

MAN IN QUR'ĀN AND THE MEANING OF FURQĀN

Surat ul-Baqarah



Tafsīr by
Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

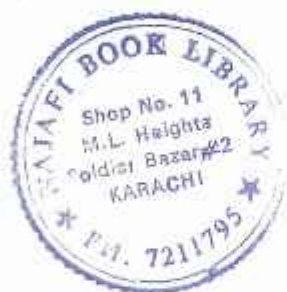
Author's Biography

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, a Sufi Shaykh of the Jafariyya Tariqah, came to sufism via a scientific, engineering and business background. He was educated in England with Bachelor of Science Degrees in physics and mathematics, and a Master's Degree in science and business, and was a successful oil businessman who had established several manufacturing and consulting firms. As a young man, he had always questioned the meaning and usefulness of spiritual pursuits, and had spent long periods in various parts of the East, especially in India, and in North Africa, seeking the truth.

In 1979, Shaykh Fadhlalla came to the United States to establish an Islamic Teaching Center. By December, 1981, the American Institute of Quranic Studies was inaugurated, and in September of 1982, the first classes began.

Shaykh Fadhlalla has also recently established several spiritual and medical teaching centers and clinics in the Middle East, Europe and South America. He has lectured throughout the world at various universities and institutes, and he is presently directing a publishing effort to make available to the culture of the West outstanding works of Islamic scholars and gnostics, as well as his own commentary on the Quran.

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ZAHRA PUBLICATIONS

Originally published by
Zahra Publications
Box 730, Blanco, TX 78606 USA

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ISBN 0-88059-005 X

Reprinted in Pakistan by
Ahmad Brothers Printers Karachi.

AL Serat Publications
House No. 6, Street No. 8,
F-7/3,
Islamabad.

Foreword

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي
لَنفَدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنْفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي
وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا ۝

Say: Were the sea to be ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord are exhausted, even if We bring others like it.

(Surat ul-Kahf:109)

The Qur'ān is the transcendent Word of the Transcendent Lord, Creator and Sustainer of all things. With it creation began when Allah took our covenant with the question: 'Am I not your Lord?' With it history began, when He announced to the angels: 'Behold, I am about to set a representative (khalīfah) in the earth!' In it, history will continue its cosmic journey from the multiplicity of things and names to the One, when 'the earth shall shine forth with the Light of its Lord,' and the eternal voice of the Ever-living and All-sovereign Lord shall challenge all creation: 'To whom shall all dominion today belong?' The resounding answer will then echo: 'To Allah, the One, the All-conquering!' Yet, Allah in His infinite mercy willed that His timeless Word, the Qur'ān, should enter into our finite history to shape and guide it to its ultimate fulfillment on a day when He alone shall be King and Master.

The Qur'ān, which we write in our books (maṣāḥif), preserve in our hearts and recite with our tongues, was sent down onto the heart of Allah's beloved servant and Messenger, Muḥammad, who was a prophet while Adam was between water and clay, may Allah's mercy and blessing rest forever on him and his household.

The science of writing, understanding and interpreting the Qur'ān has occupied the best minds of the Muslim 'umma throughout its long history. The fruits of these labors are contained in the vast literature of tafsīr. The Qur'ān, in its inner and infinite dimension, is known only to Allah. Yet, to the Prophet and the chosen few of his descendants, the Imams and their followers, the veils were removed, and they were able

to touch the inner mysteries of the Qur'ān with their purified hearts and minds, 'for none but the pure shall touch it.' The righteous friends of Allah (awliya' Allah aṣ-ṣāliḥīn), who purified their hearts in this ocean of knowledge, left for us allusions and glimpses to guide us in our journey (suluk) to Allah.

The American Institute of Qur'ānic Studies is dedicated to the task of making the Qur'ān available to the men and women of the twentieth century, to contemplate, understand and be guided by it in their daily lives, and in their spiritual quest. The Institute has therefore undertaken to teach the Qur'ān in Arabic, its original language, and to study its inner and outer meanings. It has, furthermore, decided to present the Qur'ān, both in its exoteric and historical dimension and its inner dimension, to the Western readers, as Allah will grant it teachers and seekers. The Institute will produce a commentary, if Allah wills, which will consider the reasons and occasions of the revelation of the verses of the Qur'ān, as well as interpretations of its precepts of ḥalāl and ḥarām. This commentary will present the tafsīr (interpretation) and ta'wīl (inner and primary exegesis) of the Qur'ān. In the task of tafsīr, standard works in this field will be used, but in ways that would be relevant to the present age and its needs. The present small volume is a first attempt at achieving this task.

The Qur'ān must speak to the condition of every age – this it can most effectively do through ta'wīl. Thus, through the reflections of Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, as Allah shall illuminate his heart, the inner dimension of the Qur'ān will be touched.

وَقُلْ اَعْمَلُوا فَاَسِيرَی اللّٰهُ عَمَلَكُمْ
 وَرَسُوْلُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ وَسُرُدُوْنَ اِلٰی
 عَلَیْمِ الْغُیْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيَنْبِئُكُمْ بِمَا
 كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُوْنَ ﴿۱۰۵﴾

Say: Work! For Allah shall see your work, His Messenger, and the people of faith. In Him alone do we trust, for with Him is right guidance, and to Him shall be our return.

(Surat ul-Tawbah:105)

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Introduction

Surat ul-Baqarah encompasses both ḥaqīqah and shari'ah. It contains the blueprint of how a community can live – how its members should behave among themselves as individuals, as families, and as economic and social entities. It contains the laws that govern jihad (from جهاد , to strive, toil, take pains over), the fight against inward and outward evil – when, where and against what. The surah sums up what we need to know. It is the answer of the Ḥamīd, He Who has been praised, to His beloved slave. It is the answer to the true muslim's praise and gratitude to the Lord-Sustainer, the Rabb.

Surat ul-Baqarah begins with that devastatingly deep simplicity of the letters Alif / Lam / Mim (الم). Everything is a building block. From the Unity, everything in the cosmos descends to you as a wave of mercy in tiny portions, and therefore each portion contains the meaning of that Oneness. One drop of the ocean contains the secret of the entire ocean.

On the surface, Surat ul-Baqarah contains the history of mankind from Sayyidnā Adam, peace be upon him, to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family. A great portion deals specifically with Banī 'Isrā'īl (the tribe of Israel). It illustrates how they were given the message of Unity, of the One-and-Only Reality, and how they rejected it time after time. In spite of their rejection, Allah, in His infinite mercy, repeatedly granted them repentance.

Although this surah deals specifically with Banī 'Isrā'īl, they also represent that state of rebelliousness in all peoples and individuals which constantly attempts to assert itself over the will of Allah. On the level of ḥaqīqah (حقیقة , essential Truth and Reality), the Banī 'Isrā'īl represents the ever-present, ongoing struggle of the nafs (نفس , ego) to establish itself as the ultimate authority and power, which, in turn, brings to it misery, sadness, and constant disappointment. The way to utter joy and complete bliss is through the submission of the nafs, the submission of the will of the individual which has no existence of its own, for there is no power and no might except in Allah. This surah gives us a road map of the course to follow to reach that stage of abandonment and complete submission to Allah subhana-hu wa ta'ala.

Every surah is a complete and contained unit. Various parts of Surat ul-Baqarah were revealed at various times and places. Except for the last few ayats, however, most of the surah was revealed in the early years of hijra. The 281st ayah is considered to be the last ayah of the Qur'an revealed historically.

The following interpretations are possible and plausible, but are not the only ways of interpreting and comprehending the ayats. Furthermore, we have avoided constant reference to the specific historical occasion of the descent of each ayah, since this is described in many old and new tafasir. The interpretation and exposition is based on the system used at the American Institute of Qur'anic Studies in the United States of America, which particularly emphasizes teaching Qur'an to students whose mother tongue is not Arabic.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْم



○

1

Bismillāhi'r-Rahmāni'r-Rahim.
ALIF LAM MIM.



ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

- 2 This Book, there is no doubt in it – a guide to those who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

The first five ayats describe and define the mu'min (مؤمن), he who trusts in the mercy and justice of reality, and the muttaqī (متقى), the spiritual seeker of awareness of reality and its governing boundaries. The fear of Allah and the love of Allah are only aspects of taqwā (تقوى). The next two ayats are about the kāfirūn (كافرون , plural of kāfir, كافر), those who cover up reality (كفر , to cover, hide), and the following thirteen deal with the munāfiqūn (منافقون , plural of munāfiq, منافق), hypocrites.

The root of understanding creation is based on fundamental and basic modules which contain the meaning of creation and the means of transmitting and communicating it. The secret of creation is with Allah, and the secret of the mercy of inner knowledge is with Allah. The building blocks of the language, which is the means of communication, and, therefore, connection and unification between the creatures of Allah – mankind – are reflected in the creational reality of mankind itself. String letters together intelligently and purposefully, and you get a language. String together the genetic alphabet of a man and you get the entire story of that man. There are many other outward and inward interpretations of the Alif / Lam / Mim (ا ل م). Allah is the All-knower of what He means.

This is the Book. There is only the Book. Everywhere you look its unfoldment is there. It is the decree of Allah, the creational reality. لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ ('no doubt in it') – it is absolute and all-encompassing.

The muttaqī is one who avoids that which is not conducive to himself because he has been warned against it through experience. In a state of taqwā (تقوى), one can by dhikr (ذكر) systematically bring oneself to awareness. The sunnah of Allah is uncompromising and fierce: you are either dead or alive, exhaling or inhaling. The mercy of Allah encompasses the entire creation, be it in the seen or in the unseen. The meaning of the Book is in the unseen (what is not felt or measured by human senses), and its unfoldment is in the seen – for example, the chromosomic alphabet in the genes of an individual is the hidden Book that will be revealed by the particular growth and

function of the body exploding from one cell, by the guidance and direction of the coded message inherent in the genes. Every other cell in that body contains the entire code within it yet again.

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا

رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

- 3 Those who believe in the unseen and keep up the prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

This describes the *muttaqī*, who trusts in the *ghayb* (غيب), the unseen, that which exists but is not fully perceivable within the limited range of our senses. It is through being limited that we have the capacity for knowing the unlimited. There cannot be a limited without an unlimited and vice versa. Life is meaningless unless there is death. Each attribute is in balance with its opposite, and contains the doorway to its knowledge. Another name of this Book, *al-Qur'ān*, is *al-Mizān* (الميزان), the balance.

Ṣalāt allows the *mu'mīn-muttaqī* to reflect. *Ṣalāt* implies *waṣala* (وصل), to reach, connect, arrive. It is an act which enables the *mu'mīn* to move further along the path of knowledge of the laws that govern existence, and beyond. It connects him to truth, *ḥaqq* (حق). That connection brings about a surety which dispels anxiety about provision (ومما رزقناهم ينفقون, 'and spend out of what We have given them'). When the *muttaqī* is fulfilled inwardly, and external worries are thereby eliminated, then the giving of both his gross and his subtle provision becomes real. *Rizq* (رزق , sustenance, i.e. all that is beneficial to man — material such as food, or abstract such as knowledge) will then flow through him. The fact that giving out is mentioned hand in hand with *ṣalāt* and *taqwā* indicates that it is by such acts that freedom fully develops.

In essence man has nothing. He is born naked and is buried naked. Everything in the *Qur'ān* points to giving, implying that if you give, you will also be replenished. You can tap the reservoir and become an open conduit.

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ
 قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ

- 4 And who believe in that which has been revealed to you, and that which was revealed before you, and they are sure of the hereafter.

This refers to those who trust and follow what has come through Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and the preceding messengers. They believe that they will be guided to taqwā, and they are certain of the ākhirah (آخرة), certain that there will come an end to this realm of life, after which there lies another realm of experience and consciousness. This certainty, this yaqīn (يقين), is a deep, unconscious and unprovable knowledge which is a higher aspect of 'imān (ايمان, faith and trust). And yaqīn is based on fiṭrah (فطرة), innate disposition, and is not connected to logic and deduction.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًىٰ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

- 5 These are on a right course from their Lord, and these shall be successful.

This casts us back to Surat ul-Fātiḥah: اهدنا الصراط المستقيم , 'guide us to the straight path'. By avoiding the harmful, you are able to follow the true dīn, life transaction. Falāḥa (فلاح), success, comes as a result. The failures and pitfalls are numerous, the major one being kibriyā' (كبرياء), arrogance, self-elevation, the rise of shayṭān, and then ḥirs (حرص), covetousness and the rise of mind, followed by ḥasad (حسد), jealousy, then lust, love of power, and so on. It is only by removing these obstacles that the way can be made straight.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أُنذِرْتَهُمْ

أَفَلَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

- 6 Surely those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe.

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَى سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَى
أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

- 7 Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them.

Ayats six and seven concern the *kāfirūn*. Their hearts are hardened, set and sealed by covering up the truth and denying reality, which is inherently in them, in their *fiṭrah*. They are condemned: by their denial of the One, the All-encompassing and All-merciful Reality, they bring about the veil upon their sight and the seal upon their hearts, and thus flounder in isolation. This condition is one of torment (*'adhāb*, عذاب, agony). Man's essence is limitless and expansive, and therefore limitation is a punishment. The limitation is the result of subjective separation and isolation arising from non-submission.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَيَا أَيُّومِ
الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُم بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

- 8 And there are some people who say: We believe in Allah and the last day – and they are not believers.

Hypocrisy thrives on elusiveness. (*Nifāq*, نفاق, hypocrisy, is related to *nafaqun*, نفق, a tunnel.) If the lower aspect of man is not contained, eliminated and displaced by the higher quality already there, it will lurk in one tunnel after another in a desperate attempt to evade

its end, purification. The lower self tends to preserve itself by its constant attempt to escape being checked and uprooted through spontaneous awareness. The munāfiq always has excuses, and will never face his vices squarely. When the thief in us is confronted, he will disappear. Otherwise he will run from one tunnel to another. The main characteristic of the munāfiq (منافق), hypocrite, is that he avoids facing the central issue of submission to Allah through trust, 'imān. To avoid this confrontation, he says that he believes in 'Allah and the 'ākhirah, but in truth does not, mistakenly thinking that he has safely escaped it.

يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَمَا
يُخَادِعُونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ

- 9 They desire to deceive Allah and those who believe, and they deceive only themselves, and they do not perceive.

يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ - means that they try to, or think that they can deceive Allah, but are unaware that they deceive none but themselves. They do not perceive the situation - they have started from the premise of separation and not of tawhīd, and therefore conclude that they are safe, and not already engulfed by the One Reality Whose laws cover every aspect of life, including self-deceit and the way in which they have brought it upon themselves by their ignorance.

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ

- 10 There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease, and they shall have a painful punishment because they lied.

The hypocrite is sick, and the sickness is of the heart (qalb, قلب from qalaba, قلب, to turn, be unstuck). A healthy heart is one which

is unattached and free of desires, expectations and disappointments. The desire of the hypocrite's sick heart is to deceive. Allah's generosity will only increase this desire. The outcome of this situation is increased suffering.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا
نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ

○

- 11 And when it is said to them: Do not make mischief in the land! they say: We are only peace-makers!

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

○

- 12 Now surely, they themselves are the mischief makers, but they do not perceive.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا كَمَا آمَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ
كَمَا آمَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ
وَلَكِنْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

○

- 13 And when it is said to them: Believe as the people believe! they say: Shall we believe as the fools believe? Now surely, they themselves are the fools, but they do not know.

All beings reflect the Perpetual, and therefore always resist acknowledging any discontinuity or separation in lifestyle and beliefs. So when the truly sick at heart are shown their misdeeds, they react by denying

the information. Another symptom of this disease is kibriyā' (كبرياء), self elevation or arrogance. It is basic to every man to want self-respect and honor, and this is reflected in his beliefs. The would-be deceiver looks down upon other systems and denounces their adherents as sufahā' (سفاهة), foolish, insolent, impudent. A safih (سفيه, singular of sufahā'), is a person who knows better, but acts foolishly and detrimentally to himself. It is the munafiqūn who are the sufahā', because in their fiṭrah (فطرة), their instinct or natural disposition, they know better. They have, however, lost the way to that basic fiṭrī (فطري, in-born) knowledge.

The root of fiṭrah (فطرة) and fiṭrī (فطري) is the verb faṭara (فطر), to split or break apart, hence افطار, breaking of the fast. It also means to create. Non-creation cracked and split open to show its opposite, creation. Basic knowledge is fiṭrī (فطري), connected with the pre-creational crack. Access to basic knowledge is through diving deep into the well to reach the source of the spring where the original crack is. The safih (سفيه), the foolish, ignorant man whose life is cluttered and whose well is filled up with the debris of desire, attachment and covetousness, has no access to that original crack, that fiṭrah (فطرة).

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِنَّا خَلَوْنَا
إِلَىٰ شَيْطَانِنَا قَالُوا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ وَمِنَّا كُنَّا
مُسْتَهْزِؤُونَ

- 14 And when they meet those who believe, they say: We believe! And when they are alone with their shayṭāns, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking!

Shayṭān (from shaṭana, شطن, which has the same meaning as marāḍa, مرض, to rebel, and ba'uda, بعد, to be distant, cast off the path of effulgent mercy) opposes Raḥmān, the Merciful. Mockery, istihzā' (استهزاء), is ultimately harmful only to the self, because it splits up and negates it. Our attitude can never be passive, it is only either positive or negative. Man always seeks security, and therefore he who has not gained the security of 'imān is bound to show his state

when he is back among his old habits and in his own environment, i.e. his shayṭān.

اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي
طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

○

- 15 Allah will pay them back in their mockery, and He leaves them alone in their inordinancy, blindly wandering on.

Reality reflects their mockery, and as part of its mercy, increases and aids those who wish to mock. Whatever the system, it perpetuates itself – it is self-feeding. The system of *īmān*, if it is true, will only increase, and those who are in hypocrisy will only increase in hypocrisy, and therefore dive deeper into the abyss of its darkness. Everything is in increase. The creation started from exploding mercy: the dot of the Infinite expanding, and contracting back to the Infinite at the end of creation.

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالَهَ
بِالْهُدَىٰ فَتَارِيحَتْ بِتِجَارَتِهِمْ وَمَا
كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ

○

- 16 These are the ones who buy error for right direction, so their bargain will bring no gain, nor are they followers of the right direction.

Hudā (هدى), guidance to the truth, is your birthright. It is your capital with which to set out for the next realm of consciousness, but like an inheritance, it must be claimed here and now. Some people exchange it for misguidance, a slippery path that leads to desolation by inadvertent ignorance, encouraged and perpetrated by the dominant lower nafs, habits, insecurities, and fears of the unknown.

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ
 مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي
 ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ

- 17 Their parable is like the parable of one who kindles a fire, but when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them in utter darkness – they do not see.

The hypocrite occasionally catches a glimpse of real light, but rejects it. If, however, one does not follow that glimmer, then one has denied its existence and the guidance that comes from it. The hypocrite will end up confused in the darkness of disbelief and disconnectedness.

صَمٌّ بَكْرٌ عُمَىٰ فَهُمْ لَا يُرْجِعُونَ ٧

- 18 Deaf, dumb, blind – so they will not turn back.

لا يرجعون, 'they will not turn back'. Often in the Qur'an, raja'a, رجوع, denotes return in the sense of repentance, doing tawbah (توبة), re-turning from the non-real. The Real has always been there, but, pulled by our heart's attachments, we look in the direction of attachments.

أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ
 وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ مِنَ
 الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ
 بِالْكَافِرِينَ

- 19 Or like abundant rain from the cloud in which is utter darkness, and thunder, and lightning — they put their fingers into their ears because of the thunderclap, for fear of death — and Allah encompasses the unbelievers.

Part of the mercy in the system of a rainstorm is the thunder and lightning. If one is afraid of that system, then one is in ignorance, and if one is in ignorance then one is in separation, one no longer experiences *tawhīd* (توحيد), unity. You cannot help being awestruck by the majesty and beauty of Allah's manifestations. You can choose to be in glorification of the Creator or in subjective fear. In the Qur'an, too, the promises, the warnings and the irrefutable light of knowledge that hit one like lightning and thunder cause the disbeliever to react the same way as he does to terrestrial thunder and lightning.

يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطِفُ أَبْصَارَهُمْ كَمَا أَضَاءَ
لَهُمْ مَشَافِيهِ ۖ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا وَلَوْ
شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ



- 20 The lightning almost takes away their sight — whenever it shines on them they walk in it, and when it becomes dark to them they stand still. And if Allah had pleased, He would certainly have taken away their hearing and their sight — surely, Allah has power over all things.

Deaf, dumb and blind. If one cannot hear, see or speak there is no input and consequently no appropriate output. The light of truth, of reality, is so devastating that it not only snatches away your 'sight', but brings you to the realization of your non-existence.

This ayah implies that the denier, the *kāfir*, will not see the unity

of diversity, for he has not surrendered into the blessedness of the All-encompassing Rahmān. He therefore moves only when the signs are conducive to his self, and stops in the darkness, repelled, whenever the signs go against him.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي
خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

- 21 O men! Serve your Lord Who created you and those before you, so that you may safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness.

At all times all beings are in 'ibādah (عبادة), adoration, worship, whether conscious of it or not. Everyone has a point upon which his heart focuses and around which his actions revolve. The only worthwhile focal point is that which encompasses and sustains everything, the Rabb (رب), the Lord-Sustainer (from rabba, رَبَّ, to raise, bring up to full potential). If we are not in true 'ibādah then we cannot know the full meaning of taqwā (تقوى), and therefore where the boundaries lie – where safety ends and harm begins. When 'ibādah is true, there is no friction between the worshipper and the worshipped. For example, when the road is mu'abbad (معبّد), smooth, the drive is smooth (the root of this word is the same as that of 'ibādah). If the 'ibādah is not correct and frictionless then it is perverted or superstitious worship.

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً
وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ
الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ
أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

- 22 Who made the earth a resting-place for you,

and the heaven a canopy, and Who sends down rain from the cloud, then brings forth fruits for you as subsistence — so do not set up rivals to Allah while you know.

The mercy of absolute love is clearly described here, both grossly and subtly. The first stage is ease, reclining (فراشا , bed, blanket, cushion), then stability (بناء , building, structure), then continuous adoration (ماء , flowing water), then sustenance (ثمرات , fruits) as a means to worship. All this is from One Creator, and if this effulgent love is recognized and known, then there is no room for shirk (شرك), idolatry, associating others with Allah ('andād, أنداد , rival, antagonist).

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا
بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ
اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

○ 23

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it, and call on your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful.

Our 'abd (عبد), specifically and directly meaning the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him (and therefore indirectly meaning every follower of the Prophet), read the Book of One Reality. The culture of the Arabs of his time was based on deep communication using language and memory. This ayah challenges the unbelievers to produce the likes of this Book either in its perfect linguistic form or in its meaning. This permanent challenge is one of the majestic glories of the Book as transmitted through Muhammad.

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي
 وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

- 24 But if you do not do it, and you will never do it, then safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness from the Fire whose fuel is men and stones — prepared for the unbelievers.

The Qur'an both predicts and asserts that no one can bring forth its like either in form or meaning, and uses this assertion as a proof to persuade the ignorant, arrogant challenger to be wary of the torment of the Fire. Avoid the Fire, the Fire of ignorance and denial, since you are its fuel.

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ
 لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
 كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا
 قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ
 وَأَنْتَابَهُ مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ
 مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

- 25 And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that they shall have Gardens in which rivers flow — whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit of it, they shall say: This is what was given to us before — but they shall be given the likes of it. And they shall have pure mates in them, and in them they shall remain.

'Imān (ايمان), trust, is always coupled with action ('amal as-sālihāt, عمل الصالحات), otherwise it would not flourish and grow. If you do not do right, then you do wrong. All ayats about the state after death concern your spirit or essence, called the rūh (روح), that realm of pure consciousness already within you. It will continue after physical death because it comes from the Everlasting.

The hidden garden (jannah, جنة, garden, paradise, from the verb janna, جنى, to conceal, veil) is the state of absolute freedom from everything. Its width is the heavens and the earth, and therefore the Garden can be here and afterwards. What matters to the experiencer is the state that a lush garden brings about. Therefore what concerns us is the state of those who dwell in the Garden. The name Garden indicates that state. In your heart, you can live the bliss, contentment and joy of a garden while on a sand dune. Therefore; the true Garden and the true state are nourished by indiscernible rivers, so – rivers flowing from underneath.

تجري من تحتها الانهار, 'in which rivers flow': the trees of this secret Garden are watered by the unseen rivers, the rivers of barakah (بركة) that emanate from true 'imān / 'ihsān / Islām (ايمان واحسان و اسلام).

متشابهها, 'the like of it': those in jannahs (جنة) have an echo in them of the earthly garden. They have already tasted the state of the Garden in their life on earth. Here it is we who are the echo of the Creator. If it were not so, if we did not already possess the essence of all, we would not have either outer or inner perception and comprehension. In this particular life form which we now occupy, the so-called 'we' is the effect, not the cause, in that we are subject to the boundaries of duality. We exist by the mīzān (ميزان), balance, and we contain the meaning of the mīzān. What follows after death is a direct experience of the cause. Resurrection is the emergence into dominance of those pure energies behind what we see as being this crude existence.

The azwājūn mutahharatun (ازواج مطهرة), 'pure mates', are pure because they have no tarnish or colors, and therefore there is no adequate description of them. 'Partners' signifies that the opposites will have met and been neutralized and balanced. This indicates the purity of the next life or existence.

At the moment, we are like animals seeking the source of unification. We know permanence by the permanent within us. When we die, the state of our rūh (روح) will be as pure as whatever degree of cognizance we will have attained during our lifetime. The degree of that cognizance, enlightenment and awareness is dependent on the purity of the abandonment, non-attachment, and non-expectation that we have reached,

and of the qalb (قلب), the heart, being a true turner. The purpose of this life is to separate the mix of disharmony and harmony, so that our ruh will emit and transmit according to the purity it will have attained by eliminating and negating self-produced static – the noises of the nafs (نفس) which overlay and cover pure spirits within.

By following the correct path in this life, the seeker purifies his intentions, and unifies his pure intentions with his actions without any expectations, and thereby he reflects the purity and the generosity of his Creator. At the point of death, his capital is his overall state of purity, awareness and remembrance of his source. From there on, in the next life, he emits and transmits according to his state of clarity and purity at the point of death. The more there is of nafs and ego, the more he emits distorted vibrations.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَا
 بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
 فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا
 يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا
 يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ

- 26 Surely Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable – a gnat or anything above that. As for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord. And as for those who disbelieve, they say: What is it that Allah means by this as a parable? He causes many to err by it and He leads many aright by it, but He does not cause to err by it any except the transgressors.

The parables and examples (mathal, مثل) which echo the meaning

of reality are given to us in what appears to be a small and insignificant fly. Those who seek the truth will gain this subtle knowledge from small and large parables, and those who are in kufr (كُفْر) will have no access to the Book.

الَّذِينَ يَخُفُّونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ
مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ
أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْخَاسِرُونَ

- 27 Who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation, and cut asunder what Allah has ordered to be joined, and make mischief in the land – these are the losers.

This is a description of the mufsidūn (مفسدون). The mīthāq (ميثاق , agreement, contract) here could be our being born, thus entering into the life-transaction. To break the pact is to break the contract of tawhīd (توحيد), of unity. Allah's commandment ('amr, امر), through 'īmān in the Book and the Prophet, is to see unity in diversity.

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا
فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ
ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

- 28 How can you deny Allah, when you were dead and He gave you life? Again He will cause you to die and again bring you to life – then you shall be brought back to Him.

We are only dead matter revived for a while by Allah. The drop of the ocean is not separate from the ocean, but in order to recognize that, it first has to give up its identity of being a drop. Similarly we can only taste the source of life through the door of death.

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا
ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ
سَمَوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ٤

○

29 It is He Who created for you all that is in the earth, and He directed Himself to the heaven, so He completed them as seven heavens, and He knows all things.

He created the earth for the highest of creatures, man. The next step was to create the heavens, above and below: the many heavens and layers above us in the sky, below us in the earth and within the atom, which has seven energy levels. It is only the lowest heaven that contains all the stars, galaxies, and all lights and discernable entities.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي
الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ
فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ
بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا
لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

○

30 And when your Lord said to the angels, I am

going to place a khalifah in the earth, they said: What! Will You place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood, and we celebrate Your praise and extol Your holiness? He said: Surely I know what you do not know.

The angels, insofar as they are describable, are entities which have no choice whatsoever in the course set by their Creator. They are completely single-pointed in their obedience to Allah. Under the laws of Creation they have no choice – they symbolize any created energy which is set on a trajectory toward a specific object without having a conscious ability to act otherwise.

The khalifah (خليفة , the one who is left behind) is empowered to act in what appears to be the absence of the owner or controller. The angels wondered at the decree of placing Adam on earth, rather than questioning it. While the angels are quddus (قدوس), sacred, and at the same time limited, man is not in perpetual sanctification and is potentially boundless, for he reflects the boundless Might and Power of Allah. It was the knowledge of man's potential to be creative and destructive, obedient and disobedient, believing and disbelieving, which caused the angels to be surprised. The angels do not contain the possibility of duality, and since it is beyond the experience of a totally obedient angel, the question of possible chaos arising from a creation who can choose between good and evil is a natural one.

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى
 الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ
 إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

- 31 And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels. Then He said: Tell me the names of those, if you are right!

The 'asmā' (أسماء), names, indicate knowledge. Allah gave Adam (آدم , related to أديم , skin, dust on the surface of the earth) all the

knowledges of attributes and actions in creation, indicated by names. They were then displayed to the angels who, in their sacred limitation, could not comprehend them. Within those knowledges is the innate ability to discriminate between mercy and torment, Raḥmān (رحمان) and shayṭān (شیطان). The Adamic creation thus contains within itself a radar that enables it to zone in directly toward Allah.

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ
أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

○

- 32 They said: Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us — surely, You are the Knowing, the Wise.

Having seen the superiority and glorious wisdom of their Creator, they reverted to glorifying and totally accepting His creation (Adam), and thereby also acknowledging the limited beams of knowledge which are their domain of awareness.

قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ
بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ أَنِّي أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا
كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

○

- 33 He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names. Then when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not say to you that I surely know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you manifest and what you hide?

Adam was then instructed to reveal his knowledge, upon which the angels became content with the proof of the absolute wisdom and mercy of Allah.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا
إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

- 34 And when We said to the angels: Prostrate to Adam, they all prostrated, except 'Iblīs. He refused and he was proud, and he was one of the unbelievers.

Following this great generous act, the angels were ordered to prostrate themselves and acknowledge the superiority of this *khalīfah* (خليفة) 'Iblīs (إبليس , from إبلس , to be overcome with grief or despair) diverged from the norm – the norm being hope and the experiential knowledge of the Merciful, based on 'īmān – and denied the All-encompassing Mercy by the cover and *kufur* (كفر) of *kibriyya'* (كبرياء), arrogance and self-elevation.

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا
مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ
فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

- 35 And We said: O Adam! Dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat from it plenteously wherever you wish – but do not approach this tree, for then you will be of the unjust.

The story of Adam is the story of creation. With his opposite and complementary companion, woman, Adam, the man, was given the Garden to dwell in, unrestrained. Only a tree was out of bounds, an area of aberration not of the nature of *jannah* (جنة), the perpetual

heavenly Garden. Jannah could only be meaningful if its opposite, the transient, decaying 'tree' of temptation, covetousness, (hirs, حرص), and the rise of mind questioning and desiring, were also present. So Adam had to use his 'aql (عقل , intellect, rational thinking process) to discriminate. This was his first test and affliction, to consolidate his knowledge and to begin to learn how to choose. The tree symbolizes covetousness, for in the Garden of raghd (رغد), expansion and ease, there was everything that was needed, and yet man wanted, and still wants, more.

فَاذْهَبَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَاخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ
 وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ
 عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ

- 36 But *shayṭān* made them both fall from it, and caused them to depart from what they were in, and We said: Go forth, some of you being the enemies of others! And for you, in the earth, there is an abode and provision for a time.

Shayṭān , شيطان , (from *shaṭana* , شطن , to be obstinate or perverse) is like a wavelength that can be tuned into repeatedly by not being in 'īmān. *Shayṭān* caused them to slip from the blessedness of the Garden. By desiring the fruit of the tree, they brought conflict into that eternal peace. By the rebellious energy of *shayṭān* and the despair of 'Iblīs (إبليس), they slipped out of the condition of peace, of neutral contentment, into the realm of the physical, worldly creation where the laws of opposites are at full play. In this melting pot of peace and conflict, love and enmity, the knowledge of the perfect path can be gained so that man is ready to enter the Garden, this time by earning his keep.

فَلَقَىٰ آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ

إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

○

- 37 Then Adam received words from his Lord, so He turned to him mercifully – surely He is the Often-turning, the Merciful.

By his capacity for all knowledges, Adam realized his affliction. By that recognition, the Mercy turned to Adam, and Adam recognized the words he received as acceptance of his repentance, tawbah (توبة).

قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ
مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

○

- 38 We said: Go forth from this, all of you! Then surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ
أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

○

- 39 And as for those who disbelieve in and reject My communications, they are the inmates of the Fire – in it they shall remain.

Man is programmed to dislike grief. By following his inborn guidance, hudā (هدى), fear and hesitancy, grief and uncertainty will be dispelled. Those who deny the existence of and the possibility of access to that guiding knowledge – the kāfirūn (كافرون) – will be in the turmoil and agitation of their self-created fires.

يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ
عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَوْفُوا بِعَهْدِي أُوفِ بِعَهْدِكُمْ
وَإِيَّايَ فَازْهَبُونَ

- 40 O tribe of Israel! Call to mind My favor which I bestowed on you, and be faithful to your covenant with Me! I will fulfill My covenant with you. And of Me, Me alone, should you be afraid.

Ni'mah (نعمة) is a bounty, blessing or favor. Historically, the blessing here is their safety from the tyranny of Fir'aun (فرعون), Pharaoh. Allah says: Be faithful to the Bestower of bounty and it will be reciprocated! Be in remembrance, be wary of the transgression and abuse of the laws of Allah! Do not break the laws that govern existence – as you do unto others so will it be done unto you.

وَأْمِنُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُونُوا
أُولَٰئِكَ الَّتِي هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا
وَإِيَّايَ فَاتَّقُونَ

- 41 And believe in what I have revealed, verifying that which is with you, and be not the first to deny it, nor take a mean price in exchange for My communications – and Me, Me alone should you fear!

This ayah is addressed specifically to the children of Ya'qūb, Banī (tribe of) 'Isrā'īl, exhorting them to believe in the Qur'ān as they did in the Torah. The general meaning can be taken to be that if one gives the right weight to the signs that emanate from within oneself, each individual will have signs of confirmation of the truth of the Book.

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ

42

And do not mix up truth with falsehood,
nor hide the truth while you know.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا
مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

43

And keep up prayer, and pay the poor-tax,
and bow down with those who bow.

To conceal knowledge of truth is kufr (كفر). You are in the Fire in the here-and-now if you see, but ignore and avoid acting positively upon that insight. The injunction is to join the stream of worshippers, purifiers and seekers of truth.

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ
أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

44

What! Do you enjoin men to good and neglect
your own souls, while you read the Book?
Have you then no sense?

Talā (تلا) is to read or recite, but implies repetition. Only if you have 'aql (عقل , to internalize, realize, have reason, confine), is your advice likely to be effective. The specific meaning is related to those who advise others, while not applying this advice to themselves.

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ
إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ

- 45 And seek assistance through patience and prayer, and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones.

Patience to subdue and curb desires and arrogance is a key to the door of *khushu'* (خشوع), humility, acceptance and obedience.

الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ
رَاجِعُونَ

- 46 Who know that they shall meet their Lord, and that they shall return to Him.

The reward of humility and worship is the certainty of the knowledge of the return to Allah.

يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ
عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

- 47 O tribe of Israel! Call to mind my favor which I bestowed on you, and that I made you excel the nations.

Faḍḍala (فضل), 'to favor or grace with', recalls the many prophets with which the Banī 'Isrā'il were graced. A people remembers the blessings upon it by showing gratitude through obedience and submission, and, in return, Allah's blessings and grace upon it will be greater.

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا
وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَ
لَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

○
48

And safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness against a day when one soul shall not avail another in the least, nor shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped.

On that day absolute justice prevails and no question of being a 'chosen' people or being interceded for arises. It is only you who will have brought whatever it may be upon yourself. Your rewards and recompense are your actions.

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَكُمْ سُوءَ
الْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ
وَفِي ذَلِكَ لَكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ

○
49

And when We delivered you from Fir'aun's people, who subjected you to severe torment, killing your sons and sparing your women — and in this there was a great trial from your Lord.

Balā' (بلاء) is an affliction or test — it is a part of tarbiyah (تربية), the bringing up and the development of one who is subject to the Sustainer, the Lord. It is the degree of your abandonment, the extent of your 'islām and 'īmān, that is tested. Everything must be looked at with the recognition of waḥdatul-wujūd (وحدة الوجود), the oneness of beingness. The beginning of your troubles is the rise of

anā (انا), I, as happened to 'Iblīs (ابلیس), when he claimed to be better than Adam. For the mu'min (مؤمن , trusting believer), afflictions are the delights, for they are direct evidence of the attention and love of his Rabb (رَبِّ , Sustainer, Lord).

Specifically, the ayah reminds the Banī 'Isrā'īl of being saved from Fir'aun (فرعون , Pharoah) by following the true message through the messenger Mūsā (موسى , Moses). In general, it is a reminder to all that have been saved from past afflictions and given the knowledge of wisdom arising from the circumstances. How many times each individual and community have tasted hardship and were then relieved! But it is seldom that we take the opportunity of that relief to increase our 'īmān (ايمان) and our living in 'ihsān (احسان , a state of goodness), thereby diving deeper into the sea of mercy as promised by Allah.

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمْ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا
 آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

- 50 And when We parted the sea for you, so We saved you and drowned the followers of Fir'aun, and you were there watching!

The cleaving of the sea was a natural and real occurrence. The episode blatantly demonstrates divine intervention to save the Banī 'Isrā'īl. At that occurrence Banī 'Isrā'īl were in submission to the truth, and therefore were saved. Those who were drowned were already submerged in their materialism, so their physical drowning was fulfillment of tawhīd (توحيد , unity, oneness). This ayah describes cosmic ecology: the elements which echo its true nature and the truth are protected, while those which block and deny creation's unfoldment are destroyed.

وَإِذْ وَعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ
 اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

- 51 And when We appointed a time of forty nights

with Mūsā, then you took up the calf after him, and you were unjust.

This refers to Mūsā reaching his prophethood. The traditional length of seclusion in i'tikāf (اعتكاف , withdrawal, devotion) is forty days. It was by his absence that the people's 'islām was tested, and they were shown to be unjust to themselves.

ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنْكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

○

- 52 Then We pardoned you after so that you might give thanks.

'Afā (عفا) is to wipe out past traces, to cleanse, purify, or forgive. Allah purified them so they could revert to shukr (شكر), gratitude and glorification, the rewards of submission and recognition of the state of submission. Gratefulness is contentment, being able to see the world from a neutralized point, unagitated by desires and expectations.

وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

○

- 53 And when We gave Mūsā the Book and the discrimination so that you might walk aright.

Allah exposed him to Reality. The Book contains both the inward and outward signs of tawhīd (توحيد), and discrimination, furqān (فرقان). It describes the meanings gained while in the state of gatheredness, and the wisdom attainable in the state of dispersion.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ أِنَّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ
 أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِاتِّخَاذِكُمُ الْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوا إِلَىٰ
 بَارئِكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ذَٰلِكُمْ
 خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارئِكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ
 إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

54

And when Mūsā said to his people: O my people! You have surely been unjust to yourselves by taking up the calf, so turn to your Creator, and kill your people — that is best for you with your Creator. So He turned to you, for surely He is the Often-turning, the Merciful.

The outer meaning is that the righteous elements of the Banī 'Isrā'īl should get rid of the evil ones. The inner meaning could be the annihilation of the lower tendencies in oneself, the striving for which brings about purity and forgiveness by the Merciful, as is referred to in the latter part of this ayah.

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَىٰ
 اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ وَأَنْتُمْ
 تَنْظُرُونَ

55

And when you said: O Mūsā! We will not believe in you until we see Allah openly! So the punishment overtook you while you looked on.

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَشْكُرُونَ

- 56 Then We raised you up after your death, so that you may give thanks.

وَوَضَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ الغَمَامَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّانَ
وَالسَّلْوَى كُلُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ
وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

- 57 And We made the clouds to give shade over you, and We sent to you manna and quails: Eat of the good things that We have given you! And they did not do Us any harm, but they made their own souls suffer the loss.

They were taken out of themselves by the 'thunderbolt' and then raised, having understood the meaning of death. Pure consciousness perceives the truth. In order to understand any attribute it is necessary to experience its opposite: to know heat, cold is necessary, to know life, the experience of death is necessary. Ba'athnākum (بعثناكم), 'we woke you' – death is necessary to know the meaning of al-Bāqī (الباقي), and as-Samad (الصمد), for Allah created you from dead material. Apart from the great gift of the knowledge of life and death, the Sustainer has given us the blessings of cooling clouds and all other forms of sustenance.

They knew there was nothing in this life but shadow forms. Al-mann (المن) and as-salwa (السلوى) are two heavenly foods not requiring toil to obtain. The implication is that we are born with our rizq (رزق), our means of sustenance.

وَأَذَقْنَا إِذْ دَخَلُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا

حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَاذْخُلُوا الْبَابَ مُسْتَجِدًّا وَ
 قُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطَايَاكُمْ
 وَسَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

- 58 And when We said: Enter this city, then eat from it a plenteously wherever you wish, and enter the gate prostrating, and say: Humiliation! We will forgive you for your wrongs and give more to those who do good.

After having gained knowledge of the true path, a man of submission enters the gateway, or door, bowing respectfully. If in the beginning knowledge is the priority, so too will it be at the end. The historical reference is likely to be the return of the Banī 'Isrā'īl to Jerusalem or Palestine. They were told to enter the city of their desire with humility, and in a state of ḥiṭṭah (حِطَّة, humility, humiliation). If the desire is for something worthwhile, such as higher knowledge, the correct way of approach is prostration and pleading ignorance.

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ
 فَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رِجْزًا مِّنَ
 السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ

- 59 But those who were unjust changed it for a saying other than that which had been spoken to them, so We sent upon those who were unjust a pestilence from heaven, because they transgressed.

Justice will prevail when man goes against the will of the Revealer – it will expose the truth. The Lord will prevail upon and engulf them with an affliction as terrible as their misdeeds.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ
 الْحَجَرَ فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَا عَشَرَ نَبِئًا قَدْ
 عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرَبَهُمْ كَلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا
 مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

60

And when Mūsā prayed for drink for his people, We said: Strike the rock with your staff! So there gushed from it twelve springs — each tribe knew its drinking place: Eat and drink of the provisions of Allah, and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief!

Thirst can be both material and abstract. The prophet Mūsā satisfied the people's thirst for knowledge as well as giving them springs to quench their material thirst.

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نَصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ
 فَادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ
 مِنْ بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّائِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَ
 عَدْسِهَا وَبَصَلِهَا قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ
 الَّذِي هُوَ آذَنٌ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا
 مِصْرًا فَلَا لَكُمْ مَا سَأَلْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ
 عَلَيْهِمُ الدَّلَّةُ وَالسُّكْنَةُ وَبَاءُوا
 بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا

يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ
 النَّبِيَّ بَغْيًا حَقًّا ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَ
 كَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ

61

And when you said: O Mūsā! we cannot bear with one food, so pray to your Lord on our behalf to bring forth for us out of what the earth grows, of its herbs, and its cucumbers, and its garlic, and its lentils, and its onions. He said: Will you exchange that which is better for that which is worse? Enter a city, so you will have what you ask for! And abasement and humiliation were brought down upon them, and they became deserving of Allah's wrath — this was because they disbelieved in the communications of Allah and killed the prophets unjustly — this was because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits.

Man's lower self is by nature dissatisfied and covetous, as Adam was in the Garden. The foods mentioned encompass many generic staple foods and intimate material products of the earth. 'That which is better,' *kḥayr* (خَيْر), implies that oftentimes there is better nourishment than earthly food. Being concerned only, or mostly, with the physical, one will only end up abased. It is better to use it just as it was meant to be, as a base upon which to build.

يَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ , 'They killed the prophets', because they all came with the same news and warnings: you do not exist, there is only Allah. The killing is both real and abstract, that is, discarding the message is to put an end to its value, and thereby kill it. The prophets came to remind people of the message already in their hearts, but which was hidden under the veil and debris of arrogance and self-assertion. The knowledge of Allah is *fiṭrī* (فِطْرِي), that is, inherent in man.

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَالَّذِيْنَ هَادُوْا وَالنَّصَارَى
 وَالصّٰبِئِيْنَ مَنۡ اٰمَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ وَ
 عَمِلَ صٰلِحًا فَلَهُمْ اَجْرُهُمْ عِنۡدَ رَبِّهِمْ
 وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُوْنَ

- 62 Surely, those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans – whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.

The jews (yahūd, يهود, 'those guided', from هدى, guidance), the christians (naṣarā, نصارى, those who stand for the victory of the Masīḥ, مسيح, Messiah, and what he represents, from naṣara, نصر, to be victorious, overcome), the sabeans (from ṣaba'a, صبا, to turn toward something, that is, those who turned toward Allah): these names refer to those whose characteristics are like them, as well as to specific people. Those from among them who trust and believe in the messages, who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and act virtuously, will reap the reward.

There is no abstraction in the dīn (دين). The two (belief and good works) must always go together. 'Amal (عمل), work, action, is the means by which you are able to judge according to shari'ah, because true 'imān always manifests itself in correct action.

If you are a mu'min (مؤمن), muttaqī (متقى), or ṣāliḥ (صالح), then you will not be in grief or sadness. Your reality is to be in joyfulness, and the door to that state opens with the recognition that you have a tendency to be at a loss. The way to evolve out of this darkness is to trust that the light of truth will be known to you, to have noble intentions and to translate these intentions into virtuous actions. Thus, you will unify your beingness and begin to qualify for the inner understanding of the one divine substructure, or throne ('arsh, عرش, foundation, throne) behind existence.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ
 الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ
 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

- 63 And when we took a promise from you and lifted the mountain over you: Take hold of the law We have given you with firmness, and bear in mind what is in it, so that you may safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness.

^{tr} Taqwā (تقوى) is fear of not remembering Allah, and the distress that comes with it – to remember is to be spared the darkness, loss and agony of non-remembrance.

Khudhū (خذو), 'hold fast' – be sure about something that is beneficial, and persevere until that certainty becomes second nature to you, because originally it was your nature. Be firm and aware of what is harmful so that it is avoided!

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ
 عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

- 64 Then you turned back after that – so, were it not for the grace of Allah and His mercy on you, you would certainly have been among the losers.

This ayah addresses those who have won over doubt and are not in sadness. The story of man is that his persistent nafs (نفس) will cause him to fall into the darkness of its grip.

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِينَ اعْتَدُوا مِنْكُمْ فِي السَّبْتِ
فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ

- 65 And certainly you have known those among you who exceeded the limits of the Sabbath, so We said to them: Be apes, despised and hated!

If you persist in rebelling, you will fall from the highest level of humanity to the lowest, to man's ape-ness: eating, sleeping and dying in ignorance. If man does not rise to his intended high potential, then his condition is worse than that of an animal. Man can either follow his endless whims and appetites into the abyss, or he can seek and reflect the subtle aspects within himself, and rise to the knowledge of his Creator.

فَجَعَلْنَاهَا نَكَالًا لِّمَا
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

- 66 So We made them an example to those who witnessed it and those who came after it, and an admonition to those who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

Nakalan (نكالا), a lesson or example, is used to teach. It is a reminder of what the end result can be.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ
تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا أَتَتَّخِذُنَا هُزُوًا قَالَ

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

- 67 And when Mūsā said to his people: Surely Allah commands you to sacrifice a cow! They said: Do you ridicule us? He said: I seek the protection of Allah from being one of the ignorant.

To seek refuge implies disappearing or becoming absent for the sake of safety or security by merging into that in which you have sought refuge.

قَالُوا ادْعُ لِنَارِكَ يَبِينُ لَنَا مَا هِيَ قَالَتْ إِنَّهُ
يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقْرَةٌ لَأَفَارِضٌ وَلَا يَكْرَهُ عَوَانُ
بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ فَافْعَلُوا مَا تُؤْمَرُونَ

- 68 They said: Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is. Mūsā said: He says, Surely she is a cow neither advanced in age nor too young, of middle age between the two, so do what you are commanded.

قَالُوا ادْعُ لِنَارِكَ يَبِينُ لَنَا مَا لَوْنُهَا قَالَتْ إِنَّهُ
يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقْرَةٌ صَفْرَاءُ فَاقْع
لَوْنُهَا تَسْرًا لِنَاظِرِينَ

- 69 They said: Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what her color is. Mūsā

said: He says, Surely she is a yellow cow
— her color is intensely yellow, giving de-
light to the beholders.

These two ayats deal with man's arrogance. Although specifically they refer to the rebellion of the jews, they also apply to man's bickering about, arguing with, doubting of, rebellion against and rejection of the doctrine of truthful submission and guidance. The patience of the messenger with the doubters is a proof of his divinely inspired love. In a similar way, after the death of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, many of the muslims quarreled over and doubted his will and the intention that Sayyidna 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib should lead and establish Islam Original.

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ
الْبَقَرَ تَشَابَهَ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنَّا لَإِشْيَاءَ اللَّهِ
لَمُهْتَدُونَ

○

70

They said: Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is, for surely to us cows are all alike, and if Allah wills, we shall surely be guided aright!

Not being tuned to the message and the messengers, doubt and confusion will be the norm.

قَالَتْ هُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَا ذَلُولَ تُشِيرُ الْأَرْضَ
وَلَا تَسْقِي الْحَرْثَ مُسَلِّمَةٌ لَا يَشِيءُ فِيهَا قَالُوا لَنْ
نَجِدَ بِالْحَقِّ فَذَجَّوْهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

○

71

Mūsā said: He says, Surely she is a cow not made submissive to plough the land, nor does she irrigate the tillage — s.und,

without a blemish in her. They said: Now you have brought the truth. So they sacrificed her, although they almost did not do it.

The messenger, with his infinite patience, again defines in detail the outer sacrifice which, from the very beginning, signified obedience and trust. But because of the people's disbelief, the issue and its attendant energy revolves around the physical sacrifice rather than its purpose and meaning, which was to rid man of questioning and doubt so that he may enter the heavenly courtyard of submission and peace.

وَإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا
فَآذَرْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

- 72 And when you killed a man, then you disagreed concerning it, and Allah was to bring forth what you were going to hide!

Since all human beings have been created from one self, killing a person and what he represents is like annihilating the entire creation. This ayah refers to an incident where a man was murdered by his nephew. The Jews did not believe that Mūsā, peace be upon him, would be able to determine who the culprit was. A dispute took place among the people concerning the murderer's identity, and some of the people attempted to hide the crime. But a miracle occurred, and the man was revived.

فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبُوهُ بَعْضَهَا كَذَلِكَ يُحْيِي اللَّهُ الْمَوْتَى
وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

- 73 So We said: Strike it with part of it! Thus, Allah brings the dead to life, and He

shows you His signs, so that you may understand.

All creation is in balance between two opposites – from the dead comes the living, and from life comes death. The root of one is in the other. If you can strike the negative part of yourself, then only the positive side will emerge.

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقُّ فَيُخْرِجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

○

74

Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, or worse in hardness. And surely, there are some rocks from which streams burst forth, and surely, there are some of them which split apart so that water issues out of them, and surely, there are some of them which fall down for fear of Allah – and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.

Intentions stem from the heart and are manifest in action. If the intentions are against the creational direction of mercy and divine life, it will only cause the well of the heart to clog up with the debris of evil intentions, thereby blocking the natural stream and spring of effulgent love and generosity, and all the other high attributes, leaving behind a frigid, stone-filled breast.

A heart can be worse than a stone if it does not even follow its nature the way a stone does. A stone does not rebel, but a heart can! The nature of the qalb (قلب , from qalaba, قلب , to turn),

is being willing to abandon everything to which it is attached, and to turn. If one does not allow it to turn, it stiffens, sets, and withers. The turning is jihād (جهاد, from جهد, to strive, expend energy), willingness to leave and die at any given moment.

أَفَطِيعُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ
فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلِمَةَ اللَّهِ
ثُمَّ يَخْرِفُونَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ
يَعْلَمُونَ

○

- 75 Do you then hope that they would believe in you, and a party from among them indeed used to hear the Word of Allah, then alter it after they had understood it, and they know.

If you understand parts of the truth but do not like them, then you are apt to conceal them from yourself by changing them. الإنسان على نفسه بصيرة ولو ألقى معاذيره - 'Man is a witness upon himself, although he finds excuses' (75:14-15). Begin to rid yourself of attachments by acquiring better attachments, by 'amal aṣ-ṣāliḥāt (عمل الصالحات). As a result of arrogance, those who called themselves 'the guided' (yahūd, يهود, jews), concealed what they did not like, and corrupted and altered what could have been a testimony to their loss.

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا
خَلَا بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ قَالُوا أَتُحَدِّثُونَهُمْ
بِمَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لِيُحَاجُّوكُمْ بِهِ

عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

○
76

And when they meet those who believe they say: We believe! And when they are alone with one another, they say: Do you talk to them about what Allah has disclosed to you, so that they may contend with you by this before your Lord? Do you not then understand?

أَوَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ
وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ

○
77

Do they not know that Allah knows what they keep secret and what they make known?

The truth will later be used against these scholars who keep the Book of Knowledge exclusively to themselves in order to exert and maintain power over the ummiyy (أمى), illiterate. Those who are more generous with inner knowledge are often reprimanded by those who want to maintain power over and remain above others. The jews at the time of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, had perfected the art of religious class barriers, and throughout the history of man and of other religions we see this phenomenon.

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيً
وَأَنْهُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

○
78

And among them there are illiterates who do not know the Book, but only lies, and they only conjecture.

The ummiyy (أمى), illiterate, as opposed to the crafty scholar,

are the innocent victims of priest-class falsehood and tyranny. They are barred from access to means of gaining knowledge by those who wish to maintain exclusive control and power, deliberately keeping others deprived in darkness.

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ
ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِ
ثَمًّا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ

- 79 Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their hands and then say: This is from Allah! So that they may take for it a small price. So woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn.

He who corrupts the Book of Truth has corrupted himself. People who alter prophetic messages do so only to reinforce their self-made idols, which in time can only tumble and reveal falsehood.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نَمَسَّ النَّارَ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا
مَعْدُودَةً قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا
فَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى
اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

- 80 And they say: Fire shall not touch us except for a few days. Say: Have you received a promise from Allah? Then Allah will not fail to perform His promise. Or do you

say about Allah what you do not know?

Because of their state of separation, they concoct these falsehoods and ascribe them to Allah. Wrong actions start the fire in the here-and-now – reaction in this zone of experience is instantaneous. You are caught in your intention and you will reap accordingly. This is divine, absolute justice.

بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ
خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ
فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

- 81 Yes! Whoever earns evil, and his wrong actions beset him on every side, these are the inmates of the Fire – in it they shall remain.

There is no separation – it is a perfect cybernetic system. In each situation you are rewarded according to your intention. Desires and wants usurp your availability and the energies of your mind. Fear of not fulfilling them causes anxieties, but their fulfillment increases the appetite – the cycle is vicious and unending.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

- 82 And as for those who believe and do good deeds, these are the dwellers of the Garden – in it they shall remain.

Those who have trust in the absolute mercy of His Creation, and translate their selfless peace-loving intentions and love of truth into correct actions, are on their way to experiencing the states of content-

ment, fulfillment and bliss – states which are among the results of being in the Garden.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لَا
تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَالْوَالِدِينَ إِحْسَانًا
وَزِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ
وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ
وَاتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا
مِّنْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ

83

And when We made a covenant with the tribe of Israel: You shall not serve any but Allah, and you shall do good to parents, and to the near of kin, and to the orphans, and the needy, and you shall speak to men good words, and keep up prayer, and pay the poor-tax. Then you turned back except a few of you, and you turn aside.

All experience and creation are in balance between two opposites. When Allah gave the jews the license to be guided through their prophets, the price He took was submission – 'islām, tawhīd, adoration of none other than Allah.

One experiences glorious bliss as a result of being in this experiential world. One is born into this world through parents, and therefore he who is on the path of guidance cannot but have reverence for those who existentially are close: parents, near ones, those without guardians and the masākin (مساكين, destitute and helpless). Part of the contract of guidance is to speak only good, and to adhere to the practices of prayer, purification and payment of what is due. Whoever breaks one side of the contract will lose the path of guidance and the experience of mercy.

وَإِذَا أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَآتِفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ
 وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ
 أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تُشْهَدُونَ

84

And when We made a covenant with you:
 You shall not shed your blood, and you
 shall not turn your people out of your
 cities – then you gave a promise while
 you witnessed.

The ayah makes a clear reference to the attitude of the jews as described here of only fulfilling the part of the treaty that was suitable to themselves, and ignoring the part that demanded that they should stand up and fight, and to the perverted priority of seeking power and dominance over others at all costs. Specifically, this reminder is directed to the Banī 'Isrā'īl, who entered into a treaty with the Holy Prophet at Medina. Indeed, there was a detailed agreement of cooperation and coexistence between them, but, as is the case with all humans when they allow their lower elements to surface and take hold of their actions, that mischievous, covetous attitude prevailed and generally misguided the jews into secretly siding with the enemies of 'islām.

ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ
 وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ
 تَظَاهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ
 وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أَسَارَى تَفَادُوهُمْ وَهُوَ
 حَرْمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَفْتُوهُم مِّنْ
 بَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضِ فَمَا

جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ الْآخِرَىٰ فِي
 الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ أَشَدِّ
 الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

85

Yet you it is who slay your people and turn a party from among you out of their homes, backing each other up against them unlawfully, and exceeding the limits! And if they should come to you as captives, you would ransom them – while their very turning out was unlawful for you. Do you then believe in a part of the Book and disbelieve in the other? What, then, is the reward of such among you as do this, but disgrace in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be sent back to the most grievous punishment, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ
 فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

86

These are the ones who buy the life of this world for the hereafter, so their punishment will not be lightened, nor shall they be helped.

These ayats allude to the division among the jews, allying themselves with others to fight against each other. Lower life implies the path of slovenly ease in the sense that it involves compromise in commitment and honoring of what one knows to be correct, and slackness in direction. He who adopts this path will lose the reward that comes with whole-heartedly persevering and taking on the whole model of spiritual conduct, the easy and the seemingly difficult.

For those who reject parts of the Book and select others, as suits their whims and desires, their agony in the now will not be lessened. He who selects what to accept and what to reject of the message of Allah according to his personal desires has obviously exchanged the knowledge of totality and the safety of the hereafter for the short-lived, seemingly easy life in this fleeting existence.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَقَيَّنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ
 بِالرُّسُلِ وَأَتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ
 وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ
 بِمَا لَا تَهْوَى أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ فَفَرِقْنَا
 كَذِبُكُمْ وَفَرِقَاتُ قُلُوبِكُمْ

- 87 And most certainly We gave Mūsā the Book, and We sent messengers after him one after another, and We gave 'Isā, the son of Maryam, clear arguments, and strengthened him with the Sacred Spirit. What! Then whenever a messenger came to you with that which your souls did not desire, you were insolent – so you called some liars and some you slew.

Al-bayyināt (البينات): Sayyidna 'Isā was clear with his knowledge. Rūḥ ul-Quddus (روح القدس) is the Sacred Spirit of Allah.

Whenever the message of truth is not conducive to the whims of the people, the lower nafs rejects it, and that inner rejection manifests itself in outer arrogance. The strongest manifestation of such rejection is the complete denial of a message that is not pleasing to the hearers.

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ
بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَتَعَلَّامًا يَوْمِنُونَ

- 88 And they say: Our hearts are covered. No, Allah has cursed them on account of their unbelief, so little is it that they believe!

The implication is that the hearts are already hardened, petrified and undynamic, and therefore can be encased (ghulf, غلف, cover, case-ment) and barred from the reward of being in 'īmān.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ كِتَابٌ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ
لِمَا مَعَهُمْ وَكَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ يَسْتَفْتِحُونَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ مَا عَرَفُوا كَفَرُوا
بِهِ فَلَعَنَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

- 89 And when there came to them a Book from Allah verifying that which they have, and before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved, but when there came to them that which they did not recognize, they disbelieved in him, so Allah's curse is on the unbelievers!

The same thing happens again and again. Initial confirmation is checked by denial according to the change of circumstances.

بِسْمَا اشْتَرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أَنْ
يَكْفُرُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بَعِثْنَا

يُنزِلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ عَلَىٰ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ
عِبَادِهِ فَبَاءُو بِغَضَبٍ عَلَىٰ غَضَبٍ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ
عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ

○

- 90 Evil is that for which they have sold their souls — that they should deny what Allah has revealed, out of envy that Allah should send down of His grace on whom-ever of His servants He pleases — so they have made themselves deserving of wrath upon wrath, and there is a disgraceful punishment for the unbelievers.

Baghyān (بغيا), from *bagha* (بغي , to transgress, desire, act unjustly): they did not like what was revealed, so they transgressed. They have incurred a double affliction, because being at a loss is itself the first torment, and the resultant effect of being in that state is the second. There is no end to the subsequent wrath upon them, brought about by what they themselves have earned.

وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا فَوَعْنَا
بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْنَا وَبِكُفْرُونِ بِمَا
وَرَاءَهُ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَهُمْ قُلْ فَلِمَ
تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْبِيَاءَ اللَّهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
مُؤْمِنِينَ

○

- 91 And when it is said to them: Believe in what Allah has revealed! They say: We believe in what was revealed to us! And they deny what is beyond that, while it is the truth, verifying that which they have.

Say: Then why did you kill Allah's prophets before, if indeed you were believers?

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ
اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

- 92 And most certainly Mūsā came to you with clear arguments, then you took the calf in his absence, and you were unjust.

These two ayats rephrase what has just been said, but different aspects of our self-destructiveness are brought into focus. Man is reminded that he is continually transgressing, and thereby only causing himself harm, even though he has had clear signs indicating the right direction.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا
فَوْقَكُمْ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ
بِقُوَّةٍ وَاسْمَعُوا قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا
وَ أَشْرَبُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ
قُلْ بئْسَمَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ بِهِ إِيمَانُكُمْ
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

- 93 And when We made a covenant with you, and raised the mountain over you: Take hold of what We have given you with firmness, and be obedient! They said: We hear and disobey. And they were made to drink

down the calf into their hearts because of their unbelief. Say: Evil is that which your belief bids you to, if you are believers!

Hold fast to those openings that have come to you – hold on to that state in which you have knowledge of reality!

Surat ul-Baqarah is about 'isyān (عصيان), disobedience (from 'asā, عصى, to disobey, resist), and therefore concerns obedience – tawhīd. Why do we rebel? The answer is in the phrase, 'And they drank down into their hearts,' (واشربوا في قلوبهم), they were absorbed with desires and perverted love, that is, idolworship, and so their condition became as good as that in which they were absorbed.

The mu'min is he who is not engrossed in idolworship, whatever its form or meaning may be, a situation which occurs when the heart is soaked and saturated with desire and love of the desired.

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ
فَتَمَتُّوا الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

○

- 94 Say: If the future abode with Allah is specially for you to the exclusion of other people, then invoke death, if you are being truthful!

وَلَنْ يَسْتَمْتُوهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ
عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ

○

- 95 And they will never invoke it on account of what their hands have sent ahead, and Allah knows the unjust.

They are tested to see whether they are absolutely certain of their false ideas. The ultimate test for those who truly invest in this life for the next – those who surrender, submit and purify their hearts from any attachments to this life, and who therefore await the next experience with willingness to face the consequences of their actions – is death. These are the people who are genuinely ready for the experience of death.

The ayah challenges those who do not have this attitude by asking them to be ready and willing to die. The desire and readiness for death with a pure heart and a clean slate of deeds is the test of non-attachment to this world, and readiness for the next.

وَلَيَجِدُنَّهُمْ أَخْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلَىٰ حَيٰوةٍ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ
 أَشْرَكُوا يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرَ
 أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحِّزِهِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ
 أَن يُعَمَّرَ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ

- 96 And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life, even greedier than those who are idol worshippers – every one of them loves that he should be granted a life of a thousand years, but his being granted a long life will in no way remove him further off from the punishment, and Allah sees what they do.

Zahḏaḏa (زحج) means to shake up a state out of its fixation. People who are at a loss are fixed to this life. You will find that those who are in shirk (شرك) – worship and adoration of other-than-Allah – wish to prolong the experience of life in this realm of existence. Nothing, however, will remove the agony awaiting them as a result of this profoundly erroneous attitude.

قُلْ مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَىٰ

قَلِيلِكَ بِأَذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ
يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

- 97 Say: Whoever is the enemy of Jibril – surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah's command, verifying what is before it, and guidance and good news for the believers.

The immediate reference here is to the jews, but it also applies to whoever doubts or denies the truth of the prophetic message, the angels, and the good news about the Creator. They were concerned with setting boundaries, and so Jibril came with the *jalāl*, the news of the laws and the limits.

مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ
وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

- 98 Whoever is the enemy of Allah, and His angels, and His messengers, and Jibril and Mikā'il, surely Allah is the enemy of the unbelievers.

This confirms the preceding ayah: whoever is an enemy of Jibril must also be an enemy of Mikā'il – whoever denies and covers up this truth brings about the enmity of the Truth-Giver, Allah.

وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَا

إِلَّا الْفَاسِقُونَ

- 99 And certainly We have revealed to you clear communications, and none disbelieve in them except the transgressors.

Allah's signs of the spreading of the knowledge of truth are clear to all except the transgressors who, by their transgression, deny themselves the knowledge, and are covered with ignorance. Transgression bars them in the same way as one is denied the light of a lantern by standing behind a wall.

أَوْ كَمَا عَاهَدُوا عَهْدًا نَبَذَهُ فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ
بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

- 100 What! Whenever they make a contract, a party of them cast it aside? No, most of them do not believe.

The nature of man is such that whenever an agreement (mīthāq, ميثاق) or consensus has been reached, division among men will occur because of their lack of trust and 'īmān.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَهُمْ
نَبَذَ فَرِيقٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ
كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ كَانْتَهُم
لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

- 101 And when there came to them a messenger from Allah verifying what they have, a party of those who were given the Book threw the Book of Allah behind their

This refers again to those who originally received the message but turned to hypocrisy, following their whimsical wants (hawā', هـ و ا), and disregarding the message. When the same confirmed message was repeated through a prophet, many of those who had already been exposed to the Book of truth turned their backs, denying the light of fresh revelation as though they knew nothing. The messages of Allah confirm each other in wave after wave.

وَاتَّبِعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكٍ سُلَيْمٍ وَ
 مَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمٌ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا
 يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ
 الْمَلَائِكَةِ بِلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَسُوءَ مَا
 يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ
 فَلَا تَكْفُرْ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا
 يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِ وَمَا
 هُمْ بِبَصِيرِينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
 وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَ
 لَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
 مِنْ خَلَاقٍ وَلَيْسَ مَا شَرَوْا بِهِ
 أَنفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

Sulaymān was not an unbeliever, but the shayṭāns disbelieved. They taught men sorcery and what was sent down to the two angels at Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt, yet these two taught no man until they had said 'Surely, we are only a trial, so do not be a disbeliever!' Even then, men learned from these two magic by which they might cause a separation between a man and his wife — and they cannot hurt anyone with it except with Allah's permission — and they learned what harmed them and did not profit them, and certainly they know that he who brought it will have no share of good in the hereafter, and evil was the price for which they sold their souls, had they but known!

This condition is similar to that of the people who followed the evil men who fabricated falsehoods about Sulaymān. This story is relevant to us now in its meaning. Any form of power is a trial, a test for you to see if you abuse it, for the consequences of its abuse only rebound back upon you.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِنْ عِنْدِ
اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

- 103 And if they had believed and safeguarded themselves with fearful awareness, a reward from Allah would certainly have been better, had they but known.

If man would only adhere to pure 'imān, and keep to that inborn responsibility of acting and behaving peacefully and trustworthily ('amn, أمن, 'amīn, آمين), the result would only be the promised goodness (khayr, خير). As a reward of right action, goodness is the manifestation of Allah's mercy. The result of bad intention and wrong action is their natural equal, and this is the justice of reality.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ

آمَنُوا لَا تَقُولُوا رَاعِنَا وَقُولُوا انظُرْنَا
وَاسْمَعُوا وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

- 104 O you who believe! Do not say 'rā'inā,' but say 'unẓurnā,' and listen – and for the unbelievers there is a painful punishment.

The doubters, and all those with the outlook of Banī 'Isrā'īl, take to twisting any word necessary to suit their purposes. Man is most capable and most clever when it comes to deviation. The mu'minūn are advised to be careful of the possibilities of distorted language, and are specifically recommended to use 'unẓurnā' (انظرونا) instead of 'rā'inā' (راعنا), and to listen to and comprehend the meaning behind the message. In this way they will distinguish which message has been distorted. By searching for the real meaning, and by using the 'aql (عقل), the discriminatory quality of man is revived, and thus also the clarity and purity of his 'imān. The Book of tawhīd demands tawhīd at all levels, as, for example, at the level of language, comprehension and application – unifying the action with the intention.

مَا يُوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ
وَلَا الْمُشْرِكِينَ أَنْ يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ
مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَخْتَصِرُ بِرَحْمَتِهِ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

- 105 Those who disbelieve from among the followers of the Book do not like, nor do the idolworshippers, that good should be sent down to you from your Lord, but Allah especially chooses whom He

pleases for His mercy, and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace.

When an ayah ends by mentioning the attributes of Allah, then the meaning of such attributes is to be found within that ayah. 'Mighty Grace' is when Allah's mercy has been bestowed upon a slave. Those who are not in submission, and therefore not graced by the knowledge of the All-encompassing Mercy, wish to divert or limit Allah's blessedness.

مَا نَنْسَخُ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا
 أَوْ مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ
 شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ



- 106 Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it, or like it. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?

When new signposts or pointers appear along the path toward Allah, it is only for the better. For the mu'min, the generosity of Allah increases his contentment by means of replenishing and exchanging his own experiences, and the appreciation of his own movement along the path of knowledge, with more and more *riḍā* (رضى, contentment). As he increases in *riḍā*, so does he increase in knowledge, and in his sensitivity to the All-encompassing Real. The mu'min, therefore, perceives his progress along the path of knowledge as one better sign replaces one that preceded it. It is Allah's encouragement to the true slave along his passage of self-knowledge, until he only perceives the One and Only, Ever-fixed, Ever-permanent, Self-sustained Lord of the universe.

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ
 وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

مِنْ وَلِيِّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

- 107 Do you not know that Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and that besides Allah you have no guardian or helper?

Help for the ultimate victory can only come from Allah, in Whose kingdom of the heavens and the earth the seeker is searching. All signs and aid are from Allah, and are given according to the sincerity of one's dependence on Allah.

أَمْ تَرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَسْأَلُوا رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سَأَلَ
مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۗ وَمَنْ يَبَدِّلِ الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ
فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ

- 108 Rather, you wish to put questions to your messenger, as 'Mūsā was questioned before – but whoever adopts unbelief instead of faith, indeed he has lost the right direction of the way.

The main reference here is to the lower nature of man, his squabbling, as Banī 'Isrā'il did, and his hankering after proof and miracles, all of which arise because of the doubt he casts upon himself by his own ignorance. Even when miracles are evident, he is likely to explain it all away with a strong doubt in order to return to his secure state under the cover of kufr (كفر).

وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُّدُونَكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ
إِيمَانِكُمْ كَمَا رَأَوْا حَسَنًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِهِمْ

مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ فَاعْتَفُوا
 وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ
 كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

- 109 Many of the followers of the Book wish that they could turn you back into being unbelievers after your faith, out of envy from themselves, even after the truth has become manifest to them — but pardon and forgive, so that Allah should bring about His command. Surely, Allah has power over all things.

Historically, people who received the message before the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, would erroneously and arrogantly regard themselves as being the 'guided ones,' and would therefore attempt to perpetrate and increase the system with which they were familiar, and deflect the true mu'minūn. For in any system of falsehood and distorted belief, the existence of true mu'minūn is an outright threat to its security.

Forgive, wipe out, and turn away from the situation — the mu'min must be strong enough to do this and to overcome bickering and pettiness. The mu'minūn are advised to purify their hearts by forgiving and pardoning, until Allah's decree is fulfilled.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَمَا تَقَدَّمُوا
 لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

- 110 And establish the prayer and pay the poor-tax, and whatever good you send ahead for yourselves, you shall find it with

After cleansing one's heart, inwardly and outwardly, individually and collectively, ṣalāt (صلاة) is to be established, and then zakāt (زكاة , from zaka, زكى , to thrive, grow, be pure in heart). Whatever you present to Allah, you will find that you are instantaneously recompensed. When the action itself is presented with a pure attitude, it brings about its own joyous reward with it. The condition of the life of the true mu'min becomes so intense and full that he moves along time as a scintillating being, hardly aware of what is behind him or in front of him. The now-ness encompasses the true mu'min's life.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نَبْدُخُلَّ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ
هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَىٰ تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا
بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ



- 111 And they say: No one shall enter the Garden except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof, if you are truthful!

The root of the word yahūd (يهود) is from hadā (هدى), to be correctly guided, and therefore the jews contended that they were the only ones qualified for the Garden. The naṣārā (نصارى , from naṣara, نصر , to aid, to be victorious, to overcome), who had given victory to 'Isā, made the same contention. Unless they are truly applied to what they signify, names are but empty signposts. The contentions of the jews and christians are extended to those who call themselves muslims, but who do not truly submit themselves to the inner and outer tenets of 'islām, as demonstrated by the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and his Ahl ul-Bayt.

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدِ
أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ



- 112 Yes! Whoever submits himself entirely to Allah, and is the doer of good, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for him, nor shall he grieve.

Guidance and its fruits are for him who submits himself entirely to Allah, and acts wholly *fī sabīl illah* (في سبيل الله , in the way of Allah), uncompromisingly and in full awareness of his goal, shedding all strings of attachments and expectations. Know with certainty that a true *mu'min* is recompensed without fear or grief!

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَنْ نَحْمِلَ عَلَيْهِ ثِقَلًا وَرَأَيْنَا أَكْبَارًا
 وَتُفْسِرُونَ ۚ أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ آيَاتٍ أَنْ تَتَذَكَّرُوا ۚ
 أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ آيَاتٍ أَنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ أَنْ تَكُونَ
 مِنْ الْخَائِبِينَ ۚ أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ آيَاتٍ أَنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ أَنْ تَكُونَ
 مِنْ الْخَائِبِينَ ۚ أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ آيَاتٍ أَنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ أَنْ تَكُونَ
 مِنْ الْخَائِبِينَ ۚ



- 113 And the Jews say: The Christians do not follow anything good! And the Christians say: The Jews do not follow anything good! — while they recite the Book. Those who have no knowledge say the same as they say — so Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in what they differ.

Yawm ul-Qiyāmah (يوم القيامة): the time of the end of time as we know it, and the beginning of time as another phase of existence. The root of *qiyāmah* (قيامة) is *qāma* (قام), to wake up, become conscious, aware. It is the time when truth in all its aspects is unveiled and established in individual consciousness. When this awaken-

ing takes place, all false labels and notions are dispelled, and the truth behind every indicator, or name, is clearly seen. People with fixed ideas and arrogance, who denounce others, will see on the Day of the Resurrection of Truth that judgement and justice will be complete.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ
يَذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَىٰ فِي خَرَابِهَا أُولَٰئِكَ
مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِبِينَ لَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا
خِزْيٌ وَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

- 114 And who is more unjust than he who bars the way to the mosques of Allah, that His Name should be remembered in them, and strives to ruin them? As for these, it was not right for them to enter them except in fear. They shall meet with disgrace in this world, and they shall have great punishment in the hereafter.

This ayah specifically refers to the time when the people of Mecca were unjustly preventing the muslims from worshipping at the Holy Ka'bah. Its meaning holds true at all times and in all places when we are challenged by those who seem to be entrusted with power and directed in their actions, but who are not. People at a loss and in doubt cannot but fight those who are in 'islām. The challenge confronting them of true 'imān and submission is either fought against or accepted.

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوْا فَمَتَّ
وَجْهَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

- 115 And Allah's is the East and the West – so wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah! Surely Allah is Vast, Knowing.

Both East and West belong to Allah. If you are a true seeker, then wherever you turn you will be guided by knowledge from Him Whose knowledge is the widest and most all-encompassing.

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ بَلْ لَهِ مَا
 فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُ قَانِتُونَ

- 116 And they say: Allah has taken to Himself a son. Glory to Him! Rather, whatever is in the heavens and earth is His – all are obedient to Him!

Everything in its innermost nature is directly obeying the laws of Allah. Qānitūn (قانتون , from qanata قنت , to submit or obey): follow your inward silence, as, for example, our bodies do, obeying the dictates of their chromosomic DNA encoding.

The christians contended that Allah, Whose glory is beyond description, had taken a son. In reality, all that is in the heavens and the earth is a response to the decree and command of Allah, Who encompasses all, and yet is unaffected by any of His creation.

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا
 فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

- 117 Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! And when He decrees an affair, He only says to it: Be! And it is.

Badī' (بدیع , from bada'a, بدع , to originate, do for the first time, be amazing) denotes breathtaking beauty. Qadar (قدر , law or decree) is delineable, implying a quantitative and specific relevancy, and is encompassed by qadā' (قضا , to settle or conclude), which is qualitative. The multitudinal laws of creation are the decree – everything that exists must have a limit or restraint. It only takes an intention from Allah for the resultant effect to be manifest.

The decree of a system and its destiny are prescribed by natural laws that guide and lead that system to its finality. It is natural for systems to interact, and the ultimate qada' (قضا , end product, happening, judgement, established fact) is a result of interaction between multitudinal systems. The decree is, therefore, what describes the laws guiding and governing a system's passage through time, including the code of behavior of interaction. Qada' (قضا) is the ultimate judgement and stepping-stones of renderings and transformation of a system along the passage of creation towards its original, non-creational state. Qada' (قضا) is the hukm (حكم) of Allah – it is the confirmation and culmination of the merciful decree of Allah. To know the decree is to know and accept the certainty of qada' (قضا). To succumb to it and accept it helps in retracing and identifying the perfect decree that has led to it. Qada' (قضا) and qadar (قدر) are inseparable. Allah and His creational Oneness are not fragmented.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا يُكَلِّمُنَا اللَّهُ أَوْ تَنْزِيلًا
 آيَةً كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ
 مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ تَشَابَهَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا
 الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

- 118 And those who have no knowledge say: Why does Allah not speak to us, or a sign come to us? In the same way those before them said the same as what they say – their hearts are all alike. Indeed, We have made the communications clear for a people who are certain.

Is man and his vast potential not enough of a sign? People can speak only because there is life in them from Allah. Their speaking is itself a sign, but they are ignorant. The message, gross or subtle, becomes clear to people who have certainty that the mercy and love of Allah will take them to the safe shores of knowledge. Yaqīn (يقين , yuqīnūn, يوقنون) is inner, innate, confirmed certitude, simple and at the same time inexplicable, because of the trust that the heart has in its All-embracing Creator.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا
وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْحَجِّيمِ

- 119 Surely, We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and you shall not be called upon to answer for the companions of the flaming Fire.

The purpose of the message is to uphold the truth of the good news of the mercy and beneficence of the Ever-forgiving Creator. If the light of this message does not guide one along the journey of this life, then the messenger can only warn man of the dark abyss into which man is bound to fall, should he deviate from the path upon which the beacon clearly shines.

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ
حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ إِنْ هَدَىٰ اللَّهُ
هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَلَنْ أَسْأَلَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ
مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِن وَّلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ

- 120 And the Jews will not be pleased with you, nor the Christians, until you follow their religion. Say: Surely, Allah's guidance — that is the guidance! And if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you shall have no guardian from Allah, nor any helper.

The people of dogma who call themselves 'guided' or 'victorious,' jews, christians, or even so-called muslims, would never be content with the illusion-shattering message from the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Guidance is from Allah, and he who follows his whims and attachments to false traditions or habits will be helpless.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ
 وَأُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ
 هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

- 121 Those to whom We have given the Book read it as it should be read – these believe in it. But whoever disbelieves in it, they are the losers.

Whoever has had exposure to the Book of Truth will see its repetitive pattern and hallmark of one underlying substructure, which deepens, demonstrates, and confirms one's belief in One Lord. Whoever denies the Book is himself the loser, for he thereby denies himself.

يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ
 وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

- 122 O tribe of Israel, call to mind My favor which I bestowed on you, and that I made you excel the nations!

This is a continual reminder: by remembering the blessings, the human being becomes content, more āqil (عاقِل , rational, in full possession of one's mental faculties), his presence increases, and he is more aware and able to function. The degree of one's recognition is in accord with the extent of one's purity. Recognizing ni'mah (نِعْمَة , blessing) or faḍl (فَضْل , grace) is a higher state than recognizing rizq (رِزْق , provision). Absolute gratitude will result in total fulfillment, a state of bliss.

وَأَنْقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْرِي فِيهَا نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَقْبَلَ

مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنصَرُونَ

- 123 And safeguard yourself with fearful awareness from a Day when no soul shall help another in the least, nor shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall intercession profit it, nor shall they be helped.

At the time of your death, you are the sum total of all your accumulated actions, thoughts, and intentions. This fact is absolute and unchangeable. Your state from then on is completely subject to this truth, and cannot be helped or interfered with by any other forces or agents, except what the system stored up by itself along its passage in life.

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ
قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي
قَالَ لَا يَسْأَلُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

- 124 And when his Lord tried 'Ibrāhīm with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely, I will make you an Imam of men. 'Ibrāhīm said: And of my offspring? He said: My covenant does not include the unjust.

Allah tested His slave 'Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, to see to what extent he was ready for greater closeness to Totality.

'Ibrāhīm was charged with the burden of the command of absolute and total abandonment to Allah. His test was willingness to cut off and destroy any attachment and love for other-than-Allah.

Tamma (تم) is to complete what one set out to do until one obliterates oneself in it, as Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm did in his willingness and de-

termination to sacrifice Sayyidnā 'Ismā'il, peace be upon both of them. The waswās (الوسواس) whispers which instil evil and awaken doubt) was a misguiding or negative energy, totally opposed to Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm's conviction that he was willing and determined to give up anything for the sake of Allah. Once he was determined to fulfill his vow, nature's animal, the sacrificial ram, appeared, so that his outer vow was also fulfilled. Having recognized his inner vow, Reality compensated with a double mercy, saving 'Ismā'il and unifying Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm's intention and action — the two seas of ḥaqīqah (حقيقة) and shari'ah (شريعة) meeting. Allah is the Coverer and Unifier — Allah's justice unifies words and actions. The reward of 'Ibrāhīm's complete devotion to Allah was the guardianship and divine leadership bestowed upon him and upon some of his chosen offspring. The spiritual progression and laws of propagation are not always paralleled biologically. Most prophets had doubters, disbelievers, and outright evil-doers among their families. The prophetic model, however, continued to be reproduced in 'Ibrāhīm's chain of descendants.

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَشَابَهًا لِلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنًا
 وَاتَّخِذُوا مِنْ مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى
 وَعَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَنْ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ
 لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ
 السُّجُودِ

-
- 125 And when We made the House a pilgrimage for men and a place of security — and: Appoint for yourselves a place of prayer on the standing-place of 'Ibrāhīm! And We enjoined 'Ibrāhīm and 'Ismā'il, saying: Purify My House for those who visit, and those who abide for devotion, and those who bow and those who prostrate!

Al-Bayt (البيت): the house or dwelling where rest and peace are found. Ka'bah is outwardly the sanctuary of peace, and inwardly the

heart of every man, wherein peace or disturbance may lie. If the house is one of peace, then there is security in it for the man who visits it and experiences that certainty that comes from the abandonment of all other false dependencies, illusions, and attachments. Only then is man qualified to imitate and follow the footsteps of the Prophet 'Ibrāhīm. After visiting Ka'bah, the seeker takes the station of 'Ibrāhīm to connect and pray — the prayers of a purified heart will ring true. Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā 'Ismā'īl were enjoined to purify the House of Allah for those who devoutly seek it. The prophets, being in tawhīd, no doubt purified the outer house as well as the inner. The worshippers circumambulate and bow down, prostrating to demonstrate their total outer submission and inner abandonment at the door of a pure bliss without any attribute, true sajdah (سجدة, prostration), where even man's outer profile is obliterated.

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا
 وَارزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ يَا اللَّهُ
 وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُ
 قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

126

And when 'Ibrāhīm said: My Lord, make it a secure town, and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the last day! He said: And whoever disbelieves, I will grant him enjoyment for a short while, then I will drive him to the punishment of the Fire — and it is an evil destination.

The love of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, for his people was such that he willed them all to be in 'imān so that they should come to know and taste the meaning of tawhīd. Ath-thamarat (الثمرات) includes all fruits and knowledges. Qallan (قليلا), implies that from the timeless point of view, life is short. The Fire is the highest agitation, for it is the most unstable physical element, in which nothing can germinate except destruction.

وَإِذْ رَفَعُوا بُرْهَيْمَ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ
 رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

- 127 And when 'Ibrāhīm and 'Ismā'il raised the foundations of the House: Our Lord! accept from us – surely, You are the Hearing, the Knowing!

The prophets 'Ibrāhīm and 'Ismā'il, peace be upon them, raised the foundations of the House of Allah. This action was based on their having built the inner moral and divine foundations that befit the true *khalifah* (خليفة) of Allah. The outer edifice and its solidity symbolize the eternal truth of the high and divine nature that can be nurtured and raised in man's heart.

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً
 مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَكَ وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا
 إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

- 128 Our Lord! And make us both submissive to You, and from our offspring a nation submitting to You, and show us our ways of devotion, and turn to us – surely, You are the Often-turning, the Merciful.

After this trust and righteous action, the prophets ask for the confirmation and seal of being in 'islām and submission to Allah. This formal and outward request, so to speak, was made only after their true realization of their purpose in life, and the method by which to pursue it, that is, building a foundation which enables man to fulfill that for which he was created – taking refuge in Allah, trusting in His absolute decree and divine mercy, striving, searching and circumambulating with a peaceful heart, so that one comes to know the Master of the Ka'bah, the Master of every heart and being.

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ
 آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ
 وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

- 129 Our Lord! And raise up in them a messenger from among them who will recite to them Your communications, and teach them the Book and the Wisdom, and purify them – surely, You are the Mighty, the Wise.

From their state of tawhīd and divine submission, the prophets bless mankind by their prayers to bring forth a messenger from among their descendants to expound upon the Book and its inner meanings, the outer wisdom, and the ways to purification and increase. They may have, in a way, been pronouncing the decree of Allah. The supplication of a man whose heart is totally unified with his Creator is likely to reflect the Creator's will, for how could a heart that is resting with his Creator vibrate and orientate toward a direction that does not meet the will of the Creator?

وَمَنْ يَرْغَبْ عَنْ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْأَمْنِ سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ
 وَلَقَدْ اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
 لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

- 130 And who forsakes the religion of 'Ibrāhīm, except he who makes a fool of himself? And most certainly, We chose him in this world, and in the hereafter he is most surely among those who act rightly.

Yarḡhabu (يرغب , from رغب , to desire, crave, covet, loathe, detest): if you forsake the way of Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm and turn away from the truth of leaning upon Reality (ḥanīfan, حنيفا , see ayah 135), then you have fooled yourself and become isolated from the mainstream intended for creation, which is unity through knowledge of the One Reality.

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ اسَلَّمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

- 131 When his Lord said to him: Be a muslim! He said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.

The Sustainer, the Lord, inspired Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm to submit and rest in the mercy of 'islām, his true state. The Prophet's true state was confirmed by his words, that he had submitted to the Lord of all the worlds. Initially, submission by man could be on trust without knowledge. Along with submission and 'imān, the distracted and confused energies of man become more harnassed, and he begins to see the non-separateness between the laws governing existence and all entities within the existential domains. The ecological balance and interdependence will be more clearly comprehended. Submission with knowledge then sets in, and this process begins to deepen and is further enhanced by greater 'imān and 'ihsān, culminating in total and utter 'islām, submission, with full knowledge of the non-separateness between he who submits and the Creator, Controller of the laws governing and encompassing all creation.

وَوَصَّي بِهَا ابْنَيْهِ وَيَعْقُوبَ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

- 132 And the same did 'Ibrāhīm enjoin on his sons, and so did Ya'qūb: O my sons! Surely Allah has chosen this faith for you, so do not die unless you are muslims.

Having basked in the bliss of mercy, Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm enjoins his offspring to acknowledge the purity of the path that has been chosen, and prays for them not to die except as muslims – submissive to their Lord while still conscious in this world, prepared and ready for the enforced total submission in the hereafter.

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ
 الْمَوْتَ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ
 مِنْ بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَاللَّهُ
 آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا
 وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

- 133 No! Were you witnesses when death visited Ya'qūb, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We will serve your God, and the God of your fathers 'Ibrāhīm, and 'Ismā'il, and 'Is-hāq – One God – and to Him we submit!

This is an answer to those who claim that the message is limited, fit for only one people at only one time. In reality, the message is one continuum – One God, one message – and the purpose of creation is to know God.

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَرَكُمْ مَا
 كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَنْ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

- 134 This is a people that have passed away – they will have what they earned, and you will have what you earn, and you will not be called upon to answer for what they did.

And yet, every person is doomed to himself, and every nation is doomed to itself, if they afflict themselves with injustices, but saved if they will only abandon themselves into the knowledge of just behavior. Although each individual or nation exhibits the characteristics of being a separate entity, our consciousness and the laws that govern destiny are the same. If all individuals are responsible and conduct themselves according to divine injunctions, all nations will live a life of sane, awakened, divinely inspired human beings, fit to be responsible for, and guardians of, truth and justice.

وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَل
 مِلَّةَ آبَائِهِمْ خَفِيَٰ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمَشْرِكِينَ

- 135 And they say: Be Jews or Christians – then you will be on the right course! Say: No! The religion of 'Ibrāhīm, the Ḥanīf, and he was not one of the idol worshippers.

Ḥanīfan (حَنِيفًا , from ḥanafa, حَنَفٌ , to turn, to bend, incline): when you lean upon something, it must be stable enough to support your weight. The ultimate stability is Reality itself. The final resting-place depends upon Truth, upon Allah. True guidance does not come about by joining a band of people, or a religion particularly defined by its propagators. It all depends upon whether one leans toward the knowledge of tawḥīd, as Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm did, not associating anything with his single-pointed quest.

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ
 إِلَيْنَا مِنَّا مِن سَمِيعٍ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَنْبِيَاءَ
 وَمَا يُوتَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا يُوتَىٰ النَّبِيُّونَ
 مِن رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ

- 136 Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and in what was revealed to 'Ibrāhīm, and 'Ismā'īl, and 'Is-hāq, and Ya'qūb and the tribes, and in what was given to Mūsā, and 'Isā, and in what was given to the prophets from their Lord — we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit!

The believers knowingly acknowledge that what has descended upon all the prophets emanated from One Source, and that there is no difference between the essence behind the messages. The believer who is in 'islām experiences the Unity behind the entire creation. Divisions and arguments emanate from the confused man. Knowledge of Unity, and the One Source behind what appears to be different messages at different times, is the objective of the message. The confusion that arises is the screen and shield that bars the weak, uncertain and wavering hearts from reaching that knowledge.

فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ
تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمْ
اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

- 137 Then, if they believe just as you believe in Him, indeed, they are on the right course. But if they turn back, then they are only in great opposition, so Allah will be enough for you against them — and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

If people believe, in this manner they are on the guided path. Be content with Allah's creational diversity. At first, belief is with trust, then ultimately it is with direct knowledge, unshakeable, certain — beyond which there is no greater or deeper certainty.

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ

أَحْسَنُ مِنْ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ

- 138 The dye-coloring of Allah! And who is better at dyeing with color than Allah? And Him do we serve.

The lake will reflect the color of the sky – it takes on the color of its encompasser. Ayats 135 and 136 examine the color of being ḥanīfan (حَنِيفًا). If you adore something, then you take on its hue. Outward habits and dress are an external imitation that may perhaps change the inward. Adoring that whose color you may reflect increases the nearness, and thereby the clarity of the reflected truth.

قُلْ أَتَحْتَابُونَنا فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنا وَ
رَبُّكُمْ وَلنا أَعْمالُنا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمالُكُمْ
وَناحْنُ لَهُ مُخْلِصُونَ

- 139 Say: Do you dispute with us about Allah, and He is our Lord and your Lord? We shall have our deeds, and you shall have your deeds – and we are sincere to Him.

There comes a point where a line must be drawn between the acceptors and the disputers. Those who bask in submission and are rewarded for their 'īmān will have no option but to recognize the barrier between themselves and those who doubt and bicker, that is, the people of the cow.

أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ
يَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطَ كانوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارًا

قُلْ ءَأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ اللّٰهُ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ
مِمَّنْ كَتَمَ شَهَادَةً عِنْدَهُ مِنَ اللّٰهِ وَمَا اللّٰهُ
بِعَاقِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

- 140 No! Do you say that 'Ibrāhīm, and 'Ismā'il, and Ya'qūb and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: Do you have more knowledge, or does Allah? And who is more unjust than he who conceals a testimony he has from Allah? And Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.

This is yet another retort to the dissident quarrels of those who understood the message, witnessed it and then hid it. This is the condition of people who abuse spiritual knowledge for power, and hide behind the curtains of religiosity because of their ignorance, fears, and non-submission — pseudo-'islām (like the pseudo-judaism of early christian times). Men whose actions are likely to betray their hypocrisy and kufr can often hide behind a flag inscribed with La ilaha illa Allah.

By simply being born in a muslim family, or calling oneself a muslim, one does not necessarily become a true muslim. A true muslim is he who has truly and joyfully submitted to the aid of his Creator, and who is a sincere slave to upholding the will and law of Allah, so as to establish the 'adl (عدل) of Allah, and the dīn of Allah, compassionately, fearlessly, single-pointedly, at all times and in all places, irrespective of the consequences. This is the path of true sunnah, expounded and lived in different circumstances with absolute consistency by the Ahl ul-Bayt, the greatest of all who are alive, the Imams, alay-hum as-salām.

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَرَكَبَتْ
مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَا تَسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

- 141 This is a people that have passed away — they

will have what they earned, and you will have what you earn, and you will not be called upon to answer for what they did.

The same applies on the communal level as well as the individual level. Every people, whether past or future, will be rewarded according to what they have earned, and no nation will bear the burden of its predecessors. The responsibility of each individual, and each community, is to seek the way that will save himself, or itself, from disasters in this world and the hereafter.

سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلِيَهُمْ
عَنْ قِبَلِهِمُ الَّذِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهِمْ قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ
وَالْمَغْرِبُ يُهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ
مُسْتَقِيمٍ



- 142 The fools among the people will say: What has turned them from their qiblah which they had? Say: The East and the West belong only to Allah – He guides whom He likes to the right path.

Safih (سفیه , from سفه , to be stupid or insolent), is an inane fool who is superficial, who does not get the meaning which lies behind actions, who is at a loss, not trusting the prophetic direction, nor in search of his source, the Cause of all creation.

Qiblah (قبله) is a visible focal point of orientation from which you are able to encompass reality. Historically, when the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, moved to Medina, and Jerusalem was the formal direction of prayer, many jews found the ritual attractive and agreeable. When, during the second year after the Hijrah, the qiblah was changed by Divine Command to Mecca (the first spiritual center and focal point given to man by Allah), many of the hypocrites and weak muslims resented and objected to this change, exposing their mistrust of their guide. The move also symbolized that Mecca would be conquered outwardly in battle, and the meaning of Mecca would be conquered inwardly by the devoted worshipper.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا
 شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ
 شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا
 إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى
 عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنَّكَ لَأَعْيُنُكَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى
 اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ

اللَّهُ بِالنَّاسِ لَرُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

143

And thus We have made you a middle nation,
 so that you may be the bearers of witness
 to the people, and so that the Messenger
 may be a bearer of witness to you. And
 We did not make that which you would
 have to be the qiblah, except that We
 might distinguish he who follows the
 Messenger from he who turns back upon
 his heels – and this was surely hard, ex-
 cept for those whom Allah has guided
 aright. And Allah was not going to make
 your faith to be fruitless – most surely
 Allah is Full of Pity, Merciful to the
 people.

فَذَرْنِي تَقَلِّبْ وَجْهَكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَكُنُوزَ لَيْلِكَ
 قِبْلَةً تَرْضِيهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ
 الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ

شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ
 أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ

- 144 Indeed, We see the turning of your face to heaven, so We shall surely turn you to a qiblah which you will like. So turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face toward it — those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord — and Allah is not at all heedless of what they do.

٢٦ The mu'min (مؤمن) is with the people who steer the most balanced, middle course (wasatan, وسطا) away from extremes, and thus he is on the best and safest path. The Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was awaiting Divine Guidance for both outward orientation and inward inspiration of his destiny. People of the Book are bound to know well enough that the purpose of the Messenger is guidance toward knowledge of Reality, and that bickering about changes in the formal direction is a reflection of their uncertain hearts.

Shaṭr (شطر , from شطر , to halve, cut off, disassociate) implies severing oneself from one's present orientation, and turning toward worship, toward the sacred mosque. Wherever one may be, the way to safety and success is by orienting oneself to contemplation, reflection, and prayer, to the Lord of Creation.

وَلَئِنْ آتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ
 آيَةٍ مَا تَتَّبِعُوا قِبَلَتَكَ وَمَا أَنتَ بِتَابِعٍ قِبَلَتِهِمْ وَ
 مَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبَلَةَ بَعْضٍ وَلَئِنْ آتَيْتَ
 أَهْوَاءَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ

أَنْتَ إِذَا لَمِزَ الظَّالِمِينَ

○

- 145 And even if you bring to those who have been given the Book every sign, they would not follow your qiblah, nor can you be a follower of their qiblah — neither are they the followers of each other's qiblah — and if you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, then you shall most surely be among the unjust.

The pretenders of the Book in its corrupted form are not on the path to Reality, and therefore, their outward orientation will also be confused and uncertain, for they are truly corrupt, both inwardly and outwardly. They will neither pray outwardly toward Ka'bah, nor will they inwardly be in 'īmān or 'islām. They follow their whims, and whoever is whimsical, or follows what is whimsical, brings about great injustice upon himself by being at a loss.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ
أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَإِنْ فَرِيقًا مِنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَهُمْ
يَعْلَمُونَ

○

- 146 Those whom We have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons, and a party of them most surely conceal the truth while they know.

○

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

- 147 The truth is from your Lord, so do not be of the doubters!

They hide the truth from within themselves because it threatens the continuity of their nafs, fears, attachments, and therefore their life-investment in those habits. The implication is that the people of the Book (historically the jews, christians, etc., but on a general level it refers to all human beings, because they inherently contain the meaning of the Book of creation) potentially contain and may occasionally be exposed to this knowledge.

Some of the priestly class, and those who have a deeper exposure to spiritual knowledge, know the truth of the prophetic message clearly, but withhold it and deny its exposure to others.

وَلِكُلِّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّئُهَا فَاسْتَثَبِقُوا
 الْخَيْرَاتِ آيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمْ اللَّهُ
 جَمِيعًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

- 148 And everyone has a direction to which he turns — so hasten to do good works! Wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together — surely, Allah has power over all things.

Everyone has a direction in life. To succeed in reaching the ultimate goal, one needs speed, consistency, and single-pointedness in performing selfless good works to which one is unattached, performing them as pure action without expecting any reward. If people and their leaders behave in this manner, unity among mankind will be achieved — each individual's actions will be on the path of tawhīd, and the abandonment of *dunyā* (worldliness).

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ قَوْلٍ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ
 الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِنَّهُ لَلْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ

وَمَا لِلَّهِ يَفِإِ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

149

And from whatever place you come forth, turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque — surely, it is the very truth from your Lord, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.

Wherever one may be, in whatever circumstances, the inner intention and outer practice of upholding the law of Allah and orienting oneself toward the House of Allah are incumbent upon one.

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ
الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ
فَوَلُّوْا وُجُوْهُكُمْ شَطْرَهُ لِئَلَّا يَكُوْنَ لِلنَّاسِ
عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ اِلَّا الَّذِيْنَ ظَلَمُوْا مِنْهُمْ فَاَلَا
تَخْشَوْنَ اِيَّاهُ وَارْتَضَوْا وَلَا يَمْتَنِعُ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُوْنَ

150

And from whatever place you come forth, turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your faces toward it, so that people will have no accusation against you, except such of them as are unjust — so do not fear them, and fear Me, so that I may complete My favor on you, and so that you may walk on the right course!

What unifies true men of submission is the visibility and clear profile of their actions in life as well as while performing prayer, wherever they may be. Men of tawhīd unite their intentions with their actions through their coherent behavior. The muslim distinguishes himself clearly from the kāfir, who will not have any doubt about, or excuse for, what he visibly recognizes.

The necessity to adhere to outward orientation unified with inward direction leads one to act justly. True justice stems from tawhīd, and its results will be the favors of Allah, which will be acknowledged by the slave if he is in *khashyah* (خشية, fear of transgression). If everything is done correctly, then one is on the path of *hidayah* (هداية, guidance, تهتدون, you are guided).

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا
عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ
تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ ط

○

- 151 Just as We have sent among you a Messenger from among you who recites to you Our communications, and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and the Wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know.

Rasūlun minkum (رسول منكم): 'a Messenger from among you.' Mankind in Arabic is 'insān (from انس, to be companionable, intimate) – man seeks familiarity. A Messenger speaks in the language of the day and makes known the Book and the wisdom that comes with knowledge, so outwardly there is safe conduct, and inwardly the opening to the City of Knowledge that comes by right approach, the courteous and humble entry into that sacred domain. The journey in this life is from darkness into light, from ignorance to knowledge. The heart that is open will receive that knowledge if it is directed to a fountain – the message and the Messenger.

فَاذْكُرُونِي اَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا

تَكْفُرُونِ

152. So remember Me! I will remember you. And be thankful to Me, and do not be ungrateful to Me.

If you remember Allah, then you are in the grip of Reality because you avoided other-than-It. If remembrance is total, then the turning between the so-called individual and All-encompassing Reality is total. Allah, Reality, will reflect the remembrance— if the sincere seeker remembers Allah, Allah remembers him.

Shukr (شكر , gratitude, from shakara, شكر , to be grateful, thankful –'ashkurū, اشكروا in the ayah) is the key to the fruition and personalization of dhikr (ذكر , remembrance). Here the so-called individual enters into the coziness of specific and experiential joy of inner contentment as a result of the neutralization of desires. Shukr (شكر) is the outer expression of that inner state. When shukr is genuine and deep, the individual's state at that time is that of ridā (رضاء), deep and peaceful contentment.

In the state of true shukr, the individual is free of desire and expectations, his transmission is beamed only toward Allah, and his receptivity is without resistance. The state of shukr results in inner confirmation, and blessed contentment with the Creator and what He has created. It is a taste of tawhīd through the knowledge of decree.

The opposite of this trajectory is the stumbling and fumbling over hurdles on the road of kufr and 'iṣyān (عصيان), disobedience. The 'āṣī (عاصي) carries with him all his bundles of anxiety, and self-imposed defenses and ammunition, which give him a false and temporary feeling of safety, but which ultimately are the cause of his doom, starved in the ignorance of the dark cave of stubborn arrogance and the hollow caverns of nafs (نفس).

The ayah focuses on the two states of being in remembrance of Allah and being in kufr – covering up and remembrance of other-than-Allah. You are either in shukr (شكر) or kufr (كفر), contentment or discontent, affirming mercy or denying it. In a state of gratitude, of contentment, your desires are neutralized. Only then will you be more efficient, your energy more available, and your spirit truly alive.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

153 O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer – surely Allah is with the patient.

ان الله مع الصابرين 'Allah is with the patient.' You can only be patient if you understand the nature of patience. Patience cuts out time, and therefore is of the nature of the timeless. You desire to pluck the fruit of a tree now, but you realize it is sour and will not be ripe for another two months. You stop the clock of your desire for two months, at the end of which, the button pressed, it starts to tick again, and the satisfaction of the desire takes place. What you did by being patient with that specific state was to stop time in relation to it. Allah is He Who was before time, He Who upholds time, and He Who is after time – Allah cuts across time, is beyond time, and is timeless. To have patience, ṣabr (صبر), is to be close to the attribute of Allah, the Ṣabūr (الصبور) – through taking on the attribute of ṣabr (صر), you are close to Allah.

Patience is knowledge, it is not ignorance or laziness, but positive and steadfast submission to the truth. It is only meaningful when it is combined with knowledge of the situation at hand – then it is positive contentment. Only idiots, however, are content with, say, an illness. Patience in illness should come with the realization of its cause, and of what steps must be taken in order to positively neutralize it. This is the state of justice, 'adl (عدل), and balance, mīzān (ميزان), which is another name of the Qur'ān.

Living with patience, being saved through patience, and recognizing the joy and blessedness that comes by being patient in the manner described above, can only be achieved by a true mu'min (مؤمن) in submission. One of the meanings of ṣalāt (الصلاة) is mercy. The mu'min (مؤمن), through patience, will taste and know the mercy, and will come to acknowledge that Allah is indeed with those who are truly patient, meaning that they follow the decree of Allah, wakefully and submissively – pure witnessing, and at the same time undertaking whatever dynamic action or expenditure of energy is decreed by Allah. In that state, witnessing and action unify without friction. In that state, the slave has honored his Master.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ
أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ

- 154 And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. No. Alive! But you do not perceive.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصِرَ مِنْ
الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

- 155 And We will most certainly try you with something of fear, and hunger, and loss of property, and lives, and fruits — and give good news to the patient ones.

Those who die and give themselves fully for the sake, and in the way of, Reality are not dead. Instead, they are alive, connected, in the One Self, the Ever-living. The visible, physical death is but a phase of transformation, a release of the soul. And if the soul is poised in the wake of Reality *fi sabil illah* (في سبيل الله , in the way of Allah), after shedding its burden, the clumsy bundle of the body, it then slips smoothly into its natural abode, the abode of the Lord.

'But you do not perceive' (ولكن لا تشعرون): in other words, you are not sensitive enough to experience that state, for we experience the balanced state of the seen and the unseen as a single whole in this world. Part of that insensitivity — not perceiving other realms of existence in depth — is the mercy and protection of Allah. Allah is the Ever-living, and this experience of life is a manifestation of that truth. It is a short-term cycle that has come about in the manner of both physical and non-physical experiences which are sustained by the Eternal-living, Self-sustaining: *aş-Şamad* (الصمد).

An aspect of Lord-sustainership, *rubūbiyyah* (ربوبية), is the bringing of all beings as far as possible to their full potential. To exercise patience in the manner described earlier is part of that rearing to spiri-

tual adulthood. Because man becomes stagnant and enslaved by his habits and expectations, any disruption of his patterns by the experiential learning of patience comes through being tried by, and afflicted with, fear, insecurity, hunger, uncertainty, and reduction in material possessions, lives, and the other fruits of this world. How else could the Lord stop His beloved creature from giving importance to, and adoring, the idols of wealth, property, and worldly increase? All such afflictions are a proof of the attention of the rabb (رَبِّ) to the marbūb (مَرْبُوب), so that he redirects his attention and comes out of ghāflah (غَفْلَةٌ , distraction).

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ
وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ



- 156 Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say:
Surely, we belong to Allah, and to Him
we shall surely return!

This, then, is the description of the mu'min (مومن). He does not react to afflictions, good or bad, but instead denies himself ignorance of the situation and its consequences by saying, 'We are Allah's, and to Him we shall return' (إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَ إِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ). His heart submits to what has befallen him, and in that recognition of what has afflicted him is the lesson of purification and the cause of his distraction.

The mu'min, in fact, relishes what others consider misfortune, for through it he deepens his inner 'imān and knowledge, as well as increases his outer wisdom and knowledgeable patience. He is like a tree afflicted by a gale — if it is a healthy tree, a mu'min, its roots will grow deep, and its branches will be strong, yet pliable. The man of tawhīd recognizes that whatever befalls him, including his reaction to it, is from his beloved Creator.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ
 وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

- 157 Those are the ones on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course.

This is a description of those in *hudā* (هدى), guidance (*muhtadūn* مهتدون). It is incumbent upon the Lord to take care of whoever abandons himself to Him. The Lord prays for, and blesses, them — He is as good as His slave's opinion of Him. He is the Refuge and the Comfort.

The real reward of the *mu'min* who faces misfortunes with a smile, knowing that they are the Lord's instruments of teaching through patience and understanding, is its direct and immediate blessing. The instantaneous recognition of the blessedness of affliction is his first reward, and the second is that all states will ultimately pass.

إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ
 أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا
 وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ

- 158 Surely *as-Ṣafā* and *al-Marwah* are among the signs appointed by Allah. So whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House, or pays a visit to it, there is no blame on him if he goes round them both — and whoever does good spontaneously, surely Allah is Grateful, Knowing.

Some of the rituals of *hajj* existed before the Prophet *Muḥammad*, peace and blessings be upon him, but he purified and perfected them.

Throughout your life you run back and forth between two opposite things, like aṣ-Ṣafā (صفا) and al-Marwah (مروة). Aṣ-Ṣafā and al-Marwah are two clusters of rocks between which the pilgrim runs back and forth. They are the scene of Hajar's running to and fro in search of water, after being left alone with 'Ismā'il in the blistering heat and wilderness of Mecca. They figuratively bracket all human efforts, from hunger to fullness, from illness to wellness, and man's patience and tawakkul (توكل , trust, confidence) in Allah are tested through running between them. Aṣ-Ṣafā and al-Marwah, and the practice of sa'y (سعى , running between the two of them), are indeed true signs of Allah. Man performs sa'y throughout his life in his constant search for true contentment, seeking it outwardly, not knowing that the access to it is already within him. Ḥajj (حج , from حجج , to overcome, defeat, and in meaning related to qaṣada قصد , to intend, strive, pursue), the pilgrimage, is the act of doing formally what you have been doing informally – acknowledging and enacting, purposefully striving, as you do every day of your life – whereas in ḥajj, the one and only purpose is to please the Creator, and get closer to the knowledge of the Creator by keeping away from other purposes.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ
وَالْهُدَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ لِلنَّاسِ
فِي الْكِتَابِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ
اللَّاغِنُونَ لَا

- 159 Surely, those who conceal the clear proofs and the guidance that We revealed after We made it clear in the Book for men, these are the ones Allah will curse, and those who curse will curse them!

Whoever has the knowledge is obliged to communicate it in an appropriate and meaningful way. Those who withhold what has been revealed to them of the Book, be they jews (who knew the teaching of the Muḥammadan message), or be they the muslim hypocrites of today (who equally know, and say what they do not do), those who are in this broken, disconnected state between inward and outward confusion are cursed by their action of not being in inner and outer tawḥīd.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَبَيَّنُّوا
 فَأُولَئِكَ أَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنَا التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

- 160 Except those who repent, and amend, and make manifest the Truth, these are the ones to whom I turn, and I am the Often-returning, the Merciful.

You are only alive by Allah, Who is Ever-available for those who turn away from their nafs. Those who recognize the falsehood and curse of their state will undoubtedly revert to the path of tawhīd and Reality through true submission. As a consequence of this real repentance, they will be mending their way of life, that is, unifying their intentions and actions along the path that will bring them the promised bliss, and thereby avoid the curse and destitution of ignorance and transgression. Allah says that whoever is in that state will see His mercy turn to him. In reality, Allah's mercy and love encompass *all* things, but man, in his ignorance, and under the cover of denial and kufr, does not recognize them.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ
 أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ
 أَجْمَعِينَ

- 161 Surely, those who disbelieve and die while they are disbelievers, these are the ones on whom is the curse of Allah, and the angels, and men all together —

When you die, you cannot change the condition of your spirit. Whoever dies in ignorance and kufr (كفر) will, in the next phase of the creational journey, totally reflect the state he was in when he left this world. What worse curse can there be than being sent off on that divergent trajectory, bundled up in the darkness of the nafs? The kāfir has brought the enactment of Allah's laws of curse and punishment

upon himself. All the angelic powers of creation, who are subject to the law of Allah, confirm this curse.

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ
وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ



- 162 Abiding in it – their punishment shall not be lightened, nor shall they be given respite.

The next experience, the ākhirah (الآخرة) is not bound, biologically or otherwise, to the constriction of time in this life. One will abide in it according to the state one has reached in this life, without respite.

وَالْهُمُكُمُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ
الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ



- 163 And your God is one God! There is no god but He. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.

There is no deity but God. There is only One God, and all attributes belong to Him. His main attribute is an All-encompassing Beneficence and Mercy that can be personally experienced.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ
النَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا
يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا

وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ
 الرِّيحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِينَ السَّمَاءِ وَ
 الْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

164

Most surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships that run on the sea with that which profits men, and the water that Allah sends down from the cloud, then gives life with it to the earth after its death, and spreads in it all kinds of animals — and the changing of the winds, and the clouds made subservient between the heaven and the earth — are signs for a people who understand.

Having been told that there is only One Deity, we are now given the picture of creation and its duality. Nature's diversity is caused by, contained in, and will revert to, the One Source. We have heavens and earth, day and night, land and sea, ships of sea and ships of land. We have dryness and wetness, life and death, and man, who is the highest of creation, was given the consciousness to experience all of these, to wander and explore the meaning behind them.

Whoever contemplates the nature of creation, its amazing interlinks and perfect patterning, its recycling of causal chains and its cybernetic, ecological balances and functions, will reach the understanding and conclusion that the One Divine Power activates and enlivens diverse manifestations.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا
 يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ
 حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ رَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يَرُونَ

العَذَابُ لَا أَنْ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ
اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ

165

And there are some among men who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah, whom they love as they love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah. O, if those who are unjust had only seen, when they see the punishment, that the power is wholly Allah's, and that Allah is severe in punishment!

To love, adore and worship other-than-Allah is bound to bring about punishment. This is direct proof of the love of the Creator for His created, in order to draw him closer to the truth and show him the path of knowledge. Any deflection from this is a form of transgression and waywardness. The line of safety is as tight and firm as the tightness and firmness of the love of the Creator – any loosening in this relationship is a loosening in tawhīd.

إِذْ تَبَرَّأَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا وَرَأَوْا
الْعَذَابَ وَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمُ الْأَسْبَابُ

166

When those who were followed shall renounce those who followed them, and they see the punishment, and their ties are cut asunder.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَوْ أَنَّا كُنَّا نَدْرِكُهُمْ لَسَخَّطْنَا لَهُمْ أَعْيُنَنَا
وَمَنَّا لَكُنَّا بِهِنَّ كَأَنَّ الْوَسْطَاءَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَلْمُونَ

حَسْرَاتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِمُخْرِجِينَ مِنَ النَّارِ

- 167 And those who followed shall say: Had there been for us a return, then we would renounce them as they have renounced us! Thus Allah will show their deeds to be intense regret to them, and they shall not come forth from the Fire.

Man has come alone and will return alone, and therefore he cannot blame anyone but himself for having followed the direction which does not lead him to the promised reward of 'islām, 'īmān, and 'ihsān. In the next life, the followers of misguidance recognize the futility of their journey, wishing to be given another chance to experience this life with new light. But at that time there is no escape from the Fire of turmoil and regret. Their actions are their judgements, and Allah shows them their actions, proving to them the justice that was promised.

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

- 168 O men! Eat the lawful and good things out of what is in the earth, and do not follow the footsteps of *shayṭān* — surely, he is your open enemy.

Shayṭān is from *shaṭāna* (شطن , to be far off the mainstream of divine order and mercy). It is like an energy waveband whose beam has fallen away from the ordered direction into disorder — cast off. All steps taken in that direction, therefore, move one further away from the beam of light and knowledge. Anyone who seeks guidance or light from *shayṭān* will be courting the enemy of the mainstream. That waveband, or attribute, or rebelliousness is within every human being. The injunction here is to eat all that is suitable and good, and avoid

causes of harm based on the shayṭān pattern. The shayṭān of meaning has its complement in the shayṭān of forms.

إِنَّمَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالسُّوءِ وَالْفَحْشَاءِ وَإِنْ تَقُولُوا
عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

- 169 He only enjoins evil and indecency upon you,
and that you may speak against Allah
what you do not know.

We can either follow shayṭān or follow the decree of Allah, being raised and brought up to the Adamic heritage, that of a khalfah (خليفة). Although the shayṭānic power misleads, misguides and transgresses, the positive seeker can, by positive awareness of them, use those negative tendencies, as they arise in him, to increase his knowledge of their domain – the way they arise, their different permutations – so that he delineates and is familiar with all the shayṭānic wavebands. The shayṭānic distractions are strongest when man's awareness and alertness are weakest. They appear in many different colors and forms, as though to catch us unawares. Shayṭān can be a great teacher, if the seeker is a true pupil.

وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا آفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْ لَوْ
كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

- 170 And when it is said to them: Follow what
Allah has revealed! They say: No! We
follow what we found our fathers on.
What! Although their fathers had no sense
at all, nor followed the right way?

Man is generally a creature of habit and familiarity. His duty toward himself, however, is to come to know the purpose of creation

and the One underlying Power behind all existence. To blindly follow in the footsteps of one's forefathers or leaders, is to discard the sacred responsibility of seeking the truth. The fathers of those who came first, or before the arabs, who were honored with the Muhammadan message, were in senseless ignorance, and whoever follows their direction will be far away from the guided path. One of the great glories of 'islām and the Muḥammadan message is the transformation into muslims of a most barbaric, inhuman people, the arabs of the days of ignorance, a people who had the most animalistic and superstitious of cultures, and therefore, no civilization. The greatest barrier which Muḥammad broke was the narrow-minded tribal despotism which, in our time, is reflected in the ignorant arabs by their modern nationalism. It is, therefore, a misnomer to talk about 'arab' contribution to science, medicine, or literature. In fact, most of the great men of wisdom came from non-arab origins. Most of these transformations, however, took place through the Divine Book, which is in Arabic.

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا
يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً صُوبَكُمْ عَنِّي
فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ

- 171 And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out to that which hears no more than a call and a cry — deaf, dumb, blind — so they do not understand.

He who loves himself, under the dark veil of ignorance — kufr — is like him who calls for guidance, or is called by guidance, but is deaf, dumb and blind, and so the impact of the call will be lost. No response can be drawn by the call, for there is a barrier between it and the kāfir. The kāfir will be devoid of understanding.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا

رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ آيَاتِهِ
تَعْبُدُونَ

- 172 O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you with, and give thanks to Allah, if it is Him that you worship.

Eating is an act of assimilation, absorption, and, therefore, an act of unification at the physical level. The injunction here is to eat good things, and avoid all things that are injurious to our outer or inner health.

The state of gratitude to Allah is bound to increase love for Allah, and thus increase the quality of worship. If one's nafs is not being made to struggle for the good, its tendency will be enhanced arrogance, self-indulgence, which, like a weed, will put out new roots and shoots if it is not constantly plucked.

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْنَا مِمَّا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَمَا أَهْلَ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ
وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِذَ اللَّهُ غَفُورٌ
رَحِيمٌ

- 173 He has only forbidden you what dies of itself, and blood, and flesh of swine, and that over which any other name than Allah has been invoked – but whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no wrong action shall be upon him. Surely, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

A clear description of some of the forbidden edibles, this ayah connects *shari'ah* to *haqiqah*. These foods were also forbidden by the law

of Mūsā, and, by extension, by Sayyidnā 'Isā. The Divine Mercy, however, is such that if it is absolutely necessary for survival, a deep and powerful instinct, then there is no blame if one transgresses temporarily. Allah's forgiveness and mercy will overcome the evil of the trespass.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ
 الْكِتَابِ وَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا
 أُولَئِكَ مَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ
 إِلَّا النَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
 وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

- 174 Surely those who conceal any part of the Book that Allah has revealed, and take for it a small price, they eat nothing but fire into their bellies, and Allah will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful punishment.

The Book contains and encompasses every aspect of creation, and, therefore, its knowledge must potentially exist in the heart of man. It is the eternal knowledge within you, revealed to you from within when you are ready or deserving of it. Hiding the true import of the Book of Knowledge, or abusing the power that man acquires through exposure to the truth of the Book, as some professional or salaried priests of any true religions do, is like placing fire in one's belly. The provisions that one thereby obtains are only agitation and fury. On the Day of Reckoning, they will be isolated from communion with Allah. His mercy of purifying souls will not include them, and therefore they will be in 'painful punishment.'

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَى

وَالْعَذَابَ بِالْمَغْفِرَةِ فَمَا أَصْبَرَهُمْ عَلَى
النَّارِ

- 175 These are the ones who buy error for right direction, and punishment for forgiveness – how bold they are to encounter the Fire!

These people have discarded the guidance contained in the Book in favor of error, abuse and cheap exchange of Allah's protection and forgiveness, for the affliction that comes with calculated manipulation. This is the result of being mean with imparting truth, and not being generous with the gifts of Allah.

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ
بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ
لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ

- 176 This is because Allah has revealed the Book with the truth. And surely, those who go against the Book are in a great opposition.

Allah's Book is one. The Meaning and Cause of all creation is One, but creation itself is in duality. The nature of disagreement (ikhtilāf, اختلاف) is to see diversity and opposites, but there can be no disagreement about the Book that contains and encompasses the knowledge of the diversity of creation. Dispute and difference can only relate to the creation, not to the laws that govern it.

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُولُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ

وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلِئِنَّ الْبِرَّ مِنْ أَمِنَ بِاللَّهِ
 وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ
 وَالنَّبِيِّنَّ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ
 وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَ
 فِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ
 وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ
 فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ
 صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

177

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the East and the West, but righteousness is this, that one should believe in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and for the emancipation of captives, and keep up the prayer and pay the poor-tax — and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient ones in distress, and affliction, and in time of conflict — these are the ones who are true to themselves, and these are the ones who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

Birr (بَرٌّ , reverence, devotion, from barra بَرَّ , to be dutiful, kind, beneficent), is the basis of the character of the believer in Allah, the Last Day, all angels, the Book and the prophets. The action of the

barr (بَرَّ) is his generosity and adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. The devout one follows what is right, abandoning himself into what is correct — he is not turning his face only to the East or the West.

The ayah points out the importance of adhering to true orientation in inner behavior, which is bound to be reflected in outer action. It implies the insufficiency of practicing the ritual of praying toward the Ka'bah without abiding by its meaning. The devotee's actions begin inwardly and manifest outwardly, from inner trust through to outward action. The first level of 'īmān is trust in Allah, then in the Book — the register of everything — and then in the prophets. This is given outer form in the establishment of prayer and the giving of zakat. The ṣābirīn (صَابِرِينَ) are alert and vigilant in every situation. The ṣādiqīn (صَادِقِينَ) do what they have promised to do when they have promised to do it, and they do not postpone — they unify the meaning of the promise with the outer act. To be among the muttaqūn (مُتَّقُونَ), one must live *in* truth.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كَتَبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِصَاصُ
 فِي الْقَتْلِ أَلْحُرُّ بِالْحُرِّ وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْعَبْدِ وَالْأُنْثَى
 بِالْأُنْثَى طَمَنَ عَفَى لَهُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ شَيْءٌ فَاتِّبَاعٌ
 بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَدَاءٌ إِلَيْهِ بِإِحْسَانٍ ذَلِكَ
 تَخْفِيفٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ طَمَنَ عَفَى بَعْدَ
 ذَلِكَ فَلَهُ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

○

178

O you who believe! Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the slain: the free for the free, and the slave for the slave, and the female for the female — but if any remission is made to anyone by his bro-

ther, then prosecution for the blood-price should be made according to customary usage, and payment should be made to him in a good manner. This is an alleviation from your Lord, and a mercy. So, whoever exceeds the limit after this shall have a painful punishment.

Here the law of qisās (قصاص , requital, settlement) is expounded. Every single thing has a measured opposite or equal reaction. If we could only perceive it, we would see that our lives hang in the balance, mīzān (میزان), and that man follows the straight path (الصراط المستقيم). Allah is the Forgiving, and therefore man is able to forgive. Forgiveness and clemency are recommended behavior.

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيٰوةٌ يَا اُولِي الۡاَلْبَابِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ

179 And there is life for you in the law of retaliation, O men of understanding, so that you may safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness.

The root of the word qisās (قصاص) is qaṣṣa (قص , to cut, divide, differentiate). Life hinges on, and is balanced by, discrimination: good/bad, light/dark, life/death. Without discrimination, and the enforcement of Allah's law of balance, we transgress. The proper safe conduct in this life is guarded by the proper justice of retaliation. This way the boundaries of transgression are clearly marked.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ اِذَا حَضَرَ اَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ
اَنْ تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةُ لِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْاَقْرَبِيْنَ
بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ حَقًّا عَلٰى الْمُتَّقِيْنَ

- 180 Bequeathing is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you, if he leaves behind wealth, for parents, and near relatives, according to customary usage — a duty on those who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

What one leaves behind should be clearly defined, according to both the *sharī'ah* law of inheritance, and one's direct wishes. No vagueness is allowed in 'islām, because the path is that of awareness, discrimination, and knowledge.

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

- 181 Whoever then alters it after he has heard it, the wrong action of it is only upon those who alter it — surely, Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

فَمَنْ خَافَ مِنْ مَوْصِيٍّ خَفًا أَوْ إِشْمًا
فَأَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُمْ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

- 182 But he who fears an inclination to a wrong course, or an act of disobedience on the part of the testator, and effects an agreement between the parties, there is no blame on him. Surely, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

The wishes of a departed being should not be altered. All disagree-

ments should be settled for the best within *sharī'ah*, thereby seeking Allah's mercy and forgiveness both outwardly and inwardly.

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

- 183 O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness.

Fasting is a means of putting reins upon yourself, so that you may taste *riḍā'* (رضا), contentment, and all the other blessings of this great spiritual discipline! The fasting of the ordinary man is to withhold from food and drink. The fasting of the pious man is to curb sensory desires, to fast from looking at the unlawful, hearing the injurious, and thinking about the distasteful, or about what inflames the lower nature. The fasting of the diligent seeker is to seal the heart from paying any attention to other-than-Allah.

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

- 184 For a certain number of days, but whoever

among you is sick or on a journey, then a number of other days, and those who are not able to do it may effect a redemption by feeding a poor man. So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him — and that you fast is better for you, if you know.

The prescribed days for fasting are defined and known, and, as with most rites, there are exceptions. The deeper benefits of fasting are gained when one is in good physical balance. The subtle and sensitive in man flourish. However, both in sickness and travel, when outer distractions are numerous and demanding, the deeper benefits of fasting are unlikely to be realized. The traveller who is physically well is encouraged to be at home base during Ramaḍān. Islam echoes the life at Medina, being with one's folk and community, protected from unusual environments or unfamiliar circumstances that demand one's attention. In this way, this injunction encourages man to be less outwardly mobile during Ramaḍān, so that his inward mobility — reflection and perception — is increased.

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ
هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَى
وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ
فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ
فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ
الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ
وَلِيُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِيُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ

عَلَى مَا هَدَىٰكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

- 185 The month of Ramaḍān is that in which the Qur'ān was sent down, a guidance to men, and clear proofs of the guidance and the discrimination – so whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast in it, and whoever is sick, or on a journey, then a number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, He does not desire difficulty for you, and that you should complete the number, and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for His having guided you, and so that you may give thanks.

It was during the month of fasting that the revelation of the Qur'ān began. From the constriction and restriction of fasting comes the expansion of the knowledge of the Book, discrimination and wisdom. The discipline of the dīn is well delineated, and is contained within the path of ease, wherein one does one's utmost to keep within the bounds. The ultimate fruit of guidance is ridā' (رضا, contentment), expressed as gratitude to the Merciful.

وَإِن سَأَلْتَهُ عَنِّي فإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ مُّجِيبٌ
دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي
وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

- 186 And when My servants ask you about Me, then surely I am very near – I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me – so they should answer My call, and believe in Me, so that they may walk in the right way.

Fasting, and therefore restricting oneself from creational provision.

is bound to enhance the awareness of closeness to Allah, the Cause of all creation. Moving away from indulgence and dependence on other-than-Allah takes one closer to the taste of dependence on, and security in, Allah. This ayah indicates the spiritual gift and purpose of fasting, *rushd* (رشد, from *yarshudūn*, يرشدون, correct guidance), which is the direct fruit and promised result of a call to Allah. Man was created in order to enquire and pray for knowledge of his Creator. The response to the caller is according to the sincerity of his call, and the caller will recognize the right way according to the extent of his trust and belief in Allah.

أَحَلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ
هَذَا لِبِئْسَ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبِئْسَ لَهْنٍ
عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ
فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ فَالْتَمِسُوا
بِأَسْرُوهُمْ وَأَبْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَ
كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ
الْمَخِيطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْمَخِيطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنْ
الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ وَلَا
تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي
الْمَسَاجِدِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا
تَقْرَبُوهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ

187

It is made lawful to you to go into your wives on the night of the fast — they are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them — Allah knew that you acted unfaithfully to yourselves, so He has turned to you, and removed this burden from you — so now be in contact with them, and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast until night, and have no contact with them while you keep to the mosques — these are the limits of Allah, so do not go near them! Thus does Allah make His communications clear for men, so that they may safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

Everything has its place, adab (ادب , courtesy), or ḥadd (حدّ , boundary). Your actions must follow certain patterns, starting with the gross, and gradually ascending to the subtlest of the subtle.

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتُدْلُوا
بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِنْ أَمْوَالِ
النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

188

And do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access by means of it to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know.

The knowledge of the motive behind one's action is in the heart of the actor. It is incumbent upon each one of us to seek the root of justice and right balance deeply.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْهَلَّةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ
 لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ
 مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مِمَّا تَتَّقُونَ وَأْتُوا
 الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ
 تُفْلِحُونَ

- 189 They ask you about the new moon. Say: They are times appointed for men, and the pilgrimage. And it is not righteousness that you should enter houses at their backs, but righteousness is this, that one should safeguard oneself with fearful awareness. Go into houses by their doors, and safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, so that you may be successful.

Every occasion has its own courtesy, its own door of approach, just as the month of Ramaḍān has fasting as its entry, and the month of Dhu'l-hijjah (ذو الحجة) has the ḥajj (حج). The lower tendencies of man are traditionally curbed during these sacred months. The teaching of this restriction is for man to behave in the noblest manner throughout his life, ennobling himself in preparation for the next. The freshness and positiveness of the 'Islāmic code of conduct is brought into every aspect of the life of the ignorant arabs, as well as our present day-to-day existence. Every arena, physical, or intellectual, or spiritual, has its natural point of entry. The intelligent man owes it to himself to recognize the right door, unsuperstitiously, and in order to enter must depend on the Giver of knowledge. The correct approach is righteousness in action, and its result is success.

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ
وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

- 190 And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits – surely, Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَقِفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ
حَيْثُ أَخْرَجَكُمُ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا
تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُقَاتِلَكُمُ فِيهِ
فَإِنْ قَاتَلَكُمُ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

- 191 And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out – persecution is more severe than slaughter – but do not fight with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight you in it, but if they do fight you, then slay them – such is the recompense of the unbelievers.

The message of 'islām is universal. From early on, the muslims were only permitted to fight in self-defense. When there is no option, and in the face of persecution, however, the muslim must fight. The strength of 'islām lies in its certainty of ultimate victory over aggression and transgression, victory over even ascribing falsehoods to Allah. Fitnah (فتنة) here can be rendered as 'oppression' or 'persecution,' but can also mean 'temptation,' 'captivation,' 'seduction' – all implying the discord that love of an enslavement to other-than-Allah brings about.

Later on, as the enemies of 'islām found that the light of this message was sweeping darkness from every corner, the kāfirs vowed to an-

nihilate it. It was only then that, no recourse being left for the believers, they had to fiercely and resolutely take up the sword in defense.

فَإِنْ أَنهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

192 But if they desist, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

Desisting and showing mercy when one has the upper hand are forcibly described. On all occasions, the lover of Allah attempts to draw near by taking on the appropriate attribute of Allah. In this ayah, the attributes are forgiveness and mercy.

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أَنهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

193 And fight with them until there is no persecution, and the dīn should be only for Allah — but if they desist, then there should be no hostility, except against the oppressors.

‘until there is no persecution.’ The real object of life is to attain true fulfillment through knowledge. Fighting evil should continue until its power base is dislodged.

الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ بِالشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحُرُمَاتِ قِصَاصٌ فَمَنْ
اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَى

عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

- 194 The sacred month for the sacred month, and all sacred things are under the law of retaliation – then whoever acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you, and safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, and know that Allah is with those who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

The balance is repeated – action and reaction – and whoever attacks will accordingly receive justice meted out by men of Allah. Whenever enemies desist from continued battle, peace, bound by agreement, should prevail and be adhered to.

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى
الْتَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

- 195 And spend in the way of Allah, and do not cast yourselves into perdition with your own hands, and do good – surely, Allah loves the doers of good.

Muhsin (محسن) is from hasana (حسن), to be beautiful, perfect, good. Ihsan (احسان , beneficence or good deeds), implies the doing of anything for the Most Beautiful, Allah. Allah, therefore, loves the muhsin. One manifestation of ihsan is giving wealth for the protection of the mu'minun, and keeping the muslim community strong. It is incumbent upon us to safeguard ourselves and our brothers. Many a time, through his ignorance or foolish action, man brings about physical reactions such as wars and similar afflictions. All mischief and disasters are instigated by man's ignorance and shayṭānic tendencies. The ultimate, most noble code of conduct is true and utter submission, serving the cause of Allah.

وَأَتِمُّوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أُحْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ
 مِنَ الْهَدْيِ وَلَا تَخْلِقُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ
 مَحَلَّهُ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِ آذَى مِنْ
 رَأْسِهِ فَفِدْيَةٌ مِنْ صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ نُسُكٍ فَإِذَا
 أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا
 اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامٌ ثَلَاثَةَ
 أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةً إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ
 كَامِلَةٌ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلَهُ حَاضِرِ الْمَسْجِدِ
 الْحَرَامِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ
 الْعِقَابِ

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196

And accomplish the pilgrimage and the visit
 for Allah, but if you are prevented, send
 whatever offering is easy to obtain, and
 do not shave your heads until the offering
 reaches its destination – but whoever
 among you is sick, or has an ailment of
 the head, he should effect a compensation
 by fasting, or alms, or sacrificing – then
 when you are secure, whoever profits by
 combining the visit with the pilgrimage
 should take whatever offering is easy to
 obtain, but he who cannot find any offer-
 ing should fast for three days during the
 pilgrimage, and for seven days when you

return — these make ten full days — this is for he whose family is not present at the Sacred Mosque. And safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, and know that Allah is severe in requiting wrong.

Man must trap his disobedience. *Sharī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah* have to unite. The true muslims at Medina turned their faces (hearts) toward, prostrated to, and lived for Allah. The outer action of *ḥajj* was still to be performed, and this implied facing the enemy at Mecca. As in all aspects of the *dīn*, all rituals test one's perseverance and the extent of the sincerity and purity of one's intention, which should be unified and proven through action. The *dīn* of Allah is easy, and whenever a ritual cannot be naturally performed, *sharī'ah* then gives an alternative.

الْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَاتٌ فَمَنْ فَرَضَ
 فِيهَا الْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ
 وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ وَمَاتَعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
 يَعْلَمُهُ اللَّهُ وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ
 خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُونِ يَا أُولِي
 الْأَلْبَابِ

- 197 The pilgrimage is in well-known months, so whoever determines the performance of the pilgrimage in it, there shall be no intercourse, nor fornication, nor quarreling among one another. And whatever good you do, Allah knows it. And take provision, but surely, the best provision is safeguarding with fearful awareness. So, safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Me, O men of understanding!

The ultimate control over oneself is 'ihrām, that state of purity in which one is entirely absorbed with Allah. Taqwā is the best provision, because by stopping damage to yourself – putting up the wall of taqwā – you retain that which you otherwise would have lost. If you desire increase of provision, then know the boundaries, يَا اُولِي الْاَلْبَابِ, 'O men of understanding!' The subtle core of man can only be soundly preserved if the boundaries are fortified.

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ اَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا
 مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَاِذَا اَفْضَيْتُمْ مِنْ عَرَفَاتٍ
 فَاذْكُرُوا اللّٰهَ عِنْدَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ وَ
 اذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا هَدٰىكُمْ وَاِنْ كُنْتُمْ
 مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الضّٰلِّينَ

- 198 There is no blame on you in seeking bounty from your Lord, so when you hasten on from 'Arafāt, remember Allah near the Holy Monument, and remember Him as He has guided you, though before that you were certainly among the erring ones.

ثُمَّ اَفِضُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ اَفَاضَ النَّاسُ وَ
 اسْتَغْفِرُوا اللّٰهَ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ غَفُوْرٌ رَّحِيْمٌ

- 199 Then hasten on from the place from which the people hasten on, and ask the forgiveness of Allah – surely, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

The *qaṣd* (قصد), intention, of *ḥajj* is to perform a condensed series of actions which resemble all the actions man performs throughout his life, such as hurrying from one objective to another. The ultimate objective of life, as symbolized in *ḥajj* by wearing the minimum and least noticeable covering, *'iḥrām*, is to connect with the sacred, the *ḥaram*. Despite our dissimilarity of color, age, gender, and condition of heart, the *ḥajjis* stand, equal in the eyes of Allah, on the expanse of *'Arafāt*, declaring the intention of wanting to know the Cause of creation, the Lord of the worlds, the Essence of all attributes – Allah.

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمْ مَنَاسِكَكُمْ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ
 كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ
 ذِكْرًا فَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا
 آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
 مِنْ خَلَقٍ

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200

So when you have performed your devotions, then praise Allah as you praised your fathers, but with greater praise. But there are some people who say: Our Lord! Give us in this world! And they shall have no portion in the hereafter.

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً
 وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

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201

And there are some among them who say: Our Lord! Grant us good in this world, and good in the hereafter, and save us from the punishment of the Fire!

Hajj is the meeting with your Lord. The ignorant arabs used to boast about the greatness of their fathers. Your father is merely your physical source, whereas your real source is Allah, so remember Allah with a more lively and intense *dhikr* (ذكر). Knowledge usually begins with the gross and moves toward the subtle. Most men begin seeking basic physical fulfillments, but the true seekers move quickly towards the door that opens onto the garden of knowledge, where fulfillment in meaning brings about inner certainty, from which comes contentment, which in turn deepens into greater certainty. The forces guiding this journey are 'islām, 'imān, and 'ihsān.

أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا
وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

- 202 They shall have their portion of what they have earned, and Allah is swift in reckoning.

At the outset, man begins to replace his selfish actions with less selfish ones, and if he is patient and perceptive enough, he will discover that there is greater reward in this life from less selfish actions, for the simple reason that he is relatively free from the clutter of expectation. From this standpoint, good actions stemming from pure intentions will have good rewards. Because our awareness is inconsistent and incomplete, we see action and reaction as separate phenomena. When intention and action are united, when hypocrisy is eradicated, and awareness of reality is increased, when the past is forgotten and the future causes no anxiety, only then will action and reaction be experienced as one continuum. The ultimate reward is according to the intention.

وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ تَعَجَّلَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ فَلَا إِشْرَاقَ عَلَيْهِ وَمَنْ تَأَخَّرَ فَلَا إِشْرَاقَ عَلَيْهِ لِمَنْ أَتَقَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا

اللَّهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

- 203 And praise Allah during the numbered days — then whoever hastens off in two days, there is no blame on him, and whoever remains behind, there is no blame on him for whoever safeguards himself with fearful awareness. So safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, and know that you shall be gathered together to Him.

The specific reference here is to the three days after sacrifice. The normal state of a seeker is to be in perpetual remembrance of Allah. As an outer expression of this remembrance, and as a confirmation of his 'islām, man follows the path prescribed in ḥajj, which echoes the great gathering in the next life. The entire cosmos rises from a single point in creation, exploding, expanding, and eventually collapsing back to its beginning.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
وَيُشْهِدُ اللَّهَ عَلَى مَا فِي قَلْبِهِ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ الْخِصَامِ

- 204 And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder, and he calls on Allah to witness what is in his heart, yet he is the most violent of adversaries.

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا
وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُمِيتُ

- 205 And when he turns back, he runs about in the land causing mischief in it, and destroying the tillage and livestock — and Allah does not love mischief-making.

Khiṣām (خصام), adversary, quarrel, or controversy, is from khaṣama (خصم), to discount, defeat or antagonize. The enemy of truth and 'islām, the enemy of oneself, is the breakdown between what is said and what is really meant. The seeker unifies his intention and declaration, both of which are proven outwardly in his action. If one's speech differs from one's intention, then the flow of unity is broken. The real enemy is within — it is the cause of failure. He who is broken up by his ignorance cannot but reflect his true reality by trying to break up the divine systems which bring mercy. The shattered being has no option but to cause mischief and destruction of the natural order.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ
بِالْإِثْمِ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ وَلَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ

- 206 And when it is said to him: Safeguard yourself with fearful awareness from Allah! Pride carries him off to wrong action, so hell is sufficient for him, and certainly it is an evil resting-place.

When one is challenged by the truth of tawhīd, the natural defense of the nafs (ego) is pride and self-elevation. This tough protective layer of ignorance and self-acknowledgement — shirk (شرك) — is the natural state of jahannam (جهنم), that bottomless pit, that wasteland of permanent agitation — hell.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ

مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَؤُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

- 207 And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is compassionate to the servants.

The way to taste the compassion and love Allah has for His true adorer and slave is to give oneself up. There is no end to satisfying the lower self. Freeing the heart of *its* wishes in order to discover Allah's wishes removes all the so-called resistances and obstacles in this life. This can only be described as compassion.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ
كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ
إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

- 208 O you who believe! Enter into submission one and all, and do not follow the footsteps of shayṭān – surely, he is your open enemy!

Those who enter the Garden of peace where no agitations, desires, fears or expectations can enter, are those who trust that this final abode of knowledge is attainable by those who diligently and sincerely strive for it, as prescribed in the Book, and as applied by the men of the Book. The footsteps of shayṭān trip up the wayward ones. This is clear to all who wish to see. Recognizing the lure and footsteps of shayṭān, the lover of peace will tread carefully along his path of trust.

فَإِنْ زَلَلْتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْكُمْ

الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

- 209 But if you slip after clear arguments have come to you, then know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.

Often even a sincere seeker slips until his steps grow surer, his direction clearer and his awareness of the boundaries clearer. Recognition of one's failures, and the sincere intention to truly correct them, brings about Allah's mercy, which is imparted to the slave with wisdom. Natural, spontaneous awareness will shine more and more brightly.

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلُمٍ مِّنَ الْعَمَامِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ إِلَى اللَّهِ تَرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

- 210 They do not wait, except that Allah should come to them in the shadows of the clouds along with the angels, but the matter has been decided – all matters are returned to Allah.

The laws of Allah are absolute, and their description in the Qur'an clear. By clinging to his ignorance, hypocrisy and arrogance, man entrenches himself in his own fiery grave. Allah's decree encompasses all existence, seen or unseen – it operates in every situation and phenomenon. The total ecological balance, and the overall outcome of any system, are completely contained within the laws of reality. The result, therefore, is already settled – all matters emanate from Allah and return to Allah.

سَلِّ نَبِيَّ إِسْرَائِيلَ كَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ آيَةٍ بَيِّنَةٍ

وَمَنْ يُبَدِّلْ نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

- 211 Ask the tribe of Israel how many a clear sign
We have given them — and whoever
changes the favor of Allah after it has
come to him, then surely, Allah is severe
in requiting wrong.

The jews have repeatedly rejected the prophets or distorted the messages of Reality, the clear blessings of Allah. Rejection of Allah's blessings leads one to remain in darkness, from which all troubles spring. Denial and rejection are characteristics of the lower self. Man is at a loss unless he centers himself, acts righteously, and follows in the footsteps of the Messenger. The greatest blessing is the message of Qur'ān. If one does not take this blessing upon oneself, no doubt the result will be the punishment of ignorance and loss.

زَيْنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَالْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ
مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

- 212 The life of this world is made to seem fair to
those who disbelieve, and they mock
those who believe, and those who safe-
guard themselves with fearful awareness
shall be above them on the day of resur-
rection — and Allah gives means of sub-
sistence to whomever He pleases, without
measure.

Every system is made to appear beautiful to those in it, including the system of kufr. One is as broad or as narrow as one wants to be. In terms of provision, one will only understand infinite rizq (رزق, provision, sustenance) when in complete abandonment. We are all lovers of

Allah, for we all expect provision — all provisions and gifts are from the One Provider. Most people who adore the limited, lower life reject and mock the true believers. Mocking is, in its way, a proof of the deep uncertainty and insecurity of the misguided orientation of the mocker.

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ
 مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
 بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَمَا
 اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا
 جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ
 الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
 يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ الْصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

- 213 People are a single nation — so Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, so that it might judge between people in that in which they differed. And none but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, revolting among themselves — so Allah has guided, by His will, those who believe, to the truth about which they differed — and Allah guides whomever He pleases to the right path.

Humanity is, and will continue to be, unified in consciousness. Everyone tastes health and illness, love and hate, justice and injustice. The 'umma (امة , nation, community) of 'islām was unified in heart

and by action in Medina, and repeatedly in other communities following the path of tawhīd. The good news is and was that there is *only* Allah behind all existence, and that to Allah all returns – that transgression of the laws of Allah causes man's fall on personal or national levels – that no people will be wronged unless they deviate from the path which was revealed to them – and that whoever keeps to the straight path and direction of the Lord of safety and success is guided. Allah's mercy manifests in the repeated appearance of prophets revealing the Book. Whenever a culture began to decay through their differences, bickering, and uncertainty about the path, Allah raised another prophet, culminating in the final code of 'islām through the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ
الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَّاءُ
وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلاَ إِنَّا نَصْرُ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ

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Or do you think that you would enter the Garden while the state of those who have passed away before you has not come upon you? Distress and affliction befell them, and they were shaken violently, so that the messenger and those who believed with him said: When will the help of Allah come? Now, surely, the help of Allah is near!

The gateway to the Garden of safe conduct, knowledge and dependence upon Allah is in this life, surrounded by afflictions and turmoil. Man's impatience blurs his perception of Allah's laws at work. The laws governing action and reaction begin to operate, the intention is made and given expression in action. The outcome of the action can only be understood in the light of the true intention behind it. In fact, the outcome of the intention is never separate from it.

Naṣr'Allah qarīb (نصر الله قريب) means the help or victory of

Allah. The knowledge of the law of Allah is so close that there is no separation between the intention and its resultant effect upon the intender.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ
 مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلَّهِ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالتَّائِبِينَ
 وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ
 خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ

- 215 They ask you as to what they should spend.
 Say: Whatever wealth you spend, it is for
 parents, and near of kin, and orphans, and
 the needy, and the wayfarer — and what-
 ever good you do, surely, Allah knows it.

Allah's generosity and mercy are boundless. Man, as a lover of Allah, imitates, gives, and spends the best of his share. That flow of goodness will quite naturally touch the near ones first, and then radiate out to mankind at large, to parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and so on. The seeker of Allah's favor is bound to be rewarded according to the purity of his intention to seek His favor.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ
 أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ
 أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ

- 216 Fighting is enjoined on you, and it is an object of dislike to you – and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is bad for you – and Allah knows, while you do not know.

How can there be outward or inward peace without battle against outward and inward evil? Good men dislike war, and yet without war against corruption and injustice, peaceful coexistence and a life of worshipful reflection cannot be preserved. One cannot experience one state without its opposite being in existence. Indeed, the gateway to any state is through its opposite, where its roots lie. Love of peace, therefore, is rooted in hatred of injustice, hypocrisy, and chaos, and peace will prevail when its opposite is isolated and kept at bay, be it in an individual or in a society. The only way to bring about peace is to gain victory over its opposite.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ قُلْ
 قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ وَصَدٌّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
 وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ
 مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ
 الْقَتْلِ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّى
 يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَن دِينِكُمْ إِذَا نَسْتَأْذِنُوا
 وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَمَا لَمْ
 يَكُنْ يَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ
 هُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ

فِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ
هُدًى فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

- 217 They ask you about the sacred month, concerning fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter, and hindering from Allah's way, and denying Him, and hindering from the Sacred Mosque, and turning its people out of it, are still graver with Allah — and persecution is graver than slaughter. And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your dīn, if they can. But whoever of you turns back from his dīn, then dies while he is an unbeliever, these are the ones whose works will amount to nothing in this world and the hereafter, and they are the inmates of the Fire — they will remain in it.

If order is to prevail, then adherence to the divine laws is necessary. One of these laws requires fighting against mischief and against the denial of man's right to perform the basic acts of acknowledging his Lord and Sustainer. True believers cannot give up their convictions. Guided by the darkness of their ignorance, those in kufr cannot but thrash about in angry retaliation. What bigger misfortune can there be than to turn away and lose the path of 'imān?

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا
وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ يَرْجُونَ
رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

- 218 Surely, those who believed, and those who fled their homes, and strove hard in the

way of Allah — these hope for the mercy of Allah, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

After establishing 'Imān, hijrah (هجرة) is the highest act. If you cannot change a bad thing by your action, then abandon it. To do hijrah is to emigrate fī sabīl illah (فى سبيل الله , in the way of Allah), so that you may come closer to Him. Hijrah is negating, leaving behind what is unproductive in the spiritual sense, and is followed by jihād (جهاد , from jāhada, جهد , to strive, take great pains), positive action both outward (avoiding the evil and corrupt), and inward (being watchful of lower tendencies predominating). Doing both of these qualifies a people to expect and understand the mercy, for Allah's mercy encompasses everything.

If you flee from all your lower tendencies, such as selfishness, insecurity, attachments, self-opinion and expectation, then your hijrah is bound to show outwardly in your avoidance of bad companionship, spiritually inappropriate surroundings, and societies, nations or countries which are misguided and off the path. It is the intelligent man who flees from a doomed abode. He who flees from shayṭān moves closer to Raḥmān.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْمِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا
إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا
أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا
يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ كَذَلِكَ
يَبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

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They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: In both of them there is a great wrong and a means of profit for men, but their wrong is greater than their profit. And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say: What you can spare.

Thus does Allah make the communications clear to you, that you may reflect...

Everything in existence has its usefulness, purpose, or reason. Man's love of intoxicants is an aspect of his love of freedom. Intoxicants depress the demands of one's chains of attachment to the duniyā (الدنيا , worldliness), and their use, therefore, brings about a false, momentary relief for the fallen man. Actions such as taking intoxicants, or seeking quick and easy wealth through gambling, remove one further from comprehending and being conscious of reality and certainty. Man's reason for existence is, after all, to grasp reality.

فِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْيَتَامَى قُلْ
إِصْلَاحُهُمْ خَيْرٌ وَأَنْ تَخَالطُوهُمْ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ
لَأَغْنَىكُمْ إِنْ اللَّهُ غَيْرُ حَكِيمٌ

220 ...on this world and the hereafter. And they ask you about the orphans. Say: To set their affairs right for them is good, and if you become co-partners with them, then they are your brothers – and Allah knows the mischief-maker and the peace-maker. And if Allah had wished, He could certainly have caused you to fall into a difficulty – surely, Allah is Mighty, Wise.

Drug-taking or gambling enhance the unreal and the uncertain, and therefore will be opposed by the seeker. You are either a mufsid (مفسد , one who acts corruptly, violently, and is a cause of decay), or a muṣliḥ (مطح , one who acts rightly, with integrity) – you are either a lover of duniyā (دنيا) or a lover of 'ākhirah (آخرة).

Acting rightly and generously towards the orphans and those with-

out guardians will not only directly benefit the giver as well as the receiver, but will also be reflected in an improved community. The world is an aggregation of communities made up of individuals. If each individual sets himself right, then the world will be a gross reflection of the Heavenly Gardens.

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَاتِ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنَ وَلَا أُمَّةٌ
 مُؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكَةٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ وَلَا
 تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنُوا وَلَعَبْدٌ
 مُؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ أُولَئِكَ
 يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ
 وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيُبَيِّنُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ
 لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

- 221 And do not marry the idolatresses until they believe, and certainly a believing woman is better than an idolatress, even though she may please you. And do not give believing women in marriage to idolaters until they believe, and certainly a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he may please you — these invite to the Fire, but Allah invites to the Garden and to forgiveness by His will, and makes His communications clear to men, so that they might be mindful.

The road to the taste of bliss of the Garden has strict rules: one cannot follow one's whims. The closer one is, the more subtle the rules of courtesy become.

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ قُلْ هُوَ آذَانِي فَأَعْتَزِلُوا
 النِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّى
 يَطْهُرْنَ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ
 أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ
 وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

- 222 And they ask you about menstruation. Say: It is a pollution, so withhold yourselves from women during the menstrual discharge, and do not approach them until they have become clean — then when they have cleansed themselves, go in to them as Allah has commanded you. Surely, Allah loves those who turn (to Him) often, and He loves those who purify themselves.

The natural cyclical discharge of woman is a purifying process — it removes discarded cells and purifies her body. The path of purification, perception and knowledge starts with the gross and moves toward the subtle. Knowledge of what causes you bodily harm leads to knowledge of what causes disturbance to your heart. Purification of your clothes, therefore, can lead to the purification of your intentions. The physical laws that govern health and safety must be recognized and adhered to in parallel with the knowledge of the subtler boundaries that govern inner purity.

نِسَائِكُمْ حَرَّتُ لَكُمْ فَأَتُوا حُرَّتَكُمْ
 أَنِي شِئْتُمْ وَقَدِّمُوا لِنَفْسِكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ مَلَاقُوهُ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

- 223 Your wives are a tillage for you, so go to your tillage when you like, and do good beforehand for yourselves, and safeguard yourself with fearful awareness before Allah, and know that you will meet Him, and give good news to the believers.

وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا اللَّهَ عُرْضَةً لِأَيْمَانِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَتُصَلِّوا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ
وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

- 224 And do not make Allah, because of your swearing (by Him), an obstacle to your doing good and safeguarding yourself with fearful awareness, and making peace between men – and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

Send forth goodness from yourselves, have the intention or the expectation to present something that is either good, or that will become good, such as conceiving a child who will be a delight. The issue here is not about having children, rather, it is about having taqwā (تقوى), fearing that which will happen to you if you are not on the way to Allah. Marriage is an act of sacrifice, and not necessarily of pleasure. If the sacrifice is along the path that pleases, then it will rest on a foundation of spontaneous joy. The pleasure of Allah will be the pleasure of the seeