, sound and its echo.

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّتْهَا

3 And the day when it clearly reveals it,

Jalā (جلى) means “to be clear or manifest, to be great or illustrious.” Thus this ayah could mean, “When the day is effulgent and clear, its reality is evident.” It might also refer to that time when inner knowledge, the inner day, shines forth in the heart, making the heart open, so that it sees nothing other than the Truth. It sees *al-Ḥaqq* (الحق ; the Truth), and all that the *ḥaqq* encompasses of *al-mīzān* (الميزان ; the balance).

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا

4 And the night when it covers it with a veil,

Night comes and covers over the light of day, just as death comes and covers the meaning of men of knowledge, while the darkness of ignorance covers over those who have the potential of awakening to knowledge. Night comes and covers us in this existence.

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا

5 And the heaven and He Who constructed it,

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَّيْنَاهَا

6 And the earth and He Who expanded it,

The verb *banā* (بنا) means “to build, to construct,” and from it come the words *ibn* (ابن), which means “a son,” and *ibnah* (ابنة), which means “a daughter.” We are being asked, “Do you not see, by the clear day and by the clear night, by the night which covers the day and by the structure of the heavens as they hold themselves in balance despite the influence of all the different forces, and by the earth and its expanse and function? Do you not see all these diversities? Our attention is drawn to the perfection of these systems so as to make us contemplate the Creator of this perfection.

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّيْنَاهَا

7 And the self and He Who made it balanced,

Sawiya (سوى) means “to make, equal, even, proportionate, perfect and level.” Allah is asking, “Do you not see the absolute and utterly amazing complexity of the *nafs* (نفس ; self) with its intricate balance, and the infinite possibilities that it has?

فَالْهَمَّهَا فَجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

8 Then He inspired it to understand what is wicked for it and to have fearful awareness of what is right for it.

All of the realities within the *nafs* are inspired by Allah; they have been there since before birth. They did not come into the *nafs* later. *Alhama* (ألهم) means “to inspire,” and *iltahama* (التهم), from the same root, means “to gulp down, devour.” So good and evil tendencies have already been introduced into the *nafs*, along with all its other diverse aspects. The self has been shown the two highways

mentioned in Surat Al-Balad, ayah 10. These entail both the transgression of the *nafs* and its *taqwā* (تقوى), its fearful awareness and its journey along the path of *rubūbiyah* (ربوبية ; Lordship). We are asked to look at the balance which the *nafs* has been given, at the perfection of justice it has been given in order to balance its opposite tendencies.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا

9 He will indeed be successful who makes it grow in purity,

He who moves along the path of the purification of the *nafs* purifies it by recognizing what causes its impurity. This refers to the person who increases his higher *nafs* by reducing the energy and gratification of the lower *nafs*. By reducing transgression, we increase fearful awareness, and by increasing fearful awareness we reduce transgression. By increase, by *tazkiyah* (تزكية ; purification), we cause the *nafs* to be successful in what it has been created for. All of this occurs by means of these days, these events, by the duality, by the creation of heaven and earth, by the creation of the *nafs* and that which we see within it. Allah is telling us, “The truth is that you *will* win, you *will* be what I wanted you to be, you *will* be close to the meaning of existence and you *will* be engulfed by the meaning of *tawhīd*, if you are purified.”

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

10 And he will indeed fail who corrupts it.

Dassa (دس) means “to scheme or plot, bury, conceal,” and *dassasa* (دسس) means the same but is greater in intensity of meaning. *Dasīṣah* (دسيسه) means “a secret plot.” If a man poisoned someone secretly, *dussa lahu* (دس له) is said. The love of *dunyā* (this world) is given to us secretly, covertly and overtly, in the dazzle of all the goods that are being held out temptingly before us in this world.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوِيهَا

11 Thamud belied [the truth] in their excessive transgression,

Those who err and give excuses but make no effort to overcome their lower *nafs* will be at a loss. The way to overcome this habit is to let go of the lower self and to center ourselves on the higher self which is always with us. The lower self is our creation and is the result of our own "construction" of a world-view. Everyone has his own so-called "self." We say, "My self," or "he insulted *me*." This is a result of the "I," the rise of ego and of arrogance.

This ayah is saying that he who tries to let the *nafs* maintain complete control will be at a loss. Again, we are given historical evidence showing what will happen in the future. From one *nafs* comes two, and from those two come communities. The formation of our *nafs* is the result of circumstance or situation, and the situation of the *nafs* is the situation of the family, of the community, of the culture or the civilization in which Allah has placed us. If we increase our lower tendencies, if we continually fan them and feed them, and if we pamper them rather than put a stop to them, then the result will be our complete destruction. We are given evidence of this by means of the example here of the people of Thamud, who were destroyed by their arrogance.

إِذَا نَبَعَتْ شَقِيهَا

12 When the most wretched of them broke out with mischief.

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا

13 So Allah's messenger said to them: It is Allah's she-camel, let her drink!

These people perished as a result of the increase in their transgression, their arrogance and their rebellious disobedience. The prophet Salih, *'alayhi-s-salām*, was sent by Allah to try to harness them with the message, and he beseeched them not to afflict the female camel which was, after all, made a sign of Allah. He told them that the female camel was sacred and belonged to Allah. He also said that everything belonged to Allah, and that from that point of view, everything was sacred. If, however, we do not start seeing outward, visible things as sacred and if we do not see the sanctity of the House of Allah, we will not be able to know the sanctity of every other house. This means that everything is divine. If we view everything with the vision of divinity within us, if we look through the eye of the Creator within us, we find that everything is perfect, and if we do not do this, then everything appears unjust. If we see things with a low, base vision of life we find that everything is imperfect. We are, however, given numerous opportunities to serve the highest ends and to polish ourselves. When we look through the eye of *sharī'ah*, everything may appear to be in a dreadful state. Therefore, an opportunity is given to us according to our situation to serve, to do good, to help, to work, to improve others, and to uphold true Islamic values. If we look through the eye of the *ḥaqīqah*, then everything is perfect. There are transgressions, there are failings, and things may appear miserable, but everything is nevertheless in perfection. We are the *barzakh* (برزخ ; the interspace, the meeting point) of both possibilities; we contain them both.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمُ
بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَسَوَّاهَا

- 14 But they called him a liar, and slaughtered her, so their Lord crushed them for their wrong action, and destroyed them all.

The people of Thamud denied what their prophet told them — and this message was a test for them. *Damdama* (دمدم) is “to smear a thing with great force.” *Dam* (دم) means “blood,” and *damīm* (دميم) means “smearred with blood.” Their agony was imminent; their affliction came suddenly upon them, by the physical means Allah provided. We do not know whether they suffered an

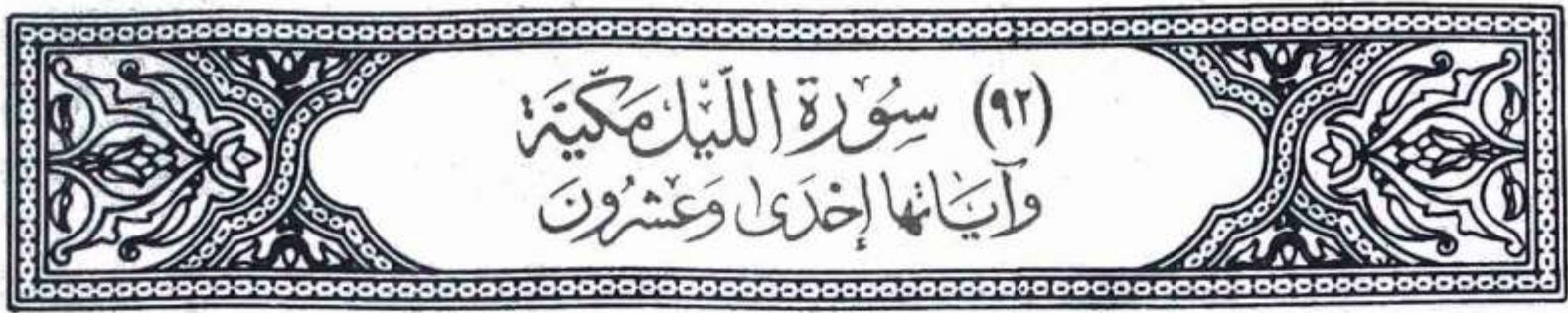
earthquake or the collapse of their dwellings, but whatever form the destruction took, they were obliterated.

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا

15 And He does not fear the consequence.

In a *ḥadīth qudsi* (a sacred *ḥadīth* in which Allah speaks in the first person) transmitted through the tongue of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, Allah says, "I have created people for the Garden and I do not care, and I have created people for the Fire and I do not care." Creation must have the two extremes, it must have people of Allah and people of *shayṭān*. This world is the theatre of Allah's operation, and in which we can also wake up to the One, to Allah, may He be exalted, to the One and Only Power behind all the variegated manifestations.

From the Creator's point of view, the entire heaven and earth is of no consequence, it does not even amount to one speck of dust by our earthly measure. Allah created the laws and gave us the consciousness to choose between right and wrong; to act either through fearful awareness or in total disregard for His laws, to be controlled by our lower *nafs* with its whims and desires, or by the higher self, which is guided by the spirit and its love of Allah and His Prophet. We will either be fearful of transgression and guard ourselves carefully, and through that watchfulness inner awakening will occur, or else we will roam about, behaving worse than animals. Allah does not care.



SURAT AL-LAYL

THE NIGHT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Most Merciful

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ

1 By the night when it covers with a veil,

Before anything existed there was the unfathomable ocean of non-creation. Before leaving the womb there was darkness, night. Ignorance is darkness, a veil of separation and desperation. If we proceed in time, if we go on from the creational beginning, we will find that with every night there is a day, and the day will be clear. For the seeker of knowledge, the twilight of his wakefulness will become like the effulgent day.

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ

2 And the day when it reveals itself,

If we start with a general recognition of our darkness, or our ignorance and misery, if we face it and see its reality, and if we are on the Path, then we are bound to recognize how this ignorance came about. By recognizing this we will be freed from the shackles of night; the day will be clear, and the certainty of knowledge will be its final fruit.

وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ

3 And the creation of the male and the female,

The opposites — male and female, night and day, life and death — have only been created in this balanced form so that we may strive to discover that the root of one is in its opposite, and that one cannot exist without the other. Man cannot exist without woman, nor woman without man. They are two opposites of one reality.

إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّىٰ

4 Certainly, your striving is (directed to) various (ends).

Sa'y (سَعْيٌ) means “striving, seeking, making a great effort.” We are all striving, everyone according to his intention and orientation, everyone according to his *dhawq* (ذَوْقٌ ; taste). One of the men of Allah said, *sa'y al-'uqūl li-ṭalabī'l-karāmāt*, “The effort (or striving in the sense of seeking) of the *'aql* (عَقْلٌ ; intellect) is to seek *karāmāt* (كَرَامَاتٌ ; miracles).” The effort of the intellect is to see, to witness miracles, and miracles may be defined as Allah’s overflowing abundance in the creation which are not clearly or correctly interpreted by us when seen. This refers to events or phenomena that the eye of the intellect may discern as natural, but to the person whose intellect is not fully awakened they may seem out of the ordinary.

The word “miracle” is understood as something remarkable, and in the dictionary it is defined as “an event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is therefore thought to be due

to supernatural causes.” In Arabic, however, the equivalent word indicates seeing the blessedness and mercy of Allah.

This man of Allah then went on to say, *Wa sa'y al-qulūb li-talab al-mushāhadāt*, “And the effort of the hearts is to seek direct witnessing;” *wa'l-arwāḥ 'ala'l-mudānah*, “And for the spirits (souls) to experience closeness” (meaning to see everything with the eye of the *ḥaqīqah*); *wa sa'y al-asrār li-fanā'iha fī anwār adh-dhāt wa baqā'iha fī anwār as-sifāt*, “And the effort of the *asrār* (اسرار ; secrets) is to seek to be annihilated in the lights of the essence so that they remain in the lights of the attributes.” The effort or striving (*sa'y*) made by people is such that everyone's aspiration is different; some make it through *maḥabbah* (محبة ; [reciprocal] love), some through *irādah* (ارادة ; desire), others through *shawq* (شوق ; yearning). The *sa'y* differs according to the individual's orientation.

Sa'y also means, “hastening purposefully, running,” and it is the name of the running between *aṣ-Ṣafa* and *al-Marwah* in Mecca that one performs as part of the ritual of the Hajj. Man goes from one extreme to another as he hastens towards his inevitable end. *Kullun mulāqī wajhi Rabbih*, “Everyone will see the Face of his Lord.”

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَىٰ وَاتَّقَىٰ

5 But as for he who gives and is fearfully aware,

This refers to the person who has given of himself, *a'tā* (اعطى ; to give, offer, present), and who has given what he considers to be his best. This is someone who totally surrenders in the recognition that he has nothing, controls nothing, and that his only purpose in existence is to recognize the mercy of his Creator. If he gives up his lower self, he avoids transgression and, thereby, self-affliction.

وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ

6 And believes in the good,

Saddaqa (صدق) means “to trust, to believe in,” and from it

comes the meaning, "to give in charity." It is the confirmation of our belief that Allah is the Giver. *Ṣadaqa* (صدق ; to be sincere, truthful) is the root of *ṣidq* (صدق), which means "truthfulness" and "sincerity." Imam Ja'far, 'alayhi-s-salām, was called *aṣ-Ṣādiq* (الصادق) because he was truthful. To have *ṣidq* means that one is truthful to his Creator, which is a recognition that there is only pure giving. He is the only Giver; we can do nothing and in recognizing this, we confirm that we have nothing, and thus we confirm what is true. By trusting in the good, in excellence, we confirm the highest truth, that is, that Allah wants nothing in His creation but *ḥusn* (حُسْنُ ; goodness) for everyone, nothing except mercy. We confirm that absolute truth inwardly, and we confirm it from the viewpoint of *sharī'ah*, by giving away that which has been given to us of the visible *ḥusn*, Allah's *ni'am* (نِعْمَ ; blessings, delights). By manifesting Allah's gifts to us outwardly, we confirm inwardly that we are from Allah, by Allah, and it is to the grace of Allah that we return.

فَسَيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ

7 We will ease his way to the state of ease.

Allah is saying that he who has this belief and follows this path, will be led along a path of ease, his end will be easy, and it is Allah Who will make both the path and the end easy for him.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَىٰ

8 But as for he who is miserly and thinks himself independent in wealth,

Bukhl (بخل) means "stinginess, miserliness." *Bakhila* (بَخِلَ) means "to be stingy." By being stingy one stops the stream of Allah's generosity from passing in through the heart and out through the hands. The *bakhil* (بَخِيلَ ; miser) is he who tries to stop the will of Allah, who appears by his actions to attempt to stop the purpose of creation. *Istaghna* (اسْتَغْنَىٰ) is derived from *ghaniya* (غَنِيَ), which means "to be free from want, to be rich,

to have no need of.” Here it specifically means, “He who thinks himself self-sufficient or independent.” He is disconnected; he thinks that he is rich due to his own independent efforts or means, considering himself a superior being.

وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ

9 And belies the good,

This person who has set himself up as independent of Allah’s mercy has denied that the whole purpose of creation, visibly and invisibly, hinges on believing in the good. If one cannot do anything that is *hasan* (*حسن* ; good), then he should at least have a pleasant demeanor and bearing. If he cannot be useful in his actions, then at least let him be so in his heart so that he does not detract from others.

فَسَنِّيئِرُهُ لِّلْعُسْرَىٰ

10 We will ease his way to the state of difficulty.

For he who denies the good, the best, the path will be difficult — *‘usr* (*عسر*) is the exact opposite of ease. It means “difficulty, hardship, adversity, straitness.” Thus a person who denies the good will have nothing but constrictions along his path.

وَمَا يَغْنِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّىٰ

11 His wealth will not save him when he perishes.

What is the use of whatever he has accumulated of inner or outer wealth if he is returning to Allah in turmoil? *Aradda* (*أردى*) means “to bring about the fall of, to destroy, ruin, or kill.” If such a person is already burning in his own fire, in the ignorance of his own

night, then of what use is all the wealth he has accumulated when he ends up in *Jahannam*?

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ

12 Certainly, it is upon Us to give the guidance,

Allah says, "It is incumbent upon Us to show the path," to show the meaning of *hidāyah* (هداية , guidance). This means that the path of reality, the purpose of existence, will show us the way out of this apparent, seeming darkness. It is up to Reality to show us that we are not separate, and that we are an essential part of the creation and its interconnectedness.

وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَىٰ

13 And certainly, Ours is the Hereafter and the first (life)!

All the goodness, all the blessings in this life and the next, all those blessings of creation in all its forms, all of what comes after and all of what is here now, is encompassed, owned, and controlled by the One True King. The purpose of all this is to guide us along the narrow path of *hidāyah*, which comes by *taqwā*, which is the perpetual, constant awareness that we are surrounded by danger.

فَأَنْذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَّىٰ

14 So I warn you of the raging Fire:

لَا يَصْلِيهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى

15 No one will enter it but the most wretched,

The person who is *shaqī* (شقي ; miserable, unhappy, wretched) is he who denies the message and denies the purpose of existence. Outwardly extend this experiential denial and it will reach the end described in this ayah, that is, *an-nār al-kubrā* (النار الكبرى ; the Great Fire). This person is already in the little fire, preparing himself for the big one. Even this is an example of Allah's mercy: He is preparing them for the great turmoil through their experience of the small fire.

الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى

16 Who belies and turns his back (on it).

This refers to those who deny, who think they have their own way, and imagine that they are independent of Allah.

وَسَيَجْزِيهَا الْآتِقِ

17 But far away from it will be he who safeguards himself with fearful awareness.

He who is in *taqwā* (تقوى), who guards himself from wrong actions through fearful awareness, who constantly remembers the outer purpose of his existence and his indebtedness to his Creator for his inner non-separateness, and who strives to purify his intentions and to do his best, this person will be drawn closer to the Truth, closer to Allah, and remain far from the Fire.

الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى

- 18 Who gives his wealth so that he may grow in purity.

Whatever wealth he has, not only in the material sense, but also in the sense of wealth of knowledge, he gives it voluntarily. *Māl* (مال) means "possession, property, wealth, goods," from *mawwala* (مَوْلٍ), which means "to enrich, to finance, to become wealthy." It has the connotation of inclining towards something. If we want something, we incline towards it. In this case, the ayah refers to someone who increases his wealth by giving it out since if he restricts it, it will not flow. The same thing applies to knowledge. If we withhold knowledge, we are not allowing new knowledge to come to us from the only reservoir of knowledge, from Allah. We may be afraid of losing it. One of the Names of Allah is *al-'Alīm* (العليم ; the Knower). The more we give the more our supply is replenished, and the more our own reservoir is filled up.

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى

- 19 And none has with him any favor for which he should be rewarded,

The *jazā'* (جزاء ; reward) is brought about by, and is the result of, one's action. Whatever *ni'mah* (نعمة ; favor, blessing, comfort, bliss) we have is not from us. We own nothing, we have nothing, and we are only here to begin the witnessing, the true *shahādah* (شهادة ; witnessing), so that from this point on we will always witness Allah, the Ever-Effulgent.

إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى

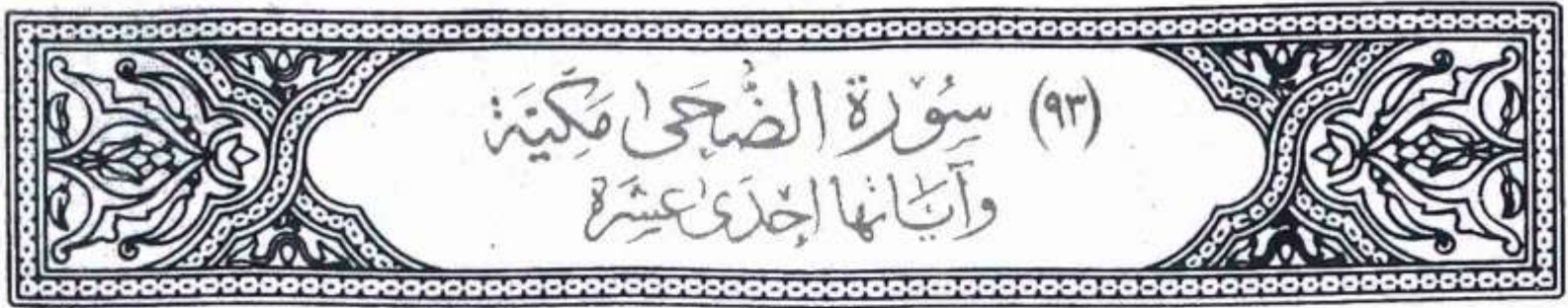
- 20 Except the seeking of the Face of his Lord, the Most High.

21 And he shall soon be well-pleased.

This means that our purpose and interest, the entire objective of our life here, is to know the Face of the Lord. If we see the outer appearances of the creation of our Lord, and see how Lordship manifests, how sustainership takes hold – so that for everything in creation Allah has provided nourishment and protection, a beginning and an end, and has given it perfect balance – then we naturally are filled with yearning, and those of us who are seekers then yearn to see the Face of Allah, the outer appearance of that Reality. It says in the Qur'an; *Aynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu'llāh*, "Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah."

If this is the direction in which we are moving, then upon reaching the light of vision and wakefulness we will have contentment and the contentment will be experienced here as well as in the Next World. We will have nothing other than the reward of our pure actions stemming from our pure intentions. Thus we will have come forth from the darkness of non-existence, and we will finally reach the light of knowledge, and turn our faces to the Face of Allah, the Exalted, He Who is Greater than all else.





SURAT AD-DUHA

THE MORNING HOURS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

In regard to the historical context of the revelation of the surahs of the Qur'an, we know most of the details of those revelations which were directed to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. What concerns us here is how we, as followers in the dust of the footsteps of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, can apply them. One of the traditional and oft-repeated commentaries explains this very early Meccan Surah as the one which broke a period of silence, after the first revelations, in which no new revelations were coming to the Prophet.

وَالضُّحَىٰ

1 By the early morning hours,

Wa'd-duḥā (**والضُّحَىٰ**) refers to the hours that follow sunrise when one is bathed in the clear light of the morning sun. Allah is saying, "By the direct witnessing in which knowledge comes to you; by the witnessing of Truth, of Reality; by the time when everything is made clear under that sharp light!" At that time there are hardly any shadows, and all borders are clearly delineated.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ

2 And the night when it is most still and dark,

Allah also swears by the opposite of the morning hours, the time when the darkness of night and ignorance has taken over. In doing this, Allah swears by the light of knowledge and the darkness of lack of knowledge, which are both part of Allah's creation. This is the balance of all existence over which Allah's sovereignty reigns.

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ

3 Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He hate you.

The people of Mecca were mocking the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, saying that his Lord had forsaken him, as evidenced by the fact that he was no longer receiving regular, direct revelations of the Qur'an. We can personalize this event for our own benefit. Each one of us has periods in which we are not greatly inspired. This is the normal course of events and it may be due to any number of situational factors. There are also periods when we are highly inspired, as though the skies have opened up to us. There are some days when it is better for us to plough the earth and work with the land, keeping to what is simple. On other days it is better to sit in contemplation and stay up at night in prayer, and yet on other days it is better to be in action, going out into the world, visiting people, and so on. On any given day, each of us will experience a slightly different orientation.

When we feel that we are not constantly in a state of *mushāhadah*, (مشاهدة ; witnessing), and do not constantly see the hand of Allah at work behind everything, it does not mean we are further away from Allah, or that we are separated from Him. It may mean that something is wrong with us. If a person has a hand injury and it is giving him a great deal of pain, how can he be constantly aware of the higher values within him? At that time he is absorbed in lower values — the hand, the injury, the pain. This is normal and the person should nurse his injury until that phase is over. This does not mean that Allah

has forsaken him. His hand is broken, and what is best for him is to rest and try to see the blessing in it. Perhaps it did not happen for his sake at all; perhaps it happened so that someone else could have sympathy for him, someone whose heart is usually as hard as stone. This is ecological. It does not mean that Allah is being hard on him. The implication here is that everything involves the opposites, both day and night, man and woman, bad and good, life and death; this is an example of the *mīzān* (ميزان ; balance). Allah, our Lord, is constantly there, and there is no anger, only love. The feeling that there is anger is only our lack of trust, our own lack of *īmān*.

وَلِلْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ

4 And truly, what is to come is better for you than what has gone before.

This speaks of what comes at the end. The *ākhirah* (آخرة), the “end,” also means “the next life,” which is better, obviously, because it is in the zone of timelessness, of eternity. Here, in this world, we can do nothing, we can control nothing. No matter what we establish, something else gives way and collapses; this is the nature of time and the dynamic movement of life. Any person with some degree of intellect soon reaches the conclusion that this world is transient. It is very quick to pass, and we cannot predict its passage with any certainty. All we can be sure of is that when one cycle of time stops, the next phase will begin.

وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ

5 And soon will your Lord give to you so that you will be well-pleased.

The *rabb*, (رَبّ ; Lord, Sustainer), He Who brings us up to our full potential, to our totality, will reveal His signs to those who have *īmān*, for the awareness of those in *īmān* will enable them not only to perceive His signs, but to be patient for them.

الْمَجِيدُ كَيْتِيمًا فَأَوَىٰ

6 Did He not find you an orphan and so shelter you?

Did He not find you *yatīm* (يتيم), an orphan, alone, separated, cut off? The Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, was orphaned at birth. His father died before he was born, and his mother died, according to some sources, when he was two years old, and according to others, when he was six years old. The ayah says, “Can you not see that even in the case of a man who had no father or guardian, the situation constantly improved?” First the Prophet’s grandfather, and then his uncle, took care of him. The same is true for every one of us: if we look back on our own loneliness, we may see that as time went by its intensity lessened, or that even if we had good friends who abandoned us, we gained new ones.

The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, once said about the orphan, “I and he who cares for the orphan are like this (putting two of his fingers close together) in the Garden, if he was fearful of Allah.” The meaning of it is that there is only connectedness, there is only One. But since we love oneness, we clumsily misinterpret it by befriending only people who are already connected, by befriending people, for example, who are loved by their fathers and are therefore already connected. We forget that the *yatīm* is here to show us the importance of connectedness and the dreadfulness of being separate and lonely. Keeping our distance from the orphan is a kind of inverted worship of Unity. We are worshippers of Allah’s Oneness at all times, and therefore feel we have to outwardly connect with those who are already connected, and reject those who are separated.

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ

7 And find you straying and so guide you?

وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ

8 And find you in need and so make you free from want?

The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, was also *yatīm* in the sense of the darkness of not having direct knowledge of Allah. So Allah says, “Did He not guide you to the right Path?” Allah guided the Messenger until wherever he looked he saw the hand of Allah.

And Allah found the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, destitute many times, and gave him provision. All of us are in need of provision. ‘*Ā’il* (**عائل** ; poverty) also means “dependent,” and thus we have the word ‘*ā’ilah* (**عائلة**), which means “family.” We all depend on something, we all need security, in the physical sense as well as the spiritual. The Prophet was, *amīn* (**أمين** ; trustworthy). He was honest and straightforward, and he trusted in Allah. Soon the wealthiest woman of the Quraysh tribe the most sought after unmarried woman among them, married him and gave him all that she had, and this caused many people to try to create trouble between them. They used to say to her, “See how all your wealth is being squandered by the Prophet!” Rather than being dismayed, however, she took pride in his use of it, satisfied that the wealth she had made available to him was being used in the way of Allah.

فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ

9 Therefore, as for the orphan, do not oppress him.

Every one of us has gone through the experience of being *munfarid* (**منفرد**), of feeling alone in this world, of being at a loss, of fearing for our provision and of being filled with feelings of insecurity. Looking back, however, we see that we are better off now, because now we have more knowledge and experience. As a result of these, we can now thank Reality fully, and the way we can thank Allah is described in this ayah and the following two. We must not control, oppress, suppress, overcome with power, or wield power over

the orphan, or over anyone who feels separated and isolated in this world.

وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ

10 And as for the one who asks, do not drive him away,

This refers to anyone in need, whatever his need may be, whether it be wealth or knowledge. He may be selfish, but he considers himself in need, and so he has come to us. Since his need may be real, we should not send him away. We have to help each other in this life, and alleviate each other's suffering.

وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ

11 And as for the favor of your Lord, speak of it!

Allah is saying, "There is only the *ni'mah* (نعمة ; bounty, blessing, favor or grace) of your Lord, so thank Him by talking about it, by making it evident, by making it available, by setting it forth." If it is a house we consider to be *ni'mah*, then we should use it, make it available, and put it to its proper use by opening its doors and filling it with guests. This is how we can talk about the *ni'mah* of Allah, about the *rahmah* of Allah. Most people, however, especially Muslims, are afraid of this. Nowadays, for example, if we ask a shopkeeper in the bazaar if his business is good, he may respond negatively because he is afraid that an affirmative response will bring a request for money. What is the use of a *ni'mah* if it is not lived, if it is not recognized and shared? Many people end up accumulating funds which they keep hidden away, unused.

Allah is encouraging us to talk about whatever good comes to us. When this becomes a habit, it will bring us positiveness, and we will become optimistic, which is our real nature as human beings afloat in the ocean of Allah's bounty. In reality there is only a "bright future," because the ultimate is nothing but the brightness of the *nūr* (نور ;

light) of Allah. We all eventually reach that Light, so why should we make ourselves and other people miserable along the way? Why are we disturbed? Our troubles are simply the result of our being put into a processor in preparation for experiencing that final reality.





SURAT AL-INSHIRAH

THE EXPANSION

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This surah is very closely connected to the preceding one, and some commentators consider it to be a direct continuation of Surat ad-Duha. In any case, it is also addressed to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, and by extension to all who would follow in his footsteps.

الْمُنشَرِّحَ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ

1 Have we not expanded your breast for you?

Sharaha (شرح) means “to uncover, disclose, to explain, to make clear or apparent,” and “to expand.” *Sharaha* also means “to cut.” In surgical usage, the word *tashriḥ* means “the cutting of sections of flesh so that what is inside can easily be seen.”

Ṣadara (صدر) means “to return, go back, turn away (from water, a country, a place)” and *ṣadr* (صدر) is “the bosom, breast or chest.” If a person says he want to “get something off his chest,” this something is not, of course, a physical object. Rather, it is something which he has taken upon himself, so that he feels constricted or burdened, as though he can no longer breathe freely. By relieving him-

self of this weight, by “expanding,” that which is far is made near and that which is difficult is made easy.

The ultimate *sharḥ* (شرح ; exposition, explanation) is the knowledge, the direct witnessing that there is only Allah. This is the final *sharḥ*; there is nothing beyond it. There is no relief beyond direct witnessing.

This ayah is directed to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, and therefore to all of us. Allah is saying, “Did We not relieve your breast of the burden of your ignorance?” But as there cannot be one without the other, the burden of ignorance was replaced with the burden of prophethood, but that burden too was relieved by having the secrets of the cosmos revealed to him.

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ

2 And alleviated your burden for you,

Wazara (وزر), the root of *wizr* (وِزْر ; burden, heavy load), is “to bear or carry [a burden].” From it comes the word *wazīr* (وزير), usually pronounced vizier in English, meaning “a minister, vice-regent or counsellor,” that is, someone who helps the ruler and who, by taking on burdens from the king, takes on the burden of the state. This ayah means that we are relieved, and that we have no responsibility other than to be the slaves of our Creator. If we truly take on slavehood, then we are no longer burdened in the same way as before, but rather we only discharge our responsibilities and obligations to Allah, without adding any more weight to ourselves.

الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ

3 Which had so heavily weighed down your back?

This is again a metaphorical reference. There are those of us who appear to take on heavy burdens, although, in truth, no burdens exist. If we maintain ourselves in a state of *dhikr*, aware that at any moment

our breath may stop, and that we will soon return to dust, then we will realize that we can only serve and try to do our best. There is nothing else for us to do. We may not consciously attract trouble in this world, yet the world's trouble will come and find us. If we do not take on people's concerns *fī sabīli'llāh* (in the way of Allah), if we do not help people, serve, and guide them, troubles will come to afflict us.

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ ط

4 And raised up for you your remembrance?

Allah says, "And raised you high in *dhikr*," referring to the outer *dhikr* (**ذِكْر** ; remembrance, esteem) of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. We cannot have a higher outer *dhikr* than the Name of Allah. The Prophet's inner *dhikr* was his perpetual, constant, uninterrupted awareness of his Creator, and his *dhikr* of his Creator was the highest because of all Allah's creation he was the closest to Him.

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

5 For certainly with every difficulty there is ease,

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ط

6 Certainly, with every difficulty there is ease.

This means that "With *the* difficulty there is ease," and again, "with *the* difficulty there is ease," indicating that there is only one difficulty. This means that with every difficulty there are two eases or solutions. One solution is that the difficulty will pass: it may not pass

by itself, but it will ultimately pass by our slipping away from it through death. The second solution is for the true seeker; it lies in knowledge of how the difficulty originally arose and in seeing the perfection in it.

A person may, for example, make the mistake of visiting a dangerous place and is hit on the head. He may not have known all the factors involved, whether the people there were plotting this or not, but he will experience the blow. Once he sees how it came to pass, how perfect! His head will hurt but that hurt will pass – that is the other ease. With the difficulty of feeling separation, comes the relief of knowing that we are connected.

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ

7 So when you are freed, remain steadfast, expend!

The *shari'ah* meaning of this ayah is that once we have finished dealing with the world and with our responsibilities in it, we will be ready to seek direct knowledge of the Divine Reality. According to the interpretation of this ayah by the people of Ahl al-Bayt, when we have finished our formal prayers, we should go on to the next stage, that of staying up during the night to engage in more prayers, *dhikr* and study. When we have finished our duties towards creation and towards our Creator, then we should do more, and expend ourselves to the utmost. This inner struggle and effort is the literal meaning of the word *jihād* (جهاد), which is usually translated as “holy war.”

وَالِى رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

8 And make your Lord your exclusive object (of longing)!

When we put our desire to know into practice, if we desire knowledge, then we will *become* knowledge, and if we put into practice anger, then we will *become* anger. Once we have laid the groundwork

necessary to discharge our duties, then we will be authorized to make Allah our sole object. Discharging our duties first is essential, however, for otherwise we will be acting out of the desire to escape.





SURAT AT-TIN

THE FIG

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

وَالتِّينِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ

1 By the fig tree and the olive tree,

In our traditions, the fig-tree represents the tree of Sayyidna Adam, *'alayhi-s-salām*, and the olive-tree represents the tree of the prophet Ibrahim, *'alayhi-s-salām*. In the traditions of the people of Allah, the fig-tree also refers to the Mosque of Ilyas in Palestine, and the olive-tree is the mosque of the prophet Musa, *'alayhi-s-salām*. The *Ṭūri Sīnīn* is also the mosque of Sayyidna Musa, *'alayhi-s-salām*, and the *balad al-amīn* of the following ayah is the mosque of the Ka'bah, the mosque of the Muslims. So the "land made secure" of the third ayah is also the mosque of Nabiyy-Allah Ibrahim, *'alayhi-s-salām*.

The *tīn* (تين ; fig) and *zaytūn* (زيتون ; olive) are basically the fruits or products of the Garden, and it is in that sense to which they are referred. They have come from the greater Garden to the outer garden; they are representatives of where these great prophecies have taken place, which is why we say that they come from Paradise. It does not mean that they miraculously appeared from Paradise, but rather, that the areas from which these prophets came and the cultures of their people were based on these trees. If we examine

the function of these fruits, including that of dates, we find them to be the thread that links various cultures through time. Although civilizations come and go, these trees remain constant. Their hardiness enables them to live for hundreds of years and continuously bear fruit, though they may be wrinkled and old. They are like an echo of truth, linking era after era. Armies battle and kill each other, but the trees remain.

وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ

2 And by Mount Sinai,

This is where Sayyidna Musa, *'alayhi-s-salām*, had his recognition of Allah and came face to face with knowledge. It is where his heart opened, where he saw the truth. And it is also where he later took forty of his closest men to experience the truth for themselves.

وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ

3 And by this land made secure.

Some people of the Path say that this is the heart of the *'ārif bi'llāh* (**عارف بالله** ; knower or gnostic of Allah). In the language of the Path, they call the heart of such a one, "The city of peace." Outwardly, it means Mecca.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

4 Certainly, We created man in the best form.

By the evidence of all of this, man has been created in the best conformation, in the most harmonious and symmetrical form, and with the most potential. This is how the Creator intended man to be.

تَمَرَدْنَا هُ اسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ

5 Then We reduce him to the lowest of the low.

From the physical point of view, anything that is green and succulent will eventually become yellow and dry, barren and dark. Anything that is created will be destroyed. As we see man grow up in the best form, in the most erect and perfect symmetry – young, virile, active and healthy – so too will we see him stoop and start once more to bend over, as though he were shrinking back to his childhood. It also means that in the inward sense if he goes to the extreme end of the spectrum of his *nafs* he will become worse than an animal.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ

6 Except those who believe and do good works, so they will have an unending reward.

Human nature is divine, but man sometimes allows himself to gravitate downwards. For those who trust and believe, man is created here in order to have his breast expanded, in order for that which is already near to be recognized as near. It is not enough to have trust in the abstract sense. We have to act on that trust so that we actualize it. If we do not do this we are left either with theoretical knowledge or with empty ritual. A ritual without a philosophy is merely ignorant folklore and a philosophy without a ritual is just an intellectual exercise; either one alone is meaningless. The two must be combined through man because man is one, and he is the unifier.

The reward for those who believe is unending because their reward is their very state and the state of self-abandonment is unending and boundless.

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدَ بِالذِّينِ ط

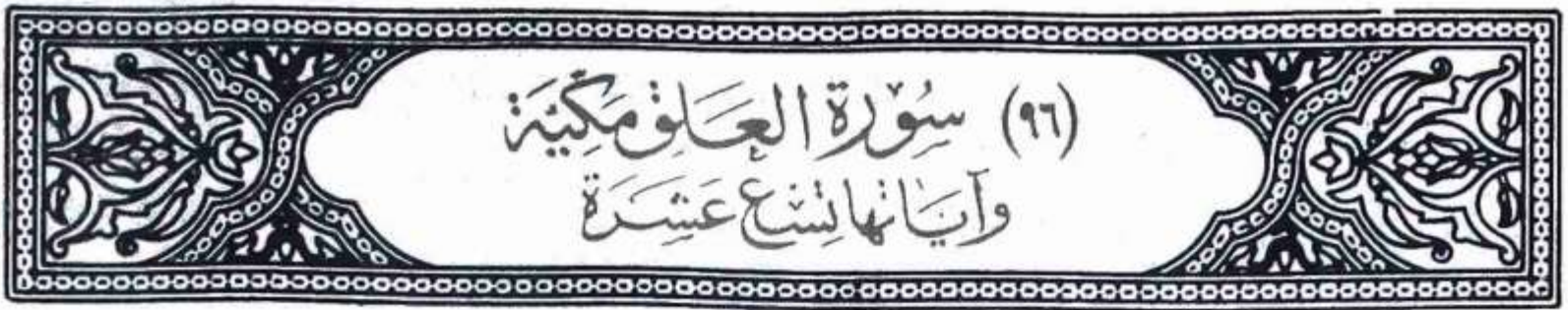
7 Then who can give you the lie after this about the judgement?

After these visible evidences, the gardens, the trees, the outer trees as well as the inner trees of knowledge brought by the repeated message of prophethood – after all of this – how can we deny our debt? How can we deny that we are here only to unburden ourselves of this debt to our Creator, to execute our transactional obligation to Allah in the fullest way? How can we deny this truth?

الْيَسَّ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمِ الْحَاكِمِينَ

8 Is not Allah the most Just of the judges?

Is the Creator not the most Just, the most Firm in judgement? Does not the whole creation embody absolute justice? If we do not act accordingly and do not recognize the signs, then we will continue to flounder about without guidance, causing ourselves great loss and harm.



SURAT AL-'ALAQ

THE CLOT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The beginning five ayats of this surah are generally regarded as the first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. This surah concerns the awakening of the intelligence and knowledge that is already within the reader. It concerns self-knowledge and the reading of the record, the reading of the engraved tablet.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

1 Read in the name of your Lord Who created.

Iqrā' (**اقراء** , from *qarā'a* **قراء** ; to read) means "Read!" This was the injunction that came to the Prophet, who is referred to as being illiterate, *ummi* (**أمي** , from *ammā* **أمي**), but the translation of the word as "illiterate" or "unlettered" is generally misunderstood. There is no merit in being unlettered as such, and if the Prophet had been illiterate, there would have been something amiss. The Prophet himself encouraged literacy among his people and was constantly accompanied by readers and scribes.

Ummi also means "maternal or motherly." *Umm* (**أم**) means "mother," or "source." His knowledge was from the One Source. When we say *ummi*, we mean that he was himself the record, and that he read the record of what he was.

The *Rabb* (رَبّ ; Lord) is that entity which brings us up, that energy or that attribute of Allah whose function is to elevate everyone to his full potential. That is the purpose of Creation. The order is to read with the license of recognizing the purpose of creation. See creation in its entirety. See the one reality which manifests as a *Rabb*, a sustainer, or lord. The word "*Rabb*" is translated as "lord," but it means much more. It means "Sustainer." It is by virtue of His grace that man is sentient and is sustained with air.

By the time these ayat were revealed to him, the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, had already been regularly spending days, weeks, and months in meditation in a cave in order to penetrate the layers of his *nafs*, thereby following the path of all those before him who followed the dictum, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." The path towards the knowledge of lordship, of sustainership, is by way of the recognition of what is closest to us, which is all the different selves, or aspects of ourselves.

Like other seekers before and after him, he went to solitary places for his periods of reflection. For the true seeker, this is not escapism, but a direct, positive attempt to find out where he comes from by reflecting upon what is closest to him, that is, his own self. Finally, he may reach a point of neutrality in which hardly any more of that self is left and it has been recognized in all its aspects by the seeker. He will have seen every angle of the so-called personality.

When this has been seen, the seeker moves on single-pointedly to blacking out, symbolized by the Black Stone of the Ka'bah. He moves toward a state of no attributes, reaching, as the Sufis say, close to the suns of essence, moving away from the stars of attributes. First, he quietens his actions. Next, he moves into a subtler realm of attributes, and from there he crosses the boundary of essence. From that point on, one is traversing another realm. This process is not directly discernable or describable; another set of rules begins to apply. It is a no-man's land where no one can help anybody else, except by discussing its outer boundaries. It is an experiential state that everyone interprets differently. It is like an event which causes a great shock and which everybody tries to describe in a different language. It is a taste, a higher taste; it is a great opening. It is the explosive germination of the heart.

This opening is, of course, devastating as we see from what happened to Sayyidna Musa, *'alayhi-s-salām*. It is a shattering experience; it is not simply another experience of life, but rather of another realm. We can only go so far in understanding knowledge and information regarding our realm of consciousness which is in fact an aspect of a higher consciousness. It is like the story of a person who lives under water. He has a good consciousness of what is under water and he

understands what goes on there. He may also have had quite a lot of glimpses of what is above water. But it is a different experience to actually *be* above water. No matter how much he may be prepared for it, it still is a shock, and when this occurred to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, he was in such a state of shock that some people even said he had gone mad.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

2 He created man from a clot.

That reading, through *‘ilm al-ladunī* (علم اللدني ; intuitive, inner knowledge), reveals to him how creational reality came about, and why. We are given the entire story of man in this realm, in this cycle, in the word *‘alaq* (علق ; blood clot). The word *‘alaq* also means “leech,” and is from the root *‘aliqa* (علق) meaning “to hang, adhere, be attached, conceive.” The word indicates that Reality created man from something that hangs on, from a tiny little thing that latches on – the sperm united with the ovum – and stabilizes into an *‘alaq*. Development can only take place if it becomes attached in the womb. So creation is brought about by something that is merely hanging on – even as the earth is suspended in its course within this speck of the cosmos.

Biologically, the creation as we understand it now, is described perfectly in the Qur’an. We just need to dare to look at the words carefully and understand their inner meaning, and not gloss over them.

We must read, see, and understand man’s situation intuitively, through our own inner nature. We are not separate from it. Man and all that occurs within and without come from one Reality. We must read by virtue of the generosity given by the most generous Sustainer and Lord.

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

3 Read for your Lord is Most Bountiful

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

4 Who taught by (the use of) the pen,

Qalama (قَلَمٌ) means "to cut, clip or prune something."
Qalam (قَلَمٌ) means "pen or pencil." It is the instrument by means of which one leaves one's mark; one inscribes something and it is recorded forever.

It is also the pen that has recorded how this creation is to be maintained, sustained, and returned. This creation is contained and maintained, and the laws within it apply by means of subtle energies that are within it and that guide it, the *malā'ikah* (ملائكة) as they are called in the Qur'an. Although *malā'ikah* is translated as "angels," which to most of us evokes the image of winged beings, it is more accurate to call them powers, forces, or forms of energy. They ensure that what has been written, that is, the laws that govern all aspects, visible and otherwise, of the cosmos, are integrated, are contained and maintained, and are following their course.

It says in the Qur'an that if all the trees in the world became pens and all the oceans turned to ink, even these would not suffice to write the wisdom of the Creator. The meaning of this is that every possibility, every permutation and combination of these possibilities, in meaning or form, exists. The number of possibilities is unfathomable. This is the meaning of the pen. It is the pen that wrote out the creational tablet, the *qadā' wa qadar* (قضاء وقدر), the decree and destiny. It has a purpose, a direction, an end and a return, and it is all within the one creational command. This, then, is the pen which wrote.

When this occurred to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, it was as though he instantaneously saw the writing of the pen in its entirety. He experienced this overwhelming truth and saw its genetic codations. Whatever we can comprehend of it is already encoded in us genetically.

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمُ

5 Taught man what he knew not.

He taught man what he did not know, meaning that man was unaware of his potential for knowledge. He taught man, who was only looking in front of him, that he was in fact unaware of what was before him and what was behind him. In other words, He taught man *tawhīd* (divine unity), He taught him connectedness with past and future, because there is neither past nor future. They exist only in our illusory dimension of time, and from the point of view of reality, the non-temporal dimension, they are only aspects or products of it. This ayah is concerned with knowledge that cannot be transmitted from one to another, but which can pass only between man and the Creator, where there is no separation. When man completely becomes a nonentity, then the One and Only Entity takes its course. This is *'ilm al-ladunī*.

This first revelation (that is, these five ayat) caused the Prophet utter shock, because he did not expect to face Allah, know Allah, or see Allah, for he was beyond that. He already knew there was only Allah — *lā ilāha illa'llāh*.

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ

6 Nay! Man is most surely a transgressor,

The quest for self-knowledge begins by looking at what is closest to us, that being the lower nature of man, his fears, lusts, anger, despair, and lack of trust. At all times the arrogant, lower nature of man is such that it causes him to transgress, *yatghā* (يَطْفِي). He assumes one of the attributes of Allah, and so he becomes arrogant. This is in his nature, however, because he is automatically and spontaneously moving towards Allah.

There is only one creation, and so we must accept the whole of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an it says that some of the people of the Book — of other revealed books, which are versions of the one and only Book — accept only parts of the Book. They try to take from it only what they wish to use for power or other purposes, but this cannot be done.

Thus, we will always find the beginning in what is nearest to man himself, and that is what lies on the path of ease (*yusr*). To take the easy way is to follow one's *nafs*. Thus, what is nearest to man is what arises and afflicts him from his lower nature, that is, his anxieties,

fears, anger and so forth which exist primarily because of his arrogance. Man's arrogance stems from the mistaken notion that because he is here on this earth, he has to put the earth right.

The true purpose of our being here is for us to become fully awake, to know why we are here. Once we have awakened to that, then everything else will follow. We have, however, forgotten the priorities and do not want to address such a difficult issue. It is exactly like the tale of Mulla Nasruddin who, upon losing his ring, searched for it under the street light. Others came to help him search. Finally, when asked if he was certain he had dropped it in this spot, he said, "No, I lost it there," pointing to his house. The others asked incredulously, "Then why are you looking for it here?" "Because it is dark where I lost it, and it is light out here."

We only want to address ourselves to the easy questions. We do not want to ask ourselves why we are here. That is a difficult question and to answer it takes time, effort, and reflection. Man's nature is to be arrogant, arrogant in more than one sense, not only in the sense of self-aggrandizement. That arrogance will easily be taken care of by old age. We are speaking of arrogance in the sense of man not questioning his state, his position, his purpose, not questioning his nothingness or the fact that at best he is only hanging on air. At his healthiest, man is like a balloon blowing himself in and out, not questioning himself, oblivious of the fact that this is his capital and everything else is but a passing moment. Not questioning — this is *tughyān* (transgression), inner *tughyān*. At any moment he may drop dead. Will he leave contentedly? Will he leave the railway station with an open heart for his journey?

آنراہ استغنیٰ

7 Because he sees himself free from want.

One of the reasons for our arrogance is that we imagine ourselves to be self-sufficient. *Istaghna* (استغنیٰ): he appears independent, thinks he is independent, rich, self-sufficient. He is not connected, he is not in *tawhīd*, he is in separation.

إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرُّجْعُ ط

8 Surely to your Lord is the return.

To your Lord, to your Sustainer, to that Reality is the return. Everything is sustained by the Sustainer.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ

9 Have you seen him who tries to stop

عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰ ط

10 A servant (of God) from praying?

The example given here is about actual historical situations, which apply at all times. We see how people who forbade others who wanted to worship and pray – as happened in the case of the Prophet, who was constantly the target of Abu Jahl's effort to stop him from praying near the Ka'bah – were completely at a loss.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ الْهُدَىٰ

11 Have you considered if he was on the right way,

أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَىٰ

12 Or enjoined fearful awareness (of God)?

This means they are completely the opposite – they are neither on the path, nor have they *taqwā* (تقوى ; fear of transgression). They have no insight; they deny and lie. Lying is covering of truth. The truth is within them but they do not want to be exposed to it because it contradicts whatever values they uphold.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ

13 Have you considered whether he gives the lie to the truth and turns away?

أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَىٰ

14 Does he not know that Allah sees?

The answer is here. He knew the truth inwardly, but he did not act on that knowledge. He did not see that Allah saw him. He did not realize that whatever he did, whatever he intended, wherever and however he moved, Reality, which permeates all, which contains all, which controls all, knew it. Reality is the All-Knower. Only the man who is at a loss does not know this.

كَذَٰلِكَ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ لِنَسْفَعَا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ

15 Nay! If he desist not, We will seize him by his forelock –

نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ

16 A lying, sinful forelock.

Nāṣiyah (نَاصِيَةٍ) is the forelock. It is as though by being caught and dragged down by the forelock he is thoroughly humiliated. A person who is at a loss, a person who denies the truth within him, ends up by being caught in a situation akin to this. It is like the treadmill of existential punishment, being at a loss here and now, as well as in the hereafter.

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ

17 Then let him summon his council;

سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ

18 We will summon those who thrust (into hell).

This is a reference to the forces and powers that are at play in this existence. *Zabāniyah* (زَبَانِيَةَ) here implies the angelic powers and forces and their prevalence as the powers that completely and directly apply destiny's dictum, applying, in the sense of which was spoken earlier, what the pen has written.

كَلَّا لَا تَطِعُهُمْ وَأَسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ السَّجْدَةَ

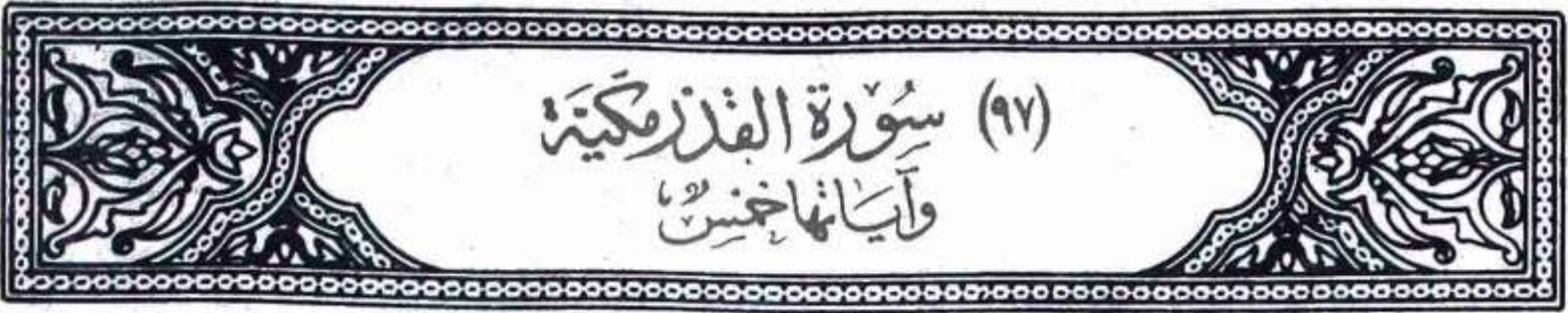
19 Nay! Obey him not, but prostrate yourself and draw near (to Allah).

Do not obey these people who deny the truth, who deny that the purpose of this creation is to know the Lord. The way out of that is to become close to Allah. Closeness to Allah is by *sajdah* (سجدة), by prostration, which is the outer proof of inner abandonment. Outer prostration is the manifestation of an inner state: if it is not, it becomes an empty ritual. *Sajada* (سجد), the root of *sajdah*, also means "to obey," meaning to obey the purpose of existence. The purpose of existence is merciful and benign.

Another meaning of *sajada* is "to submit," and through that submission comes freedom. The only freedom is the recognition of no freedom. The only freedom is the direct inner recognition that there is absolutely no possibility of freedom. From that comes the ultimate freedom and release which is the real and infinite freedom, freedom that is beyond our creation and after our end. Our purpose is to be in that state of inward drunkenness and outward sobriety, inward abandonment and outward courtesy and correctness. In this state we become awareness itself, not aware of something. This then is the outer manifestation of *sajdah*, of prostration, which is spontaneous. It is the only human position and it is the final as well as the first human position.

It is only after that that one can talk about responsibility, because then one starts from a foundation which is always available. In other words, if we want to know what is right or wrong, we have to be aware at all times that we are dead. We must be in a state of total abandonment, otherwise, we will do nothing more than make value judgements, and act as a carry-over of our past.

Abandonment is freedom, and from that freedom comes action which is much more than mere re-action. The quest for freedom is usually a reaction to self-imposed shackles. Let us first try to free ourselves from these individual shackles before embarking on the quest for real freedom.



SURAT AL-QADR

THE DECREE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The Power that created all the creational systems made them according to a measure, the Decree (*qadr*; **قدر**), by which all creational manifestations are brought to their destiny, *qaḍā'* (**قضاء**), and final judgement. In this surah we are given a glimpse into an aspect of the meaning of *qaḍā' wa qadr* (**قضاء و قدر**; destiny and decree).

Qaḍā' means "fate, destiny, judgement, justice, decree," and "that which has passed," and while *qadr* means "measure, decree," it also means "destiny" because it is according to a measure that things unfold and develop. The judgement, or the final destiny, of any created thing follows according to its measure, its *qadr*, for if it did not, there would be chaos. These measures may fluctuate and interweave within definite bounds, but there must be a measure in order for man to know the limits and to gain knowledge of the world.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

- 1 **Certainly, We sent it down on the Night of the Decree.**

Laylat al-qadr (ليلة القدر) is the Night of Power, or the Night of the Decree. The knowledge of what is written descended on the night of power and was made known to the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. Thus it is the night when he was empowered with knowledge, the night when the hidden tablet was unveiled to him.

وَمَا أَدْرِيكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

2 And what will make you know what the Night of the Decree is?

When questions like this arise in the Qur'an, their purpose is to glorify what is being described. In this case, the question glorifies the night on which this event occurred. For each of us there is a possibility of *laylat al-qadr*. Our awakening to our fullest potential occurs on our night of *qadr*. It occurs when we see the Power behind the power in creation, or the power of the Powerful One, Who is Allah, and we experience the power of inner knowledge. The night of *qadr* occurs according to each person's capacity.

"The Night of the Decree" is that night of revelation when the heart opens, when the tablet within man's heart is unveiled, when the direct recognition that there is only Allah, and that everything which comes into creation comes through that single power, is experienced. This tablet does not contain encyclopedic information: it contains direct knowledge.

It is related that Imam Ghazzali was once travelling on a long journey with all his books. A robber suddenly confronted him and the Imam told him to take anything he liked, but to please leave him the mule loaded down with his books. To his great chagrin, however, the robber said, "But that is precisely what I want," whereupon he stole them all. Nine or ten years later, Imam Ghazzali met the same man again in the street. The robber asked him, "Do you remember me?" The Imam said he did not. The man then said, "I was the one who rescued you by taking away all your books. I was the cause of your gaining knowledge. When all that information you were carrying was taken from you, you obtained knowledge!"

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

3 The Night of the Decree is better than a thousand months.

The Arabs often use seven or seventy or a thousand, or multiples of those numbers, to indicate a great number. Here *alf* (**الف** ; a thousand) means “a vast number.” If we suddenly understand something, we realize that the one day in which we were awakened is better than years of ignorance. In a period of ten years we may remember two or three days that were critical, which contained those moments that changed the entire course of our lives and the way we saw things. Those days brought more to us than a thousand months.

Our traditions relate that the Prophet once saw monkey-like figures preaching from his mimbar in Madinah, and it is said that by this sign he predicted that for a thousand months after his death, unworthy leaders would misguide the *ummah* (**أُمَّة** ; the community of Muslims). One night of opening, the descent of the Qur’an, the revelation of the truth upon the Prophet, more than compensated for the thousand months of misguided leadership. Its truth is eternal, therefore, its light will always overcome darkness.

تَنْزَلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ

4 The angels and the spirit descend in it with the permission of their Lord, with all the commands.

Rūḥ (**روح**) means “spirit, soul.” It is related to *riḥ* (**ريح**), which means “wind.” *Rāḥah* (**راحة**), which means “comfort, contentment, or ease,” also comes from the same root, as does the word *rā’iḥah* (**رائحة**), which means “perfume” and *mirwahah* (**مروحة**), which means “fan.” The implication here is that the spirit is like a wind; it is as subtle as a summer breeze. The spirit is blown into the body and later blown out of it. Like the wind,

its subtlety is balanced by its forcefulness. It says in the Qur'an, "They ask you about the soul. Say: the soul is one of the commands of my Lord" (Al-Isra':85).

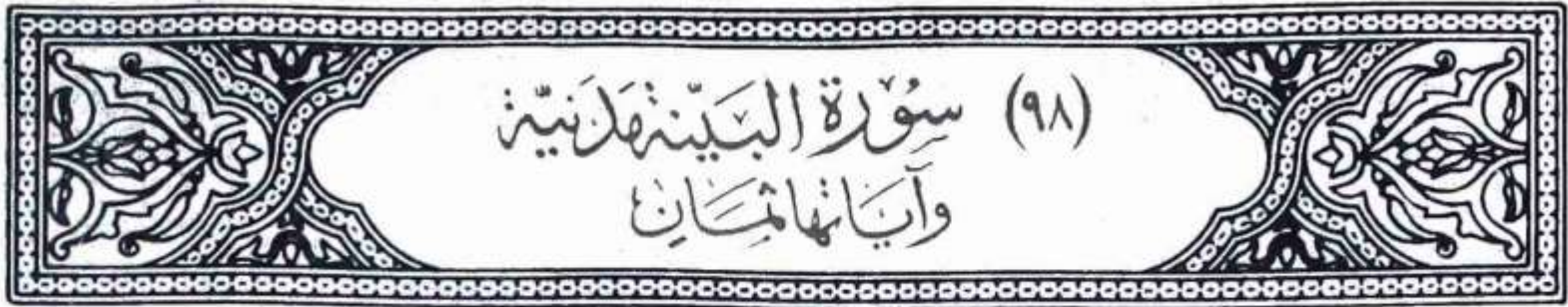
On that Night of Power the All-Mighty, All-Powerful Lord extends His mercy of knowledge and opens up the skies, and the angelic powers and forces fulfill their merciful duty of bringing forth clearly the message and knowledge of *tawhīd* and the command and control of the Lord.

سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ

5 Peace! Until the break of dawn.

From the knowledge that all creation exists according to a measure and is moving toward a destiny according to that measure, comes the peace of certainty. This inner certainty, which illumines all possible outer manifestations, brings about an equilibrium and balance that renders the awakened being in a state full of harmony and unity. The meaning of that peace, which is the result of knowledge, resides inherently in every heart. For the seed to be unearthed, the heart must be purified and made open. The seeker of the knowledge of Allah spends his days of darkness and nights of vigil awaiting the descent of the opening, and when that occurs it is like the crack of dawn.

Fajr (**فجر**) means "dawn, the first light of the morning." *Fajara* (**فجر**), the root of *fajr*, means "to crack, to break out, to explode." The state of the heart of the knower is hidden in the darkness of the night but is illumined inwardly. It is outwardly in darkness yet bright with inner light, outwardly quiet but inwardly active and dynamic in the sea of knowledge. Most spiritual work is done from late at night until the dawn, when outwardly there is the least physical action and therefore a maximum possibility for inner action. The root of everything lies in its opposite. The root of the most beautiful, soft, white, ravishing lily lies in mud just as the root of maximal inner action lies in outer quietude.



SURAT AL-BAYYINAH

THE CLEAR PROOF

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Most Merciful

لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِينَ
حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ

- 1 Those who denied (the truth) from among the people of the Book, and the idol worshippers, could not have separated (from the faithful) until the clear evidence came to them:

In the Qur'an, when there are historical references to specific events, we can take them as applying equally to us in modern times. Those amongst the people who consider themselves to be of the Book, who deny and cover up the truth, will continue to be in doubt and in that state of denial until the blinding evidence comes to them. Even when it does come, however, they will persist in their denial. People who want to deny will continue to deny, and people who want to doubt will continue to doubt.

رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُطَهَّرَةً

2 A messenger from Allah reciting pure pages,

The implication here is that some of the physical, recorded books that had come down before the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, were not totally intact, but were either altered or else handed down in an incomplete version. This is one of the meanings of *muṭahharah* (**مُطَهَّرَةٌ** ; pure). The Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, confirmed all the prophets before him; he did not bring anything new. The Qur’an repeatedly relates what happened to earlier prophets such as Sayyidna Musa, Sayyidna ‘Isa, and others; the same occurrences constantly repeat themselves, with the only changes being in the setting and the social coloration. In essence, man’s lower and higher natures are the same at all times.

فِيهَا كُتِبَ قِيمَةٌ

3 Containing true and sound ordinances.

وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ

الْبَيِّنَةُ

4 And those who were given the Book were not divided until after the clear evidence came to them.

Al-bayyinah (**الْبَيِّنَةُ** ; from *bāna*, **بَانَ** , to be clear, evident) is the evidence of the last Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, that is, it is his book. *Tafarraqa* (**تَفَرَّقَ**), from *faraqa* (**فَرَّقَ**), means “to become split up, scattered, divided and differ-

entiated," and in this case, it refers to people who were divided in accepting the message of the Prophet Muhammad. When the evidence came to them, confirming what they had in their hands and purifying it from wrong interpretations, some of them accepted it, and some of them did not.

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَ
يُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقِيَمَةِ ط

- 5 And they were not commanded (to do) anything but to serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, upright, and keep up the prayer, (purify themselves by) paying the poor-rate, and that is the right religion.

The order, the command of Allah, the command of Reality, was nothing other than to sincerely worship Allah, the Creator. *Hunafā'* (حنفاء) are those who establish the full prayers, uphold the *dīn*, and perform purification and charity. The command of the Creator is only to adore and worship Allah.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ
خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ ط

- 6 Certainly, those who cover up among the people of the Book, and the idolworshippers, will be in the fire of Hell, remaining in it; they are the worst of creatures.

If we deny the one and only repetitive message which tells us how to be safe, how to conduct ourselves, how to reach our fullest poten-

tial in this existence by means of *ṣalāh* (**صلاة** ; prayer), and *zakāh* (**زكاة** ; the paying of poor-rate, thereby purifying oneself), then there is loss and *shirk* (**شرك** ; associating other-than-Allah with the Creator). Those who deny the message and the purity of its descent, which has come in the form of evident, revealed books, are already in the state of the Fire, in the state of agitated *jahannam* (**جهنم**). *Jahannam* is the bottomless pit wherein there is neither stability nor peace, neither life nor death, but instead, constant agitation and turmoil. Man always seeks stability; this is his nature. The ritual prayer should be performed on firm ground because in our prayers we are seeking the knowledge of Allah, Who is the Permanent, the Everlasting, Ever-continuous. That which is not stable is not truth; it is only information.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ

- 7 Certainly, those who accept and perform right actions, those are the best of creatures.

جَزَاءُ لَهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَ
رَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ

- 8 Their reward is with their Lord in gardens of perpetuity, beneath which rivers flow, abiding in them forever; Allah is well-pleased with them, and they are well-pleased with Him. That is for him who fears his Lord.

On the other hand, those who trust in Reality (*āmanū*, **آمنوا** , from *āmana*, **آمن** ; to trust, accept), who have

peace and security within themselves, who have *īmān* (إيمان ; trust, faith, belief) that they will come to know, who have trust that what the revealed books contain is the absolute truth emanating from the Absolute Reality, and who translate that trust into correct actions, they are the best of creation. The inward state of trust in Allah's all-encompassing mercy must be translated into action, otherwise it will remain abstract.

Jazā'uhum (جزاؤهم) means "their reward," and this reward from the Sustainer comes in the form of gardens fed by underground rivers. This implies that they are fed by energies that are not visible. These rivers, or energies, are the higher attributes of man, such as forgiveness, generosity, and nobility. The people of trust are forever in that state, because once a person experiences that state, or even catches a glimpse of it, he veers more and more towards it. The Qur'an repeatedly tells us that ultimately the foundation of the Path is patience. That is why we need encouragement, because we are human beings and we measure things by time.

Patience is reason. This is the state of a person who trusts that his *'aql* (عقل ; intellect, reason) will be sharper. He will come to know in a way that will make his life, his behavior, and his environment better. This is positive *īmān* translated into action. From the moment of attaining complete trust and putting it into practice in this world with all its constrictions and limitations, these people are promised eternal gardens. They will be in a state which other people regard as already having elements of heaven. They will not, however, be isolated from others, nor artificially protected. There is no protection. There is no separation.

"Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him." They are in a state of *riḍā'* (رضا ; contentment), and here it means contentment which stems from knowledge, not superficial optimism or mere positive thinking. *Riḍā'* comes through knowledge and is an aspect of perfection. At all times that which occurs is perfect, and if we make no judgements about events we will see perfection in them. If, however, we have prejudged a situation and are full of opposition, then we will see it only from our own narrow viewpoint.

Let us look at the substance of comedy. The audience sees what is happening and laughs, but the clown does not know that the bucket he turned upside-down was full of paint. From his viewpoint, it is a tragedy. If we take the viewpoint of the *shāhid* (شاهد), the "witnesser," then we will eventually reach the positive state of *riḍā'*, of contentment with knowledge.

Looking at a half-empty glass, we do not see the full half and say,

“That is very good! Half of it is full!” Human beings do not like something only half full; we want all of it to be full. Half of the glass is empty, however, because half of its contents were drunk. Therefore, we must accept the situation in its perfection. However it presents itself to us, we must accept it with knowledge, with heart and head combined. When that acceptance happens, “Allah is content with them, and they are content with Him.” Reality is content with us, and we are content with Reality. When that happens, everything in existence is content with us, because we are completely and ecologically in tune.

“That is for him who fears his Lord.” The door to *riḍā*, the door to contentment is *khashiyah* (خشية), which means “positive fearfulness.” This is a fearfulness of transgressing, a fearfulness of taking on a task which we did not outwardly measure correctly, let alone inwardly, a task for which we lacked a clear intention when we took it on. Before we move again, we should ask, Why? When we say, “*Bismi’llāh*,” we perform our actions in the Name of Allah, and there is nothing of us in them. They will succeed or fail and in either case we say, *al-ḥamduli’llāh*, “The praise belongs to Allah.” We acted for Reality’s sake, and if we did not succeed that is because Reality did not want it, even though we did our best.

Khashiyah, then, is fearful awareness, the first stage before *taqwā* (تقوى ; safeguarding with fearful awareness). A person with this fear foresees the likely outcome of following a certain destructive path and so withholds himself from taking it. *Khashiyah* also means “prevention.” It means to be wary of transgressing, fearful that transgression will come back upon us. That is why we say *astaghfiru’llāh*, and with this phrase we beseech Allah for *ghufrān*. *Ghufrān* (غفران) does not mean “forgiveness.” There is no such thing. There is only One, Single, Unifed Reality, so who can forgive whom? *Ghufrān* means to be protected both from actions emanating from us without the right intention or the right knowledge, and from what we have done in the past that we did not do in the Name of Allah, and which will come back to us. This is *ghufrān*, this is the forgiveness that is meant. Forgiveness is not a dialogue between two people, because that is *shirk*, that is duality. What we desire is full realization of our state of *tawḥīd*; we desire oneness, with no separation.



SURAT AL-ZILZAL

THE EARTHQUAKE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Most Merciful**

This surah describes to us an aspect of the beginning of the end of time. Scattered throughout the Qur'an are descriptions of how creation began, how it will come to an end, and how the next creation will take place. Here we are given a model of when creation will reach its fullness and stop, thus signalling the beginning of the next cycle in which the universe will collapse upon itself. This model is comprehensible to us by virtue of the language which appeals to our physicality and our basic humanity.

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا

**1 When the earth quakes with her (violent)
quaking,**

Here we are given a very vivid picture of the earth shaking, of it actually being convulsed. This will be the earth's final surrender of its solidity and apparent firmness. It will be like a return to the time when the earth was molten liquid, before the mountains came to rest on the molten metal of its mantle. This will be the same process, but in reverse.

“When the earth quakes . . .” indicates that the event *will* occur. If we are able to envisage the tablet containing the entire span of creation within ourselves, we will see this event contained therein and we will be able to stop time within ourselves. This is what happened to the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, on the *laylat al-qadr* when the Qur’an was revealed to him and total knowledge was unveiled to him. He was eager to transmit it in its entirety, but the ayah came which said, “Do not be hasty, it will all unfold.” He wanted to impart the knowledge that what we regard as solid and firm, that is, all of material existence, will come to an end.

وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا

2 And the earth casts forth her burdens,

Athqāl (اِثْقَال , the plural of *thiqal*, ثَقْل) means “burdens, heaviness.” We consider the earth to be solid and heavy, but this tells us that an event will take place in which the earth will begin to fall apart. The word *athqālahā* can also apply to those of us who have taken heavy weights upon ourselves.

وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا

3 And man says: What has happened to her?

And then man, *insān* (اِنْسَان), who seeks familiarity, questions himself. Suddenly that dormant state of his original being is reactivated and reawakened, causing him to question what is occurring.

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُخَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا

4 On that day she will tell her news,

At this time everything will be revealed for what it is. There will be no more hiding, no more keeping secrets and deeds within ourselves. The zone of action will be removed and there will no longer be any possibility for us to cling to the layers of our *nafs* which hide every possible thing.

بَانَ رَبِّكَ أَوْحَىٰ هَاطُ

5 Because your Lord will have inspired her to.

That your Lord inspires the earth means that this earthquake was prescribed and that it will occur at the correct moment. The earthquake will come at the command of the Sustainer, the Creator. It has been predetermined since everything in this reality contains its destiny within itself, and all the destinies are interlinked, with the invisible Subtle One connecting them.

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ

6 On that day men will go forward in groups to be shown their actions.

Yaşduru (يَصْدُرُ) is from *şadara* (صَدَرَ), which means “to go out, go forward, to originate,” and “to bring back.” *Şadr* (صَدْر) means “front, chest, or breast,” and *maşdar* (مَصْدَر) means “source.” So here it means that men will rush out; they will be sent forth.

‘Amal (عَمَل) means “action,” and denotes the outer grossification of one’s intentions. The moment referred to in this ayah, however, will not take place in the zone of action. According to the Qur’an, in this realm of existence where *sharī‘ah* prevails over *ḥaqīqah*, we first perceive the solidity of things and then we search for the subtlety of their invisible essence. In this realm, therefore, the solid overwhelms the subtle.

In the next experience it will be the reverse and the first thing we will perceive will be the subtle elements. We will clearly see our inten-

tions and who we really are. This does not mean that a sculptor will suddenly see all his sculptures standing before him. We will not see our works in that sense, but rather their essence. The Prophet, *ṣallāllāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, “Actions are only as good as their intentions.” We will see our intentions in the next realm; we will see our hearts, which at the present moment we are too frightened to look at. We will see what we have done, what our innermost intentions were, and what was the genuine motivation for all of our actions. At that moment we will see if we acted in order to know Allah or to simply appease reality and please others.

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ

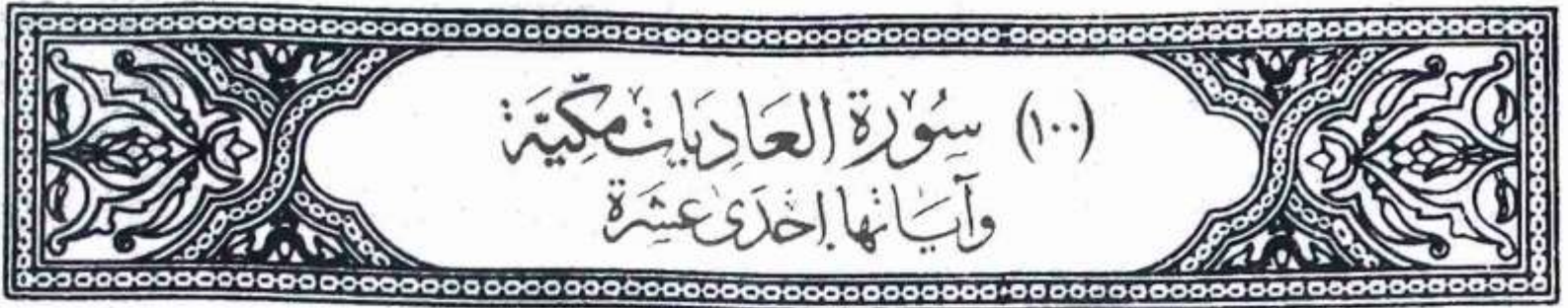
7 So he who has done an atom’s weight of good will see it,

Whoever has done even an atom’s weight of goodness and has acted out of a pure intention, *fī sabīli’llāh* (**فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ** ; in the way of Allah), for Reality’s sake, will see his good actions before him.

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

8 And he who has done an atom’s weight of evil will see it.

We will see everything unfolded fully. Elsewhere in the Qur’an, we are told that the *Yawm al-qiyāmah*, the Day of Judgement, is the equivalent of 50,000 of our years. On that day we will see everything as if it were in slow motion. Imagine that in anger a person beat a child, and that someone else secretly recorded the incident. Imagine the agony the person will experience upon seeing and hearing that recording being played back. This is an example of what will occur in the next life.



SURAT AL-'ADIYAT

THE CHARGERS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The culture in which the Qur'an was revealed was a desert culture in which the camel and the horse figured prominently. Therefore, many references are made in the Qur'an to both *ibil* (ابل ; camels) and *khayl* (خيل ; horses). The word for horses, as a collective noun, is also related by root to *khāla* (خال), which means "to imagine, think, suppose," and *khayāl* (خيال), which means "imagination, fantasy, shadow" or the mental faculty of forming images or concepts of objects not existent or present. This mental faculty is one of the most important phenomena of existence, one, in fact, upon which the experience of existence is based. The first five ayats are, in a literal translation, about horses.

وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحًا

1 By the chargers panting,

Al-'ādiyāt (العاديات) is derived from the verb *'adā* (عدا), which means "to run, gallop, dash or race." *Ḍabḥan* (ضبحا) means "snorting, panting, or breathless from running too fast." The horses are charging as if at an enemy. This could also refer to either the charging of enemy forces against the Muslims, or

the charging forces of *īmān*. Some men of Allah look upon this ayah as referring to the charging of the *nafs* when it is in the higher realms of *dhikr*.

فَالْمُورِيَاتِ قَدْحًا

2 Then those who strike fiery sparks,

This is another description of this charge, this *himmah* (**هَمَّة** ; zeal, longing), this plunge, outbreak, or eruption. The sparks of fire striking – the inner meaning of this could be the dried-out tinder of the *nafs* when the spark of *'irfān* (**عرفان** ; direct knowledge) sets it aflame. It again implies force, power and direction. We can see in this ayah a situation of struggle and battle, the clash of two opposing forces, the confrontation between *īmān* (trust, acceptance) and *kufr*.

فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا

3 And those that rush to make raids at dawn,

The word *ṣubḥ* (**صبح**), which means “dawn, morning,” here implies opening up enemy territory, opening up darkness by the light of morning, opening up our own inner darkness by the light of Allah.

فَأَثَرُنَا بِهِ قُبْحًا

4 Then raising clouds of dust by it,

Mulla Sadra always referred to the purification of the self as the shedding of dust from the body, that is, the transcendence of the body. He referred to it as being thus both in this world and in the world to come. The raiders, charging and striking sparks, stir up the

dust that was already there, for dust is *adīm* (أديم ; the crust of the earth), the first, the lowest, and that from which Sayyidna Adam, 'alayhi-s-salām, came.

فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا

5 Then by it rush into the center of the throng:

Suddenly these raiders find themselves in the midst of the enemy, in the center of the gathering. A person can suddenly be in the center of the gathering of his own *wahm* (وهم ; illusion), of his inspirations, of his own *nafs*. He can suddenly find himself in the middle of a gathering of those whom he considers to be in *kufr*. Suddenly his whole subjective world is toppled over without his having any forewarning.

It is an event the dynamism of which we can all see: that energetic rush with an objective, a mission, in which the basic elements appear, the sparks of fire and dust, the movement into the center, and the ultimate discharge of breath, through panting and breathlessness, which is a result of that zeal. We are suddenly given a kaleidoscopic view of what we can witness of outside events in our own hearts. We are shown a panorama of events and actions in the outer world which are mirrors of what transpires in the inner.

Then suddenly we come to the nature of man, his invisible, discernable nature, nature which we can all examine, take note of, and reflect upon, so that we can go beyond what is closest to us, that is, beyond the natural, lower tendencies of man.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ

6 Most surely, man is ungrateful to his Lord!

The most prevalent tendency in man is *kunūd* (كنود), which means "ingratitude or denial of the truth." Man denies the mercy, generosity, and *ni'mah* (نعمة ; blessing, comfort) of

Allah. It is his nature to do so because there is within him a seed of independence which echoes an attribute of Allah, the Ever-Independent. Man, in his arrogance, pretends to be independent.

وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ

7 And most surely, of that he is a direct witness.

Within man there is something deeper than ingratitude, which is the consciousness of consciousness, and it makes him witness himself in that situation. Man is himself a witness of his own self when in that state of ingratitude. This witnessing could not take place unless there were something already within him which is even higher than the *nafs*, or unless the higher *nafs* shed light on the lower *nafs*. The lower *nafs* denies, doubts, is insincere, and changes its color according to circumstances, while the higher, intellectual consciousness sheds light on the lower. The light of knowledge is inherent in man, but he has to let that reflect into his inner eye, so that he may see clearly. What man sees depends on the eye through which he sees, whether through the eye of his lower *nafs* or through his higher, inner eye.

وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ

8 And most surely he is firm in his love of wealth.

It is man's nature to want to be "tied" to what is good — *shadīd* (شَدِيدٌ ; firm, strong) coming from *shadda* (شَدَّ), which means "to draw tight, to bind." He loves what he considers to be good, although what appears to be good for us now may not appear to be good for us at another time.

أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ

9 Does he not know, when what is in the graves
is raised up,

Man wants protection and comfort and he also wants to be left alone with his own values. This ayah asks us, "Does man not realize that what is hidden in the heart, what is hidden in the graves, will eventually come out?" In the end we will all be thrown out of our graves and what is hidden in the heart now will be revealed in the next experience. Eventually, whatever is buried or hidden away will be unfolded in truth.

وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ

10 And what is in the breasts is brought to light,

Ḥaṣala (حصل) means "to obtain, attain," or "to cause something to happen." What is hidden in the breast will be exposed and made manifest. This can happen now if we truly desire to know what is in our hearts. The purpose of this existence is to attain unity, to unify what is in our hearts with our actions, through clarity and cognition.

إِنَّ رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَبِيرٌ

11 Most surely their Lord, on that day, will be
fully aware of them.

The day when that unification or opening occurs, that day will be the day of the wisdom of our Lord. Lordship is what leads us towards *tawḥīd*, towards oneness. In order to gain wisdom from our experience in this life we must trust that whatever is decreed will also be exposed and brought to light in the perfect knowledge of our Lord.



SURAT AL-QARI'AH

THE CALAMITY

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

الْقَارِعَةُ

1 The sudden calamity!

مَا الْقَارِعَةُ

2 What is the sudden calamity?

وَمَا أَذْرِيكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ

3 And what will make you understand what the sudden calamity is?

Qara'a (قرع) means "to knock, hit, beat, to scold, rebuke,

impugn, to get the better of someone, to fight, to clash.” *Al-qāri‘ah* (القارعة) is the name of the second call that will herald the start of the Resurrection. The first and second calls will sound for the purposes of inspiring awe and of glorification. The last call — “And what will make you understand what the sudden calamity is?” — stretches our imagination and our awe, enabling us to echo within ourselves the understanding of that finality.

يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ

4 The day on which mankind will be like thickly scattered moths,

This is a description of that shattering event, presented in such a way that we can understand. *Farāsh* (فراش) means “moths or butterflies,” the word’s root being *farasha* (فرش), which means “to spread out.” The word *mabthūth* (مَبْثُوث) comes from *baththa* (بَث), which means “to unroll, to unfold in a dispersive way.” In modern Arabic it also means “to transmit by radio,” implying the spreading or scattering of energy-wave-bands in a way that is not necessarily physical or tangible, since spreading news is not necessarily a physical act. People will be as scattered moths, but not necessarily in confusion or chaos. They may appear to be confused, but their dispersion will be similar to the transmission of radio-waves in that it will be directional.

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ ط

5 And the mountains will be as puffed up wool.

Nafasha (نفش) means “to puff up,” and “to swell out or ruffle.” The mountains, so firm and solid now, will revert to their original reality and become like puffed wool since they are not made of anything but the command: “Be!,” *kun* (كُن).

فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ

- 6 Then, as for him whose measure of good deeds is heavy,

فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ

- 7 He will live a pleasant life.

This means that he whose actions, intentions, seriousness, awareness and *dhikr* in this life were heavy in the sense of substantial – which is to say constant, measured, and persistent – is the one who will be in a perfect state of contentment, *ridā'* (رضاء).

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ

- 8 And as for him whose measure of good deeds is light,

فَأَمَّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ

- 9 His abode is the abyss.

And he whose measure was light, whose actions in this existence were of no consequence, will be as much at a loss in the next life as in this. *Umm* (أم) means “source, origin, foundation, essence or mother,” from the verb *amma* (أم), which means “to lead the way, to go.” So those whose actions outweigh their right actions, their destination will be a bottomless pit, an abyss, *hāwiyah*, from the verb *hawā* (هوى), which means “to fall, to tumble down.” This de-

scribes the final fall which will have no end in that zone of timelessness.

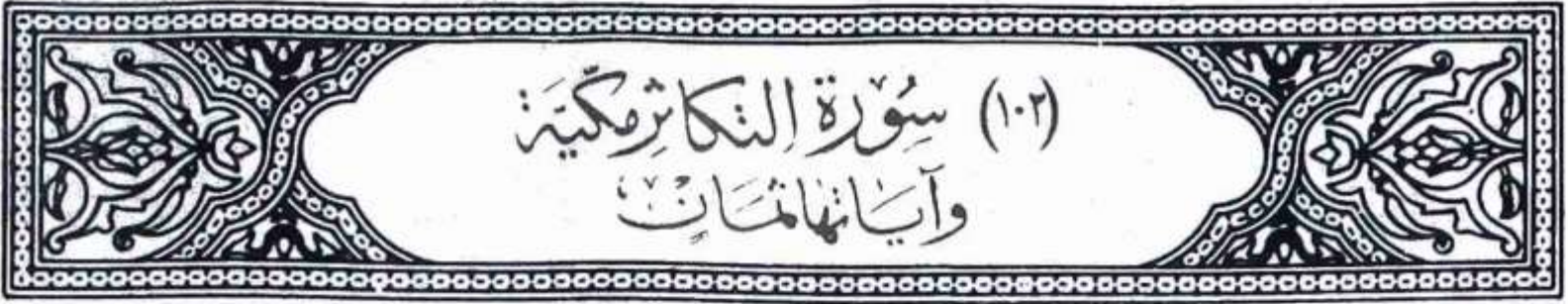
وَمَا أَذْرِيكَ مَا هِيَّطُ

10 And what will make you know what it is?

نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ

11 A blazing hot fire.

And what do we know of it? We can only experience a taste of it here. We can only experience *an-nār aṣ-ṣaghīrah* (النار الصغيرة ; the smallest fire). *Ḥāmiyah* (حامية) comes from *ḥamā* (حمى), which means “to become very hot, to flare up, to glow, and to fly into a rage.” This is a description of that fiery state. If we are aware of the state of agitation that arises from wrong action, then we have had a slight glimpse of what the Fire is.



SURAT AT-TAKATHUR

THE MULTIPLICATION OF WEALTH

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Man worships the Essence of bounty, of increase (and everything in this world increases), and thus he inadvertently looks for increase in every aspect of life even though it may mean a decrease in another way. For example, an increase of one's arrogance or expectation is in reality a decrease of one's awakening, of one's light.

أَلْهَيْكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ

1 Abundance distracts you,

حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ

2 Until you come to the graves.

The specific reference of this ayah was to a time when the number of the Prophet's followers was being counted by his enemies in Mecca, the Quraysh. They would continually congratulate themselves

for outnumbering the Muslims, but in calculating their strength in numbers they would also count their dead. Each family wanted to show itself as more powerful than the others, and to do this its members went to the cemeteries and counted their dead so as to be able to claim that there were more of them.

A similar example is to be found in the story of the man who boasted arrogantly about his great wealth, wealth of which, in fact, he had little, and which, during those times, was measured by the number of palm-trees one owned. Whenever anyone asked about the number of trees in his plantation he would say, qualifyingly, "I and the Naqid family have 3,500," although of the figure he perhaps owned only six. We count many things in this life as being among our strengths, and often they are almost non-existent.

Another way of looking at these ayat is that the grave represents the body. If we look to our bodies as strengths, then we are not looking in the right direction.

Thus, these two ayats are saying, "Your wealth, family, tribes, and their number bring you pride, and that is the opposite of fear." The object of our life is to be in a state of awareness, of *dhikr*, in which we see that anything which distracts us puts us in a state of forgetfulness. In truth, however, anything other than Allah is non-existent. If we try to see anything other than that which is, has been, and will be, then we are indulging in false thinking.

Increase is one of our first troubles because it brings about its own affliction. If we have wealth, then others try to take it; if we have family, then we have to ensure constant provision, and so on. Abundance brings about distraction unless we are totally on the path. If it is *fī sabīli'llāh* (in the way of Allah), then it will be Allah's business. The dead things we count as increase are of no use, whether they are belongings, relatives or supporters.

كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ

3 Nay! You will soon come to know.

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ط

4 But nay! You will soon come to know!

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ ط

5 Nay! If you but knew with the knowledge of certainty,

We will come to know if only we seek the knowledge of certainty, *'ilm al-yaqīn* (علم اليقين). By carefully watching events, we will know their consequences, so that at least we will have certainty at the time of their end. In this life, however, there is an injunction upon all men and women to seek knowledge. The Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, said, "Seek knowledge, even though it may be in China." From the moment we are born we want to know. Knowledge here means inner knowledge, and true inner knowledge is certainty.

لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ ط

6 You would certainly see the fire of Hell;

If man seeks knowledge he will see hell, the Fire, here and now. Many people interpret this as indicating that the Fire will come later, and when asked about ayats which imply that the Fire is here and now, they say that its root is here and that it has been willed by Allah to be here, but that it will be manifest in the next life. Imam Rida, *'alayhi-s-salām*, says, however, that the Fire certainly is here, and that whoever denies it "is not among us, nor from us," and has, in fact, already been cast away. Man can see the meaning of the Fire here and now if he looks into his innermost heart, if he wants to have that inner knowledge.

ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ

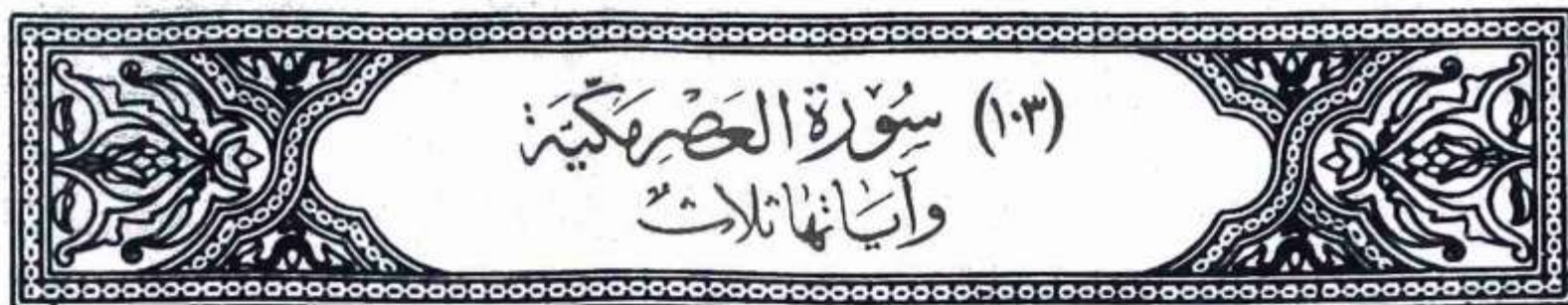
7 Then you will certainly see it with the eye of certainty;

First the Fire is known by *'ilm al-yaqīn* (علم اليقين ; knowledge of certainty), and if anything is left of us after that, we will see it by the *'ayn al-yaqīn* (عين اليقين ; the eye of certainty). After that we will come to know the truth of it in *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (حق اليقين ; the truth of certainty). If nothing is left of us after that, and we are only pure awareness, then we become *ḥaqq al-ḥaqq* (حق الحق ; the truth of truth). The state of the Fire is justice and absoluteness, clear and profound, in which obscurity or ambiguity will cease to be.

ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ

8 Then, on that day you will be questioned about the benefits and favors.

Then, on that final day, on the Day of Judgement, in that absolute state, we will be asked about the favors and comforts of life which we were given. We will suddenly see what we have squandered, and how we abused and denied the bounty of Allah and the potential we had been given of seeking knowledge and gaining it. What was *ḥalāl* (permitted) for us will be accounted for and we will be asked to account for the way in which we spent our time, whether it was spent sleeping, or waiting for the next meal, and so on. Then we will ask ourselves why we did not awaken to the certainty of this day, and we will see that we did not because we were distracted by the multiplication and increase of our wealth in all its form.



SURAT AL-'ASR

THE TIME

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

وَالْعَصْرِ

1 By the time,

'Asr (**عصر**) means "time, era," or "afternoon, the decline of day." It signifies the beginning of decline which comes after everything has attained its full height and has had its full exposure. At all times, as the next ayah declares,

إِنَّا لِلْإِنْسَانِ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

2 Most certainly man is in a state of loss.

Man's lower nature is to be at a loss. *Khusr* (**خسر**) means "loss, diminution." Man's basic nature is to be confused, swinging from one situation to another, from one dissatisfaction to another, from one illusion to another. His life is unsatisfactory because he is able to obtain neither rest, peacefulness, nor calm within it. This is the

normal state of *dunyā* (دُنْيَا ; the life of this world), whose fluctuations exhaust man. No sooner is one situation under a degree of control than he must move on to another which is hopelessly chaotic.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَ
تَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

- 3 **Except those who trust and do right actions, and enjoin each other to the truth, and enjoin each other to patience.**

These people are the exception because they will manage to transcend, to go beyond this natural state. There is nothing inherently wrong with the decline of man's state, which is described here, for it follows the natural arc of creation. We must remember that Allah says, "What is wrong with My slaves. They beseech Me, pray for ease and comfort in the world and I did not create it for that!" This was transmitted to us by the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, in a *ḥadīth qudsi*.

Once this situation of loss is recognized, we can extricate ourselves from it through submission, not through direct attack or through trying to control life. Only through submission, which does not mean escapism but rather trust in that what is behind all creation is absolutely secure, comes absolute gain. The way towards that trust is through *īmān* (إِيْمَان ; faith, trust), and *al-a'māl as-ṣāliḥāt* (الْأَعْمَالُ الصَّالِحَات ; good works).

Included in the call to prayer is the phrase *ḥayya 'alā'l-falāḥ* (حَيِّ عَلَى الْفَلَاح ; hurry to success!). This invites us to come to the success which arises out of submitting to the dilemma of man's state of loss. Out of the usual state of confusion and loss, success can come about first through the inner trust that we can be successful, that we can overcome this state, not through material means or by simply trying to gain control but by changing our attitudes. We cannot change the nature of *dunyā* no matter how much we try. Sheer power cannot overcome it, but changing an inner direction can, and that is *īmān* translated into *al-a'māl as-ṣāliḥāt*.

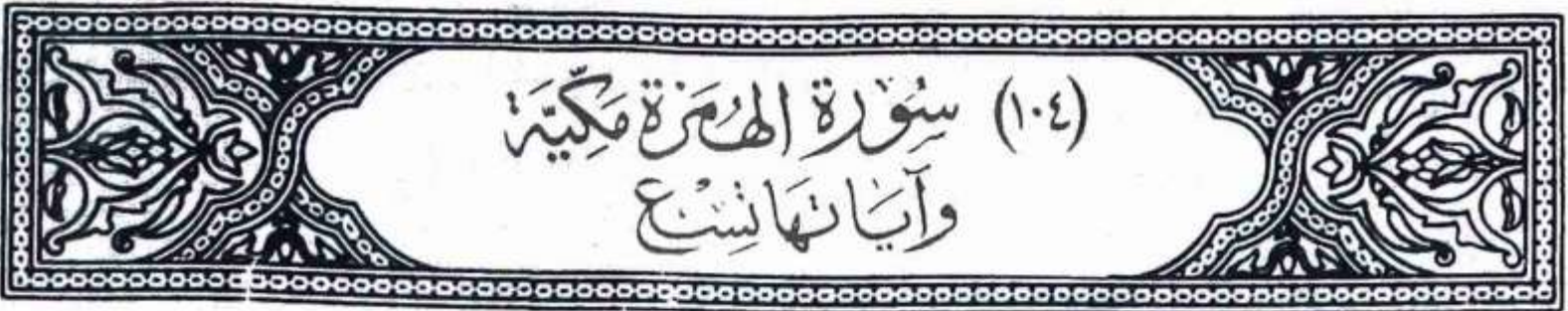
Waṣā (وَصَى) means "to admonish, enjoin, command, advise."
Wasiyah (وَصِيَّة) means "a will," the last and most impor-

tant advice that one leaves behind. The verb here is expressed in the plural because it refers to mankind. The implication is that in order to overcome that normal state of *dunyā*, other people must be involved; it cannot be done in individual isolation. Also implied is that among other people in a social unity lies the measure by which we can gauge ourselves. If we are with a group of people oriented towards truth and mutual reflection, then our lies, our *nifāq* (نفاق ; hypocrisy), will be exposed.

The foundation of all of this is *ṣabr* (صبر), “patience,” because Allah is the Ever-patient, *Aṣ-Ṣabūr* (الصبور). He is beyond time. Patience is the shrinking of time. For example, if we want to eat a fruit on the vine which is not yet ripe, we know we have to wait seven days before it is ready to be eaten, and so we agree to wait. What we have done is to freeze a week of time into “zero time.”

The surah begins with *‘aṣr* and ends with *ṣabr*, and shows us that time has come from Allah, from Non-time. The surah begins with what we experience, cyclical events, and ends with the foundation, unshakeable and unchanging: *ṣabr*. When the ninety-nine Names are written or recited the Name *Aṣ-Ṣabūr* is usually the last, because that attribute is the basis, the foundation for creation.





SURAT AL-HUMAZAH

THE SLANDERER

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

These particular ayats were addressed specifically to the people, several names of whom have been suggested, who were against the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. They were all people of great wealth and supposed strength who constantly bragged about their might and wealth and mocked the Muslims.

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ

1 Woe to every slanderer and backbiter!

Wayl (وِيل) means “affliction, distress,” and is translated as the exclamation, “Woe!” It evokes one of the rivers of the Fire. “Woe to every slanderer or defamer!” In human nature there exists the tendency to seek reassurance, and therefore we seek only those companions who reinforce the validity of our actions.

Humazah (هُمَزَةٌ) means “a slanderer,” or “back-biter.” In the Arabic language the *hamzah* (ء) is a glottal stop, and the *hamazāt ash-shayāṭīn* (هَمَزَاتُ الشَّيَاطِينِ) are the evil suggestions of the devil, the subtle whispers that we find within us.

Lumazah (لُمَزَةٌ) means “a fault-finder,” and comes from the verb *lamaza* (لَمَزَ), which means “to give someone a wink, to

“speak ill of someone, criticize, censure, backbite, defame.” The person who defames reveals his own weakness and announces his insecurity in the same way that the haughtiness of a man declares his deep uncertainty about himself. If he was totally certain that he was on the right path, if he acknowledged his dependence on Allah and realized that everyone would come to know the truth fully and absolutely, he would not give in to these subtle enticements to slander others. The truth of it is that his slander and arrogance reveal his sickness and disease, hence the warning of woe to him, the warning that he will be destroyed.

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ

2 Who amasses wealth and counts it (as a provision);

This ayah refers to those who collect wealth and take refuge and reinforcement in constantly counting it. Persistently accumulating and looking at what one has is another form of looking for security. The men of Allah say, “He who loves wealth is a hypocrite, and he who keeps wealth is ignorant.” The proof of *nifāq* (نفاق ; hypocrisy) and *jahl* (جهل ; ignorance) is in the collection and retention of *māl* (مال ; wealth).

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ

3 He thinks that his wealth will make him immortal.

Hasaba (حسب) means “to calculate, to reckon.” He imagines that he moves closer to *khuld* (خلد ; eternity) by counting and watching over what he wrongly imagines will give him longevity and permanency. His is a perverted worship. The Eternal is another attribute of Allah: *Al-Khālid* (الخالد). We all want to know the Eternal because only in that way will we be secure in the knowledge that only eternity exists. It is he who has completely slipped off the path who believes that what he has accumulated gives him security.

كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ

4 Nay! He will certainly be hurled into the crushing Hell.

Nabadha (نَبَذَ) means “to hurl, throw away, to reject, cast out, abandon.” By casting out what is useless or dangerous, we are protected from the evil in them.

Huṭamah (حُطَمَةُ) is another name for Hell, means “a crushing disaster,” and comes from *ḥaṭama* (حَطَمَ), “to shatter, crush, destroy.” Most certainly, a person who takes refuge in his health, in his wealth, or in anything of the visible world, does not trust that the hand of The Invisible is behind the visible. He will be cast out into that which causes nothing but destruction.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ

5 And what will make you comprehend what the crushing Hell is?

And what do you know of it? Another connotation of *ḥaṭamah* comes from the verb in its second form, where it means “to break,” implying that the object involved in the breaking, or crushing, is solid to begin with.

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُوقَدَةُ

6 The fire of Allah, ignited,

The crushing disaster is the Fire of Allah that is forever lit.

الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْآفِئِدَةِ ط

7 Which rises up to the hearts.

إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ

8 Certainly it will be shut tightly around them.

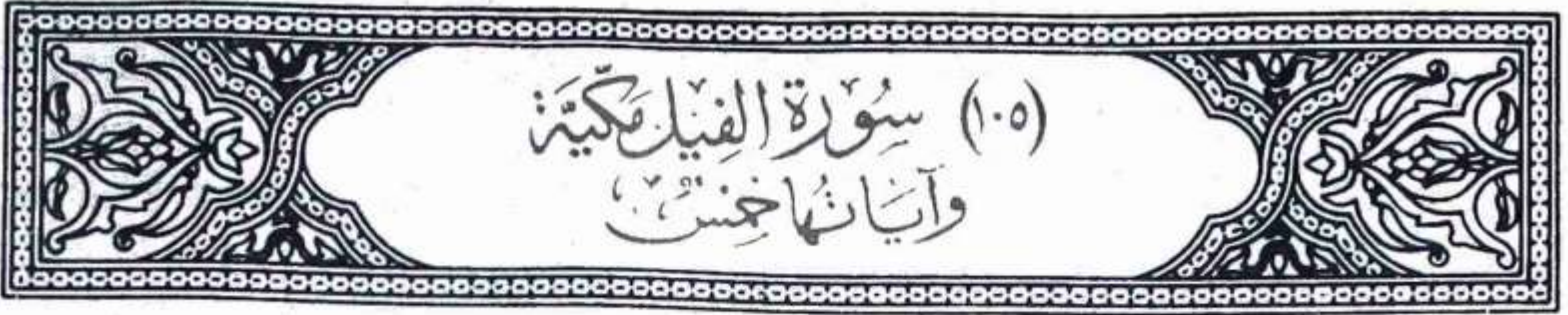
And that Fire of Allah is locked within the heart of man. It is the fire which causes him to be at a loss, to try to take refuge in material security, wealth and power. We see this in the present state of our culture, in that we have completely taken refuge in our imaginations and calculations. In this culture we imagine that what is of greatest importance is what is tangible or visible, but the visible is not the sum of what there is in this world; it is only one aspect of it, one manifestation of reality. There are other forces or powers behind the scenes.

فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ ط

9 In outstretched columns.

The Fire will tightly encircle the heart in extended columns, and form a burning wall created by the heart itself through its own ignorance. Some men of Allah talk about two types of fire: the fire that burns and inflicts pain, causing nothing but destruction, and the fire of knowledge. One normally interprets this surah, however, as being addressed to the people who are at a loss. Their hearts are locked up in the fire of the final, revealed knowledge.

Just as this surah is about those who take refuge in the discernable and material world and believe that there is nothing beyond it, the next surah explains by example the falseness of their beliefs.



SURAT AL-FIL

THE ELEPHANT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This surah refers to the event that took place, as far as we know, in the year of the birth of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. Although many people talked about it at the time, very few of the actual details of the event have come down to us. We know that people were very jealous of the residents of Mecca and the Quraysh, who, as guardians of the house of Sayyidna Ibrahim, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, that is, the House of God, held a position of great honor among the Arabs. One of their rivals was the Emperor of Abyssinia. Through his viceroy Abraha in the Yemen, he built what he believed was another Ka‘bah, this time in San‘a, to compete with the one in Mecca. This second ka‘bah did not attract pilgrims in the numbers the Emperor had hoped for, and so he sent a huge army, headed by elephants, to destroy the Ka‘bah in Mecca. He believed that San‘a could thus become the most important center of pilgrimage in that part of the world.

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ

- 1 **Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?**

What is of relevance here is the confrontation between apparent

strength and power of great magnitude with its direct opposite. The lesson is that real power is not measurable by ordinary means. The destruction of the army which had been sent to destroy the Ka'bah was not a miracle but, rather it was a natural phenomenon which heralded the birth of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, the shining forth of that great Light in the midst of darkness.

To understand the significance of the elephant we must realize that what weapons people possessed at that time were flimsy and scarce. In a land where warriors had, at most, a few thin spears and bent swords, the possession of an elephant meant that its possessor was regarded almost as an emperor.

الْمَيِّجَعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضَلِيلٍ

2 Did He not cause their strategy to end in confusion?

Kayd (كيد) means "an artful plot," or "scheme." Did Allah not make their plot go awry?

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ

3 And send down flocks of flying creatures onto them,

Abābīl (ابابيل) means "flocks," and it does not necessarily only refer to birds but also to large, overwhelming numbers.

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ

4 Pelting them with stones of baked clay.

Sijjīl (سجيل) means "stones like lumps of dry clay." It is

related to the verb *sajala* (سَجَلَ), which means “to record, write down,” or “document.” There are many interpretations of this ayah. We do not know what this phenomenon was, whether an actual storm brought a swarm of tiny creatures that inflicted this large army with *sijjil*, which penetrated their flesh, or whether a disease suddenly came upon them (many illnesses such as measles and small pox were not identified in those days), perhaps brought by birds and insects. Despite the fact that this occurrence was widely known and discussed, we still do not know the nature of the affliction, because at that time people’s understanding of natural phenomenon was not as ours is now. We know only that this mighty army was suddenly, totally, and utterly devastated, just as it was approaching the Ka‘bah.

فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ

5 So He made them as devoured straw.

The result of the attack was that the enormous army became like leftover stalks and leaves of grain or grass after having been beaten to a stubble and was razed to the ground. In some of the numerous descriptions, it is said that after this destruction the ground appeared as if a flat sheet made up of the thousands of men of the enemy army and their elephants had been laid down on it.





SURAT QURAYSH

THE QURAYSH

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Surat Quraysh is related to the previous surah, and traditionally many people recite the two surahs together as one.

This surah is concerned with the state of the people of Quraysh, as though the protection that came to them grew out of the uniting and the joining together of their hearts, for the purpose of enabling the Quraysh to become content and reconciled among themselves.

لِإِيلَافِ قُرَيْشٍ

1 For the protection of the Quraysh —

Īlāf (ايلاف) is a verbal noun which means “keeping, protecting.” *Alifa* (الف), the verbal root, means “to be acquainted, be familiar, to be or get accustomed to,” as well as “to be fond of.” It has the additional connotation of uniting. *Allafa bayna qulūbihim* (ألف بين قلوبهم) means “he brought together their hearts,” because that familiarity, that contentment with each other, that comradeship, grew out of knowledge.

إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ

2 Their protection during their trading caravans in the winter and the summer —

This ayah refers to the fact that the people of Quraysh would gather to outfit their winter and summer caravans. Outwardly they practiced constant movement, travelling during the winter and summer seasons. In the winter they headed south to the Yemen, and in the summer they travelled north to Syria. Winter and summer represent the dual aspects of life. Night and day were created for us so that we may sleep peacefully at night and work during the day in order that we, as human beings, can function, fluctuating constantly between two levels, between opposites.

فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ

3 So let them worship the Lord of this house,

The event of the elephant brought about the destruction of Abraha's army and enabled those of the Quraysh who were in *īmān*, who were the keepers of the Ka'bah, known as the people of Bani Hashim, to continue to worship the Lord of the House, the Lord of the Ka'bah.

الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ

4 Who feeds them against hunger and gives them security from fear.

This refers to those who have received the outer, gross, existential necessities, so that their physical hunger as well as their hunger for knowledge and the Source of certainty is satisfied, and therefore their fear is alleviated. They are brought into the peace of *īmān*, into the

state of trust in the perfection of all that befalls them, and thus they are able to keep the door of worship open for the benefit of the rest of their society. There are many traditions which say that as long as there are people whose worship is true, their community, their society, will be safe, and that Allah's protection of them will be according to the extent of their *tawakkul* (**توكل** ; dependence on Allah).





SURAT AL-MA'UN

THE DAILY NECESSITIES

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The majority of the following surahs, including this one, are regarded as Meccan, but a number of the ayats, such as Surat An-Nasr, whose place of origin is very clear, are said to have been revealed in Madinah.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْدِينِ

- 1 **Have you seen him who belies the life transaction (*din*)?**

فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ

- 2 **He is the one who rejects the orphan,**

Allah is asking, "Do you not see, do you not witness the one who denies the true *din*, the true way of living, the true way of worship, the true way of conduct?" Historically, many people were specifically identified in connection with the descent of this surah, including Abu Sufyan. These were people who had been asked by the one who was an outcast, the *yatim* (يتيم), or orphan, to help him. They were people who were wealthy, people who could give help. This ayah

applies to all of us now when we deny knowledge of a personal and direct nature, knowledge that there is only One Reality. In this respect, we are all subject to that state of rejection.

وَلَا يَحُضُّ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ

3 And does not urge the feeding of the bereft.

These people do not help, nor do they encourage others to do so. *Miskīn* (مسكين) describes a person who has even given up on being *faqīr* (فقير ; needy), a person whose *faqr*, whose poverty, has caused him to give up any rest or comfort whatsoever. He has dwelt in poverty to the point of absolute surrender in which no aspiration remains.

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ

4 So woe to the praying ones!

This is the true state of every one of us. If we regard our true state as that of *faqr*, of spiritual poverty, if we look at our helplessness in every respect, and if we totally submit inwardly, then we must recognize that we are all *miskīn*. Recognizing this fact, we have to outwardly help those who are immersed in that state of total poverty.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

5 Those who are neglectful of their prayers,

Sahā (سها) means “to be forgetful, neglectful, heedless,” and “to be negligent.” *Sāhin* (ساهن) means “forgetful or inadvertent.” *Sajdat as-sahw* (سجدة السهو ; the prostration of forgetful-

ness) is the practice of Muslims who miss one of the *rak'at* of a prescribed prayer by which they must make up for that forgetfulness by performing an added prostration.

This ayah refers to those who are not aware of the reality behind the prayers and who miss the meaning of *ṣalāh*. Outwardly, it means those who do the *ṣalāh* hypocritically, for others to see, who simply perform the outer movements as though trying to please someone looking on. The highest *iḥsān* (احسان ; supreme excellence) is real 'ubūdiyyah (عبودية ; worship, service), and real 'ubūdiyyah manifests in the outward, sincere establishment of the five prayers. The people referred to here, however, miss the point of the prayers; they miss the oceans of light that emanate from that repeated act.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاؤُنَ

6 Those who wish to be seen,

وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ

7 And refuse the daily necessities (to their fellow men).

Outwardly this is the least a person can do, to donate from his property, to share his goods with others for their sustenance. At that time this ayah was an injunction upon everyone to share. *Mā'ūn* (ماعون) in everyday Arabic usage means "the plate upon which food is served," and by extension means any useful article.

The meaning of this surah is that we must use every tool that is available to help others reduce their outer afflictions until they recognize the truth of the *dīn* which is incumbent upon them.



SURAT AL-KAWTHAR

THE HEAVENLY FOUNTAIN OF ABUNDANCE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

إِنَّا أَنْعَمْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ

- 1 Certainly, We have given you the heavenly fountain of abundance.

Kawthar (كَوْثَر) is derived from the root *kathara* (كَثَرَ), which means "to exceed in number, to be much, many or numerous," and also "to increase, to multiply, or to grow." The traditional description of *Kawthar* is that of a spring in Paradise, a spring fed by the rivers of love between Allah and the Muhammadi light, a spring to which we all have access if we but step in.

One of the slanderous accusations hurled against the blessed Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, was that he bore no sons or heirs. This surah demonstrates that he was the most prolific of men and that from his children and his grandchildren came thousands upon thousands of descendants. We do not know how many they number because many of them, out of fear or oppression, never spoke of their noble descent.

Kawthar is that point beyond which there can be no further increase. There we will experience the inseparable bliss of knowledge of

the One and Only Reality. We will be completely overwhelmed by that knowledge and nothing can be greater than it in this realm of existence.

Kawthar also implies the shoreless ocean of mercy, and of course there is nothing beyond the unfathomable. This final greatness is *al-Kawthar*.

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ

2 Therefore pray to your Lord and Sustainer, and make a sacrifice.

Wa'nḥar (**وانحر** ; and make a sacrifice) cannot be taken at face value. The definition ordinarily given for *anḥar* – slaughter or sacrifice – is derived from the root *naḥara* (**نحر**), which means “to cut the throat, to slaughter.”

Yawm an-naḥr is the Day of Sacrifice (10th of Dhu'l-hijjah), and on it we perform the sacrifice by cutting the throat of the sacrificial animal at the jugular vein, releasing its spirit in acknowledgment of the Master of the Spirits and of all the worlds. If we look at it in relation to this act, *naḥr* could also imply our sacrifice of the afflictions that others put upon us, the affliction of slander, or of reputation, or of whatever else may be inflicted upon us.

Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali's, '*alayhi-s-salām*, interpretation of *naḥr* was not at all concerned with the sacrifice of the '*Id. Naḥr*, he explained, concerns the inner and outer aspects of supplication in prayer, and the innate nature of *ṣalāh* which comes from this sacrifice, rather than the actual sacrifice itself.

إِنَّ شَانِكَ هُوَ الْآبَتُّ

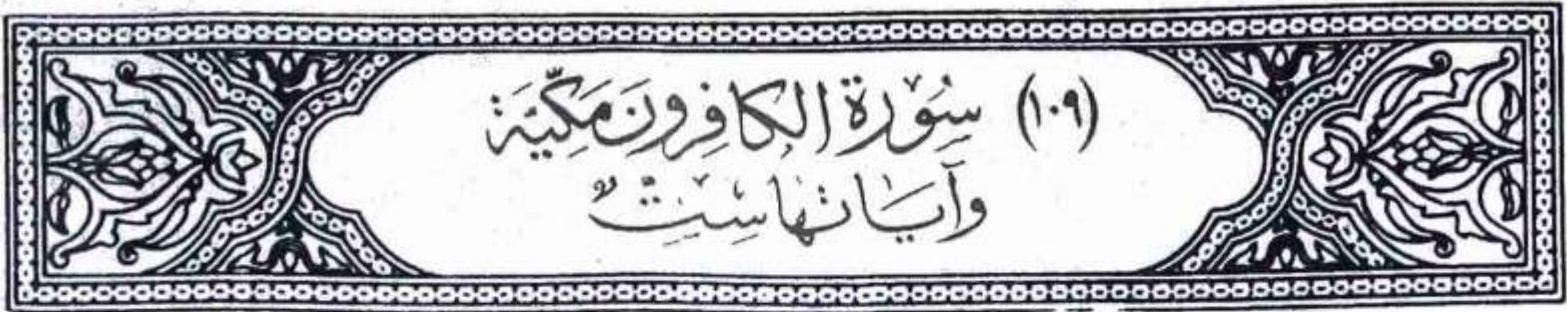
3 Certainly, your enemy is the one who will be without posterity.

This ayah refers to that individual who, by our traditions, was

known to have vilified the blessed Prophet by saying that he had no heirs or sons. It was revealed to the Prophet that the son whom this enemy accepted as his own was in fact not sired by him.

The meaning here is that he who renounces the Divine Light is himself cut off from that light by his renunciation. He who denies the truth that there is no other way of existence and of survival except through submitting to the One and Only Sustainer is himself cut off from that river, from that life-sustaining spring. It is for this reason that we pray, "May Allah gather us together at the pool of Kawthar." The pool of Kawthar can be tasted here and now, for it is in fact an elevated and pure state existing within the heart. It is illumined by the light of the most blessed being, Sayyidna Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, through intense love for him and through an intense and sincere attempt to imitate his *sunnah*.





SURAT AL-KAFIRUN

THE DENIERS OF THE TRUTH

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This surah pertains historically to a time when there was an attempt on the part of some of the unbelievers to enter into an exchange with the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, in order to draw him and the Muslims with him back into their old habits of idolatry. They proposed to worship Allah for one year, following the teachings of the Prophet, and the following year they, the Prophet and Muslims included, would worship the traditional idols. They would thus alternate their practices until one way proved true to either party. Thus, according to the *kāfir* way of thinking, if the Prophet's teachings were true, they would obtain benefit from following them, but if the *kāfirūn*'s practices were true, then they and the Muslims would benefit from worshipping the idols and most importantly, Islam would no longer be a threat to them. This surah is the reply of those who have trust and faith to those who do not.

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ

1 Say: O you who deny the truth!

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

2 I do not worship what you worship,

This is the affirmative stand of a person who is in a state of *īmān*, who has come to trust that he will recognize and taste the mercy of the One Creator. Therefore, he tells those who are in denial, in *kufr*, "I do not worship what you worship." The person in *īmān*, rather, worships that Source which gives him direct inner nourishment, keeps him safe from the darknesses which overwhelm others and gives him illumination and enlightenment. That Source increases him in *īmān* by virtue of his *'ubūdīyah* (worship) and protects him from all harm. Worship makes his journey *mu'abbad* (**معبد** ; easy, level, offering no resistance). By the recognition of his humility he is carried closer and closer to the Source of that spring.

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

3 And you do not worship what I worship.

In other words, "you have no access to that Source which I worship. You do not worship that subtle energy from which all these attributes emanate."

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مِمَّا عَبَدْتُمْ

4 And I will not worship what you worship,

"Nor will I ever, nor can I ever, having been enlightened, having had openings, having had knowledge of Allah, look up to or adore that which you worship."

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

5 Nor will you worship what I worship.

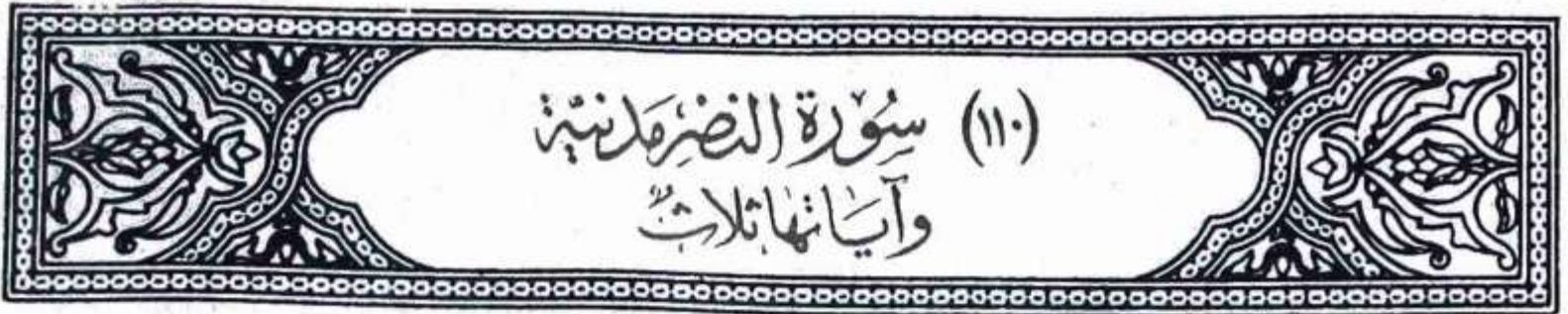
“Nor will you ever in the future worship the truth which I worship.” This is a prophecy which shows that those who are in *kufr* will persist in *kufr*. There are people who have been created as fuel for the Fire, as it says repeatedly in the Qur’an, and this fact cannot be altered. They will persist despite attempts to dissuade them, despite all efforts made to draw them into the light of the *dīn*.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

6 To you your religion and to me my religion!

The person of faith and trust, who is in a state of perfect equanimity and who knows that everything is in the hands of Allah, says in conclusion, “You have your way of transacting, the way which you choose to replenish yourself and interact with other people, with whatever entity you consider as absolute – and I have my way!” Then those of faith and firm belief join hands following the perfected method of the Muhammadi model. They are not illumined from without; their illumination comes from within. They walk along the shores of the sea of lights and these shores have their boundaries. This is the way of the *mu’min*, the way of perfect trust.





SURAT AN-NASR

THE HELP

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This is probably the last surah that was revealed intact, and it was revealed two months before the Prophet's death, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, when the Muslims entered Mecca in what is known as the "farewell Pilgrimage." At the final stage of this *ḥajj*, or pilgrimage, the chiefs of the Quraysh, who had fought against Islam to the very end, took refuge inside the Ka'bah, and the Prophet, together with his followers, surrounded them. Finally, however, the Quraysh were reprieved and the chiefs came out of the Ka'bah as if they had been resurrected from the grave, so imminent had been their deaths.

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ

1 When there comes the help of Allah, and victory!

Naṣr (نصر), from the verb *naṣara* (نَصَرَ), means "victory, help, aid." The events surrounding the revelation of this surah were significant because they presented many possibilities of great confrontations, which were always resolved in favor of the Muslims. People used to doubt the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, especially in moments of weakness and difficulty, asking, "When will the aid of Allah come?" When the real outer victories occur and are matched with what we know inwardly, then there is an inner victory as well.

وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا

2 And you see mankind entering the religion of Allah in hosts,

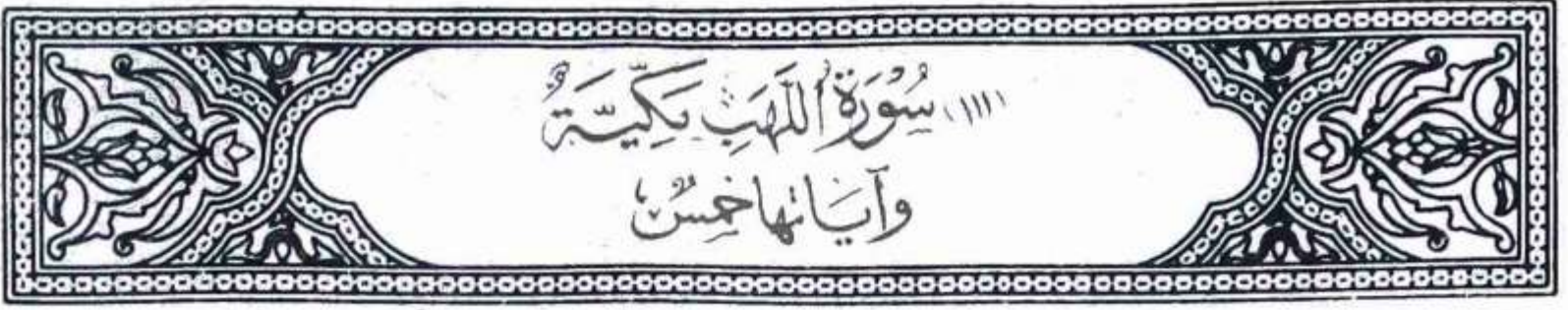
Peoples, whole tribes, came into Islam not long after this, and joined hands with the Muslims.

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا

3 Then glorify the praises of your Lord and seek forgiveness of Him – certainly, He is the One Who turns again and again (to mercy).

No matter what form these victories take, be they inward or outward, man must seek forgiveness, protection, safety and containment by *tawbah* (توبة ; turning in repentance); and he must recognize that Allah is the One Who turns again and again in mercy towards man, so that he may return to his divine origin. Man must repent and return to the peaceful Source of all, for there is only One Reality encompassing all things. Whenever there is an inner opening, we can see the meaning of this surah, and whenever there is an inner enlightenment for us, whatever may be its scale, magnitude, or type, that opening is a victory for us over our *nafs*, over the obstacles that we have imagined for ourselves. Victory does not mean overcoming *kufr* in our society or taking over the entire country and declaring it an "Islamic State." That is not our responsibility: it is Allah's. Our responsibility is to overcome ourselves, to have victory over our selves by *dhikr* and the true awareness of the nature of our *nafs*.

This is a very important surah, especially for those who are in the forefront of the inner battle. As human beings, we all want openings and signs to give us encouragement in our struggle. May Allah increase our openings. May Allah give us nothing but opening upon opening, so that we see that in reality there are no doors and no gates barring our way to the Face of Allah!



SURAT AL-LAHAB

THE FLAME

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ

- 1 May the two hands of Abu Lahab perish, and may he perish!

Tabba (تَبَّ) means “to be lost, to lose,” and “to perish,” or “to be destroyed.” Abu Lahab was one of the uncles of the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. He was a vibrant, fiery being, handsome and dangerous, like a tiger. He upheld the old traditions, and defended them in a dogmatic, fanatical way. Whatever his hands put forth, whatever his actions were, whatever his direction was, he was to be at a loss.

مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ

- 2 His wealth and what he gains will be of no use!

Whatever he earned, whatever he possessed of power, was to be of no avail.

سَيَصِلُ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ

3 He will be plunged into flaming fire,

He was destined for the ultimate Fire, just as in this life he burned with his agitation, his fiery hatred and his disappointments and frustrations.

وَأَمْرَاتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ

4 And his wife, the carrier of fire-wood,

The wife of Abu Lahab was the sister of Abu Sufyan. *Ḥaṭab* (**حطب**) means “firewood,” the implication being, in the phrase “carrier of fire-wood,” that she incited people against each other by carrying tales back and forth to fuel and fan gossip, and to create agitation. She used to throw small thorny bushes along the path which the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, used to take to the mosque, so that in the dark of the early morning he would step on them. What it implies is that her inner discontentment showed itself in whatever she did outwardly, and her inner thorns were carried outwardly on her back.

فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّنْ مَّسَدٍ

5 Upon her neck is a halter of strong twisted palm-fiber!

Jīd (**جيد**) describes the part of the neck where the necklace mark is. *Masad* (**مسد**) normally means a twisted palm-frond. What this means is that what she dragged about with her, what was around her neck, was a heavily twisted chain of her own making.



SURAT AL-IKHLAS

THE UNITY

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Amir al-Mu'minin Sayyidna 'Ali, *'alayhi-s-salām*, said that there is no interpretation for this surah because its meaning is not at all veiled. Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, *'alayhimu-s-salām*, were asked to comment on it, and each one gave a different interpretation of some of the words. There is very little we can say about this surah, although there have been reams of pages written about it.

We will follow in the footsteps of our Imam 'Ali and we will make as brief an interpretation as possible. This surah is one of the most important ever revealed. There are many reports about this surah, especially in the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt.

During one of the battles the odds were overwhelmingly against Amir al-Mu'minin, yet everything went smoothly for him. When the people who had fought next to him were asked what had happened, they replied that all he did was recite *Qul huwa'llāhu aḥad*, "Say: He, Allah, is One."

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

1 Say: He, Allah, is One.

This is an injunction upon us to say it, whether we know the truth of it or not. Whatever degree of knowledge we may possess, He, Allah, is One.

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

2 Allah, the Eternal Refuge of all.

The Divine Name *aş-Şamad* (الصمد) means “eternal, forever,” although it implies more than that. *Şamada* (صمد) means “to be high or elevated.”

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

3 He begets not, nor is He begotten.

The meaning of this ayah is very clear. Allah is above involvement. He is above coming from something or having something come from Him, and nothing can be associated with Him. He is at a distance from all that we can discern as having an attribute. He is the immediate and sustaining Cause of all that we can discern, yet He is not involved in the creation in any way as a “creature.”

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

4 And like Him there is none.

Kufuwan (كُفُوا), meaning “equal, like,” is derived from *Kafā* (كفى), “to be enough, sufficient.” Allah is sufficient unto Himself. The name *aş-Şamad*, also means “self-supporting, self-sustaining, self-containing.” There is no *mithāl* (مثال ; likeness) of Allah. Allah is the Name to which all attributes and Divine Names point.

Nothing more can be said about this surah. We must read and re-read it, and the more we do this, the deeper will grow our understanding.



SURAT AL-FALAQ

THE DAYBREAK

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ

1 Say: I take refuge in the Lord of the day-break,

Falaqa (فلق) means "to split, tear asunder, dispel the shadows of the night." *A'udhu* (أعوذ) means "I take refuge." We take refuge from our ignorance, from the darkness of our *nafs*, and from our doubts. We take refuge from our uncertainties and insecurities in the Lord, the Sustainer, Who continues to sustain knowledge, certainty, light, and illumination. We seek refuge in the One Who brings forth the dawn after the darkness of night.

مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ

2 From the evil of what He has created,

Here we are appealing to Allah, *ar-Rahīm* (الرحيم ; the Most Merciful), because we must make a subjective judgement. We accept that in this realm of duality there are aspects which please and comfort us, and other aspects which displease us and bring about suffering. There are aspects which we consider conducive to our well-being and aspects which we consider detrimental to us and thus we take refuge in the Lord of all creation from that part of His creation which we consider to be harmful.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ

3 And from the evil of intense darkness when it comes,

We take refuge from the night, from gloom and darkness, from that which we do not know. We also take refuge from self-doubt. The reference here is to what is both familiar and unknown, to that with which we have a connection and with which we do not.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ

4 And from the evil of those who blow on knots,

We take refuge from powers whose functioning we do not comprehend. We take refuge from the magicians, from the women who blow on knots to bring about magical events, and who call upon forces in this existence which we do not fully comprehend and which are invisible to us, such as the *jinn*.

We take refuge in Allah, the One Who opens to us the dawn of relief and knowledge, from these entities that can afflict us in this life. We know that invisible forces do exist and that black magic and other forms of magic are practiced in many places. There are many forces that can be called upon and brought into play, but those of us who want to go to the Source of all powers, take refuge in the Lord of the dawn.

The two surahs, Ikhlas and Falaq, were often recited by our Imams. According to our traditions, Surat al-Ikhlas was often recited by the blessed Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, for the Imams Hasan and Husayn. These surahs remind us to strive for an inner state of *īmān*, to walk straight ahead toward our objective, to the *wāḥad al-aḥad* (**واحد الأحد**), the Single and Unique One, to sing nothing but the song of the One.

If we do this, we will have no interest in dabbling in these other phenomena, because the gross phenomena will not be viewed by us as having any intrinsic reality. It must be remembered that however powerful a magician may be, there will always be another magician who will overcome him. In the case of Sayyidna Musa, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, it is well known that the *muwāḥḥid* (**موأحد** ; the man of unity), overcame all the Pharaoh’s magicians by another power which had nothing to do with the play of magic.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ

5 And from the evil of the envier when he envies.

Ḥasad (**حسد**) means “envy,” which is considered to be one of the worst afflictions of the *nafs* and one of the worst self-inflicted troubles for man, because it can grow rampant. The fire of envy will fuel itself constantly and can never be put out, because there will always be someone else who will have something that we cannot have.

Amir al-Mu’minin ‘Ali, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, was asked about Hasud, a man whose envy was causing havoc among the people. “What can we do with him?” they asked, “He should be punished!” Amir ‘Ali answered, “*Mā fihi yakfīhi*,” “What is in him is enough of a punishment for him.”

The *ḥāsīd* (**حاسد** ; envier) will never win nor will he ever profit. Keep us safe, O Lord, from the evil of this attitude which has its seed in every heart! If it were not in our hearts right now, we would be unable to understand it. We all have felt a spark of it in our life, but if we are fortunate, it remains a spark which can be smothered and covered over with generosity and other positive attributes. If we do not fight against envy at all times, it will constantly be inflamed and will take us over completely.



SURAT AN-NAS

MANKIND

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The final part of the Qur'an is concerned with taking refuge, while the beginning of the Qur'an is concerned with the recognition that the only path to success is that of glorification, supplication and praise.

The arrangement of the surahs in the Qur'an is a perfect one which was made by the perfect man, the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*. The very fact that he arranged them provides the proof of the Qur'an's unity and completion. The revelation brought to mankind different aspects of the Tablet, or Book of Reality, on different days, in different months, and under different conditions. These diverse aspects, however, all reflected the one and only Light, and only the Prophet, *ṣalla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, knew how they were to be arranged in accordance with the only model which exists. Thus the last two steps of the revelation from Allah urge man to seek refuge in Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of all His creation.

قُلْ اَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ

1 Say: I take refuge in the Lord of mankind,

Nās (ناس) means "people, mankind." Its rootword *anisa* is similar to the word *nasiya* (نسي), which means "to forget,"

denoting one aspect of man's nature. The attribute of forgetfulness can, however, be used to full advantage when we forget what is of no use to us. Thus we are better able to remember what is of priority to us. In this way we will not forget that at any moment we may die.

مَلِكِ النَّاسِ

2 The King of mankind,

إِلَهِ النَّاسِ

3 The God of mankind,

We take refuge in the Lord, in the Creator of this entity called "man," who contains within himself both the higher attributes and the lower attributes. We take refuge in Allah from the lower attributes, from the attributes which cause us loss, which cause us further forgetfulness.

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ

4 From the evil whisperings of the elusive shaytan,

There is a great deal written about the word *waswās* (وَسْوَاس), which are subtle whisperings in one's innermost that incite one to evil. In one reference ten meanings are given for *al-waswasah*, denoting ten different attributes of the whisperer. If we overcome them we will understand the *shirk* of *waswās*, and we will be able to truly take refuge from it.

Waswās is an onomatopoeic word imitative of the sound of whispering. Whispering is one of the actions which, in our *dīn* and in our *adab*, is very much repudiated, because something worth saying should be shared by saying it out loud.

Khannās (خناس) is an epithet of *shayṭān*, and means “slinking away,” specifically, when the Name of Allah is mentioned.

There are sources or rivers which feed the *waswas*. Just as the Garden has underground rivers which feed it, so too has the *waswās*. One of these rivers is *ḥirṣ* (حرص ; greed or covetousness). That river can be fought, blocked, and dammed by *tawakkul wa qanā'* (توكل وقناع ; trustful dependence (on Allah) and contentment).

Another river is *amal* (أمل), which means “expectation.” This river, too, can be dammed by constant remembrance, *dhikr*. Our hope for things of this world can be stopped by remembering that each breath may be our last. This remembrance will cut the flow of that river which feeds the whisperer who pours distracting suggestions into our ears.

The third river is *shahawāt ad-dunyā* (شهوات الدنيا), or “worldly desires.” These desires can be killed by remembering that the *ni'am* (نعم ; favors, bounties) will all eventually leave us, and that the *ḥisāb* (حساب ; account) will have to be made by us. We will have to account for the way in which we spent the bounty and goodness that was given to us. It will be a lengthy account — we are told 50 thousand years — in which every minute detail will be reviewed and examined, and in which even something as seemingly minor as a twitch can be a witness for or against us.

The fourth river, or source, of *waswās* is *taḥṣīl* (تحصيل), meaning “acquisition.” This river can be stopped by seeing the justice of each person's situation. What a person reaps arises from the justice of his own situation, and we cannot alter it.

The fifth river is *balā'* (بلاء), “affliction.” The flow of this can be stemmed by not looking at the affliction in a situation, but rather by seeing the bestowal of the good in it.

The sixth river is *kibr* (كبر), or “pride,” which can be fought by humility. Whenever *kibr* rises up in us, we should immediately call upon the humility within ourselves, so that we break its effect on us.

The seventh river is *tahqīr* (تحقير), that which entices us to belittle the honorable position of the believers, as well as anything that the believer possesses, anything that is in his domain, and that which is *ḥalāl* (permitted) for him and *ḥarām* (forbidden) for others. This river can be stopped by considering their honor to be great and by respecting it.

The eighth source of *waswās* is the love of *dunya* (this world), including the desire to be acknowledged and admired by others. This love and desire can be undone by bringing oneself to the state of abasement.

The ninth source of *waswās* which encourages *shayṭān* is separation and stinginess (*bukhl*). This can be fought by generosity. *Sakhā'* (سخاء) means "giving according to what the occasion demands;" *jūd* (جود) means "giving without being asked;" and *karam* (كرم) is "giving whatever has been asked." These three are attributes of Allah. The fourth is *īthār* (ايثار), "giving what one needs oneself," and this is an attribute which only man can have. Allah cannot have this attribute, for Allah has no need whatsoever of anything. Thus, we can take on this final attribute, which is a great aid for our inner, upward mobility toward that noble state which benefits the *khalīfah*, or viceregent, of Allah.

الَّذِي يُوسِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ

5 Who whispers in the innermost hearts of mankind,

Ṣadr (صدر ; plural of *ṣudūr*, صدور) is the "chest or breast," that part of one which faces what confronts one. It is where the battles and dramas take place. It must be remembered that every drama is self-created. Every imaginable human role stirs in the breast of man: the king, the despot, the afflicted, the jealous, the strong, the doubter, and the complainer. We have to take refuge from these, take refuge in the Lord Whose mercy brings us to the recognition that everything which occurs, visible and invisible, occurs according to a just system, according to perfect laws which govern this passage, this journey through the creation. The laws in this existence are self-enforced; there is no need for wardens.

مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ

6 From *jinn* and mankind.

Jinnah (جنة) is synonymous with *jinn* (جن), and means “the unseen, hidden forces of power.” *Jannah* (جنة ; the Garden) is derived from the same root and it refers to the most desirable place to be, a garden, which, in the desert culture of the Arabs of that time where the average temperature was 100 degrees, was a place where there was shade, and where the ground could not be seen for the thick foliage of the trees. The ground was “hidden” by the growth and thus it refers to a hidden state. The *jinn* are also hidden, and they have their limitations and their states, just as men do.

Therefore, we are asking for refuge, for protection from any energies whose nature we do not understand, and whose creation is not visible or discernable by us.



AL-KHATIMAH

THE SEAL

This most glorious *juz'*, or section, the seal of the Qur'an, is of considerable significance for several reasons. It contains most of the short surahs which are often recited in prayers, supplications, and on many other occasions by all Muslims. Historically, in the early days of Islam, these surahs were of great significance because of the time and the way they were revealed in Mecca. They were the surahs that the early Muslims used in their prayers as well as in spreading the message. Containing thirty-seven surahs out of a total of one hundred fourteen, almost all of them were revealed in Mecca during the earlier part of the prophethood. The few that were not were early or mid-Madinah.

When we speak about the seal of the Qur'an we are referring to the arrangement indicated by the Prophet, *salla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, this final *juz'* "sealing" or completing the full exposition. However, as the Qur'an is the Book of books, containing source knowledge, it can also be viewed without the limitation of time and place, having no beginning or end, a complete unit in itself. So, it is in a manner of speaking that we refer to the "seal" of the Qur'an. Actually, the entire Qur'an itself is the seal, the final elucidation of Reality, each ayah sealing the other ayahs. The Qur'an came down upon the Prophet, all at once, in its totality, but was revealed and unwound through the prophetic light over a period of time, the twenty-three years of prophethood.

Every surah in this section has its particular merits and benefits in specific situations. We therefore mention some of the occasions and benefits of reciting selected surahs from this *juz'*.

The Prophet, *salla-llāhu 'alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam*, has said: "He who reads Surat 'Amma (i.e., Surat an-Naba'), will have his thirst quenched by Allah on the Day of Reckoning." It is also related that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, *'alayhi-s-salām*, said: "He who reads Surat an-Naba' daily, a year will not pass before he will be invited by Allah to go to Mecca."

It is also related that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, *'alayhi-s-salām*, said: "He who reads Surat at-Tin, Allah will collect for him all the goodness of the *dunyā* and the *akhirāh*." Regarding Surat an-Nazi'at, he said:

“He who reads it will not enter the garden except as one who is completely fulfilled, and will not have any *shaqā*’ (suffering or misery) in this *dunyā*.” He also said: “He who has read Surat al-Buruj over water and then drinks that water over any poison he has taken will be cured of that poison. He who reads Surat al-Qadr in every obligatory prayer, a caller will call, ‘Oh slave of Allah, all your past actions have been forgiven, now carry on with your good actions.’ He who reads Surat al-Humazah in his obligatory prayers will not see poverty and will not die in a bad state.” And, “He who reads Surat al-Kafirun and Surat al-Ikhlās in his obligatory prayers, Allah will forgive him, his parents, and his offspring, and Allah will cause him to die as a *shāhid*, bringing him back joyfully in the next life.”

Imam Rida, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, said: “If one among you has a severe headache or some similar pain, he should spread his hands out and read Surat al-Fatihah, Surat al-Ikhlās, and the last two surahs of the Qur’an, and should then wipe his hands on his forehead seeking relief from the headache.”

Imam as-Sadiq, *‘alayhi-s-salām*, said that if one reads Surat an-Nasr in any of the obligatory or *nawāfil* (supererogatory) prayers, Allah will enable him to overcome all his enemies. He also said that whoever goes to his bed and reads Surat al-Ikhlās eleven times, his dwelling will be safe and all those areas surrounding him will also be kept safe. Also, one who reads Surat al-A‘la in an obligatory or *nawāfil* prayer will be asked on the Day of Reckoning through which gate of the garden he wishes to enter.

Imam as-Sadiq also said that whoever reads Surat al-Zilzal four times, it is as though he has read the entire Qur’an. There is a prophetic *riwayah* (narration or tradition) that Surat al-Ikhlās is a third of the Qur’an. It is also related that Surat al-Kafirun is considered a quarter of the Qur’an. Imam as-Sadiq further related that whoever reads the two last surahs, al-Falaq and an-Nas, upon leaving his house, no evil eye can be cast on him. And one who has any condition of fear in his house should, before he sleeps, read these two surahs and ayat al-Kursi.

There are many prophetic hadith regarding the value of regular reading of the Qur’an. Specifically, we are advised to read a hundred ayats a day if possible, and these short surahs make it easier to do so.

Upon completing a reading of the Qur’an, the correct courtesy is to “seal” it with a supplication, a *khātimah*. In Arabic, *khatama* means to encompass, to engulf, to wrap up. To read and comprehend the entire Qur’an is of great virtue, because as we have discovered, much of the Qur’an can only be explained by the rest of it. Many of

the areas which seem a bit doubtful or uncertain can be explained by other parts. Traditionally, Muslims read through the Qur'an constantly throughout the year, especially during the month of Ramadan. It is not unusual for the entire Qur'an to be read once a day during Ramadan. More commonly, it is prescribed to read a *juz'* per day so that by the end of Ramadan the whole Qur'an will have been completed, there being thirty *juz'*, or sections.

However, it is much more important to read the Qur'an with full understanding than to read page after page merely for the sake of completing it. When the Qur'an is fully taken in, absorbed, and lived by, the benefits become quite obvious. A transformation takes place in a person's life so that he heeds and takes guidance from all the injunctions and all the absolute boundaries and broader descriptions of the Qur'an. Such a person is on the path of responsibility.

Upon completion of the Qur'an, as a sign of gratitude to the Beneficent Creator, we follow the traditions of Imam 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin, *'alayhi-s-salām*, whose well-known supplication is read throughout the Muslim world. The following translation includes brief extractions from the supplication, and is followed by the original Arabic in its entirety.

"In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful. Oh Allah, You have given me aid to complete Your Book which You revealed as a light and a protection above all other books You have revealed. You have preferred it over every saying, relating it, distinguishing between what You have made permissible and what you have prohibited. It is a Qur'an by which you have made clear the laws concerning Your decrees. It is a Book You have preferred for Your servants, a detailed exposition, an inspiration revealed to Your Prophet Muhammad, may Your blessings be upon him and his family. You have made it a light guiding away from the wrong-doing of error and ignorance by following it; a healing for whoever listens by the perceptive faculty of faith . . .

"Oh Allah, You have given us aid in its recitation and You have made easy the movement of our tongues by the excellence of its expressions, so place us amongst those who guard it with proper consideration and yield to You by the firm belief of submission . . . Oh Allah, surely You have sent it (the Qur'an) down upon our Prophet Muhammad, may Your blessings be upon him and his family, and You have perfectly inspired the cognizance of its miraculous nature. You have bequeathed its knowledge to us clearly and You have preferred us over those who are ignorant of its knowledge. You have

strengthened us with its knowledge and elevated us above those who cannot bear its weight. . . .

“Oh Allah, as You have endowed our hearts with the ability to sustain it (the Qur’an) and have caused us to recognize its nobility and bounty by Your mercy, so bless Muhammad and his family. Place us among those who hold fast to its rope and take refuge from obscurities in the sanctuary of its fortress, residing in the shade of its protection, guided by the light of its dawn . . .

“So bless Muhammad and his family and make the Qur’an a means of elevation for us to the most honorable station of nobility, that we may ascend by it to the place of well-being and safety. (And make the Qur’an) a means by which we are rewarded deliverance on the Day of Resurrection.”

وكان من دعائه عليه السلام عند ختم القرآن

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ أَعْنَيْتَنِي عَلَى حَزْمِ كِتَابِكَ الَّذِي
أَنْزَلْتَهُ نُورًا وَجَعَلْتَهُ مُهَيِّمًا عَلَى كُلِّ كِتَابٍ
أَنْزَلْتَهُ وَفَضَّلْتَهُ عَلَى كُلِّ حَدِيثٍ قَصَصْتَهُ
وَفَرَّقَانَا فَرَقْتَ بِهِ بَيْنَ حَلَالِكَ وَحَرَامِكَ وَقُرْآنًا
أَعْرَبْتَ بِهِ عَنْ شَرِّ أَيْحُكَامِكَ وَكِتَابًا
فَضَّلْتَهُ لِعِبَادِكَ تَفْصِيلًا وَوَجْيًا أَنْزَلْتَهُ عَلَى
نَبِيِّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ تَنْزِيلًا وَجَعَلْتَهُ
نُورًا أَنْهَدِي مِنْ ظُلْمِ الضَّلَالَةِ وَالْجَهَالَةِ بِإِتِّبَاعِهِ

وَشِفَاءً لِمَنْ أَضَلَّ بِفَهْمِ التَّصَدِيقِ إِلَى اسْتِمَاعِهِ
وَمِيزَانِ قِسْطٍ لَا يَجُفُّ عَنْ حَوْسِ لِسَانِهِ وَنُورِ هُدًى
لَا يَطْفَأُ عَنْ الشَّاهِدِينَ بِرُهَانِهِ وَعِلْمِ نَجَاةٍ لَا يَضِلُّ
مَنْ أَمَّ قِصْدَ سُنَنِهِ وَلَا تَنَالَ أَيْدِي الْمَلَكَاتِ
مَنْ تَعَلَّقَ بِعُرْوَةِ عِصْمَتِهِ اللَّهُمَّ فَادِّ أَفْذَتَنَا
الْمَعُونَةَ عَلَى نِيْلٍ وَنَيْلِهِ وَسَهْلَتِ جَوَائِزِ السُّنَنِ
بِحُسْنِ عِبَارَتِهِ فَاجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ يَرْعَاهُ جُورَ عَائِنِهِ
وَيَدِينُكَ بِإِعْتِقَادِ السَّلِيمِ لِحُكْمِ آيَاتِهِ وَ
يَفْزَعُ إِلَى الْأَقْرَابِ بِمِثَابِهِ وَمَوْضِعَاتِ بَيْنَانِهِ

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ أَنْزَلْتَهُ عَلَى نَبِيِّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ جُمَلًا وَالْهُمْنَهُ عِلْمَ عَجَائِبِهِ مُكَمَّلًا
وَوَرَّثْتَنَا عِلْمَهُ مُفَسَّرًا وَفَضَّلْتَنَا عَلَى مَنْ جَهَلَ
عِلْمَهُ وَقَوَّيْتَنَا عَلَيْهِ لِتَرْفَعَنَا فَوْقَ مَنْ لَمْ يُطِقْ
حَمْلَهُ اللَّهُمَّ فَكَمَا جَعَلْتَ فُلُونًا لَهُ حِمْلَةً وَ
عَرَّفْتَنَا بِرَحْمَتِكَ شَرَفًا وَفَضَّلْتَهُ فَصَّلِ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ
الْخَطِيبِ بِهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ الْخَزَّازِ لَهُ وَاجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ
يَعْتَرِفُ بِأَنَّهُ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ حَتَّى لَا يَعْأَرِضَنَا الشُّكُّ
فِي صِدْقِهِ وَلَا يَخْتَلِجَنَا الزُّبْعُ عَنْ فِصْطَرِفِهِ

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَاجْعَلْنَا مِمَّنْ يَعْنِصُمُ
بِحَبْلِهِ وَيَأْوِي مِنَ الْمُتَشَابِهَاتِ إِلَى خِرْزِمِ عَقْلِهِ
وَيَسْكُنُ فِي ظِلِّ جَنَاحِهِ وَيَهْتَدِي بِضَوْءِ صَبَاحِهِ
وَيَقْنِدِي بِتَبْلُجِ اسْفَارِهِ وَيَسْتَصْبِحُ بِمُصْبَاحِهِ
وَلَا يَلْمَسُ الْهَدْيَ فِي غَيْرِهِ اللَّهُمَّ وَكَمَا
نَصَبْتَ بِهِ مُحَمَّدًا عَمَلًا لِلدَّلَالَةِ عَلَيْكَ وَأَنْهَجْتَ
بِآلِهِ سُبُلَ الرِّضَا إِلَيْكَ فَصَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَ
اجْعَلِ الْقُرْآنَ وَسِيلَةً لَنَا إِلَى أَشْرَفِ مَنَازِلِ
الْكَرَامَةِ وَسُلْمًا نَعْرُجُ فِيهِ إِلَى مَحَلِّ السَّلَامَةِ
وَسَبَبًا نُنْزِلُ بِهِ النَّجَاةَ فِي عَرَصَةِ الْفِيَامَةِ وَ

ذَرِيعَةً نَفَدَمُ بِهَا عَلَى نَعِيمٍ دَا إِذَا الْمَفَامَةِ اللَّهُمَّ
صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَاجْطِطْ بِالْقُرْآنِ عَنَّا ثَقُلَ
الْأَوْزَارَ وَهَبْ لَنَا حُسْنَ شَمَائِلِ الْأَبْرَارِ وَوَأْفُ
بِنَا إِثَارَ الَّذِينَ فَا مَوَالِكَ بِهِ أَنَا اللَّيْلِ وَاطْرَافِ
النَّهَارِ حَتَّى نَطَهَّرَ نَامِرُ كُلِّ دَنَسٍ يَنْطَهِّرُهُ
وَنَقْفُوبِنَا إِثَارَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَاءُوا بِنُورِهِ وَوَلَمْ يَلْهَمِ
الْأَمَلُ عَنِ الْعَمَلِ فَيَقْطَعَهُمْ بِجُدْعِ غُرُورِهِ اللَّهُمَّ
صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَاجْعَلِ الْقُرْآنَ لَنَا فِي
ظِلِّ اللَّيْلِ إِلَى مَوْنِسًا وَمِنْ نَزَعَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ
وَخَطَرَاتِ الْوَسَاوِسِ حَارِسًا وَلَا تُفِدْنَا عَنِ

نَفَلَهَا إِلَى الْمَعَاصِي جَائِسًا وَلَا لِسِنِّنَا غِرَ الْخَوْضِ
فِي الْبَاطِلِ مِنْ غَيْرِ مَا أَفِيحُ مَخْرَسًا وَجَوَازِحِنَا عَنْ
افْتِرَافِ الْأَثَامِ زَا جِرًا وَمَا طَوَّتِ الْغَفْلَةُ عَنَّا
مِنْ تَصَفُّحِ الْأَعْيَابِ زَانِشَرًّا حَتَّى تُوَصِّلَ إِلَى قُلُوبِنَا
فَهَمَّ عَجَائِبُهُ وَزَوَاجِرَ امْتِثَالِهِ الَّتِي ضَعُفَتْ الْجِبَالُ
الرُّوَائِي عَلَى صَلَابَتِهَا عَنْ إِحْتِمَالِهِ اللَّهُمَّ
صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَادِّمْ بِالْقُرْآنِ صَلَاحَ
ظَاهِرِنَا وَاجْمَعْ بِهِ خَطَرَائِنِ الْوَسَاوِسِ عَنْ صِحَّةِ
ضَمَائِرِنَا وَاغْسِلْ بِهِ دَرَنَ قُلُوبِنَا وَعِلَاقَاتِنَا
أَوْزَارِنَا وَاجْمَعْ بِهِ مِنْ شَرِّ أُمُورِنَا وَأَرْوِيهِ فِي

مَوْفِي الْعَرَضِ عَلَيْكَ ظَمًا هَوَا جِرْنَا وَاكْسُنَا
بِهِ جُلَلِ الْأَمَانِ يَوْمَ الْفَزَعِ الْأَكْبَرِ فِي نُشُورِنَا
اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَاجِرْ بِالْفُرْانِ خَلْسَنَا
مِنْ عَدَمِ الْأَمَلِاقِ وَسُقُوقِ النَّيَابِ رَغَدًا لِعَيْشِ وَخَصْبِ
سَعَةِ الْأَرْزَاقِ وَجَنَابِ الضَّرَائِبِ الْمَذْمُومَةِ
وَمَدَانِي الْأَخْلَاقِ وَاعْصَمْنَا بِهِ مِنْ هَوْنِ الْكُفْرِ
دَوَاعِي النِّفَاقِ حَتَّى يَكُونَ لَنَا فِي الْفِيَامَةِ إِلَى
رِضْوَانِكَ وَجَنَانِكَ فَايْدًا وَلَنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا غَرْسُ خَطِّكَ
وَتَعَدِّي حُدُودِكَ ذَايْدًا وَلِمَا عِنْدَكَ بِتَجَلُّلِ
حَلَالِهِ وَتَحْرِيمِ جَرَامِهِ شَاهِدًا اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى

مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَهَوْنٌ بِالْفُرَّانِ عِنْدَ الْمَوْتِ عَلَى انْقِسَانِ
كَرْبِ السِّيَافِ وَجَهْدِ الْأَنْبِرِ وَتَرَادُفِ الْحَشَارِجِ
إِذَا بَلَغَتِ النَّفُوسُ التَّرَاقِي وَقِيلَ مِنْ زَاوٍ وَتَجَلَّى
مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ لِقَبْضِهَا مِنْ حُجْبِ الْغُيُوبِ وَرَمَاهَا
عَنْ قَوْسِ الْمَنَابِ يَا بَاسَهُمْ وَجِشَّةِ الْفِرَاقِ وَدَنَا مَنَا
إِلَى الْأَخْرِفِ رَجِيلٌ وَأَنْطَلَاوٌ وَصَارَتْ الْأَعْمَاكُ
فَلَا يَدِي فِي الْأَعْنَافِ وَكَانَتْ الْقُبُورُ هِيَ الْمَاوِي
إِلَى مِيقَاتِ يَوْمِ النَّالِقِ اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ
وَبَارِكْ لَنَا فِي حُلُولِ دَارِ الْبَلَى وَطُولِ الْمُقَامَةِ
بِزِيَارَةِ أَطْبَاقِ الثَّرَى وَاجْعَلِ الْقُبُورَ بَعْدَ فِرَاوِ الدُّنْيَا

خَيْرَ مَنَازِلِنَا وَافْتَحْ لَنَا رَحْمَتَكَ فِي صَبْرٍ وَمَلَاحِزِنَا
وَلَا تَقْضِ مَنَانِي فِي حَاضِرِ الْقِيَامَةِ بِمُوقِفَاتِ اٰمِنَانَا
وَازْحَمْ بِالْقُرْآنِ فِي مَوْقِفِ الْعَرْضِ عَلَيْكَ ذُلَّ
مَقَامِنَا وَثَبَّتْ بِهِ عِنْدَ اضْطِرَابِ جِسْرِ جَهَنَّمَ
يَوْمَ الْمَجَازِ عَلَيْهَا زَلَلْنَا فِدَامِنَا وَنَجَّابَهُ مِنْ كُلِّ
كَرْبٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَشَدَائِدِ اَهْوَالِ يَوْمِ الطَّامَةِ
وَبَيْضِ وُجُوهِنَا يَوْمَ تَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهُ الظَّالِمِينَ فِي يَوْمِ
الْحَسْرَةِ وَالنَّدَامَةِ وَاجْعَلْ لَنَا فِي صِدْقِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَدًّا اَوْ لَا تَجْعَلِ الْحَيَاةَ عَلَيْنَا نَكَدًا اَللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ
عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِكَ وَرَسُولِكَ كَمَا بَلَغْتَ رِسَالَاتِكَ وَصَدَقَ

بِأَمْرِكَ وَنَصَحَ لِعِبَادِكَ اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْ نَبِيَّنَا صَلَوَاتِكَ
عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَقْرَبَ النَّبِيِّينَ
مِنْكَ مَجْلِسًا وَأَمَكْنَهُمْ مِنْكَ شَفَاعَةً وَأَجْلَهُمْ
عِنْدَكَ فَذُرَّاوَأَوْجَهُهُمْ عِنْدَكَ جَاهًا اللَّهُمَّ
صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَشَرِّفْ بُيَاتَهُ وَعَظِّمْ
بُرْهَانَهُ وَثَقِّلْ مِيزَانَهُ وَنَقِّبْ شَفَاعَتَهُ وَقَرِّبْ
وَسِيلَتَهُ وَبَيِّضْ وَجْهَهُ وَأَتِمِّمْ نُورَهُ وَارْفَعْ دَرَجَتَهُ
وَاجْنِبْنَا عَلَى سُنَّتِهِ وَتَوَفَّنَا عَلَى مِلَّتِهِ وَخُذْنَا
مِنْهَا جَهْدًا وَاسْلُكْ بِنَا سَبِيلَهُ وَاجْعَلْنَا مِنْ أَهْلِ
طَاعَتِهِ وَاجْشُرْنَا فِي زُمْرَتِهِ وَأَوْزِدْنَا حَوْضَهُ

وَاسْقِنَا بِكَاسِهِ وَصَلِّ اللَّهُمَّ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ
صَلَاةً تُبْلِغُهُ بِهَا أَفْضَلَ مَا يَأْمَلُ مِنْ خَيْرِكَ وَ
فَضْلِكَ وَكَرَامَتِكَ إِنَّكَ ذُو رَحْمَةٍ وَاسِعَةٍ وَ
فَضْلٍ كَرِيمٍ اللَّهُمَّ اجْزِهِ بِمَا بَلَغَ مِنْ رِسَالَتِكَ وَ
أَدَى مِنْ آيَاتِكَ وَنَصَحَ لِعِبَادِكَ وَجَاهَدَ فِي سَبِيلِكَ
أَفْضَلَ مَا جَزَيْتَ أَحَدًا مِنْ مَلَائِكَتِكَ الْمُفْرَبِينَ
وَآبِيَاءِكَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ الْمُصْطَفِينَ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيْهِ وَ
عَلَى آلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ



Author's Biography

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri was born in the Holy City of Karbala, Iraq, a descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders. Educated in Europe and America, Shaykh Fadhlalla obtained undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, majoring in science and engineering. As a businessman, he established several manufacturing and consulting firms in the Middle East, primarily in the oil industry. Shaykh Fadhlalla traveled extensively, especially in India, in pursuit of the spiritual teachings of the East, before his eventual re-discovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth.

In 1979, Shaykh Fadhlalla came to the United States to establish a spiritual foundation, the Zahra Trust, to enable serious students of Islam the opportunity of acquiring its basic teachings. The Zahra Trust currently publishes a wide variety of books through its affiliate, Zahra Publications, and has established several spiritual and medical centers in Asia, Europe and South America. The American Institute of Qur'anic Studies at Bayt-ud-Deen, the U.S. base of Zahra Trust, was inaugurated in December, 1981.

At present, Shaykh Fadhlalla is engaged in teaching, lecturing, and writing books and commentaries on the Holy Qur'an and related spiritual topics, with particular emphasis on inner meanings and *'irfan* (gnosis).

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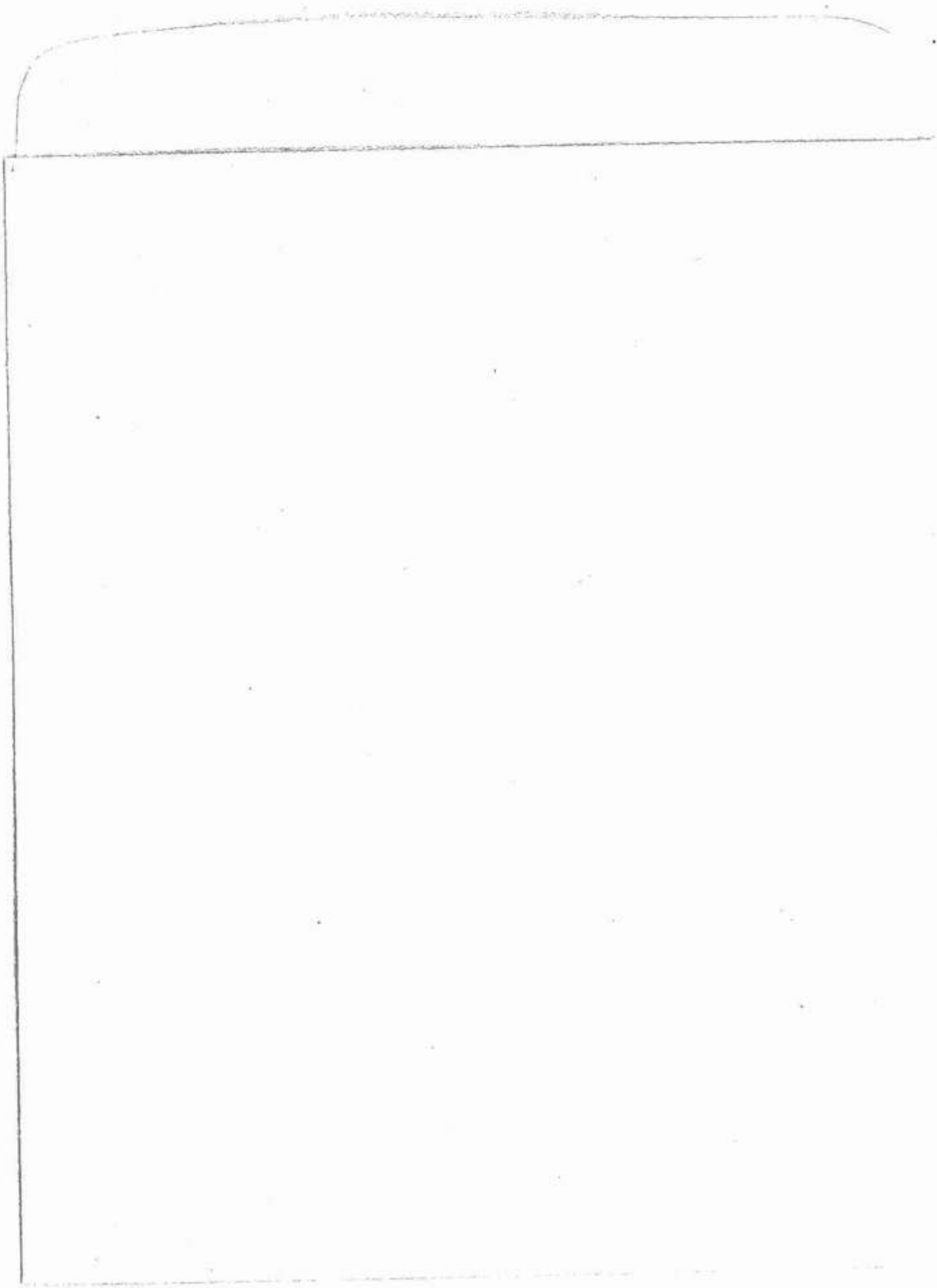
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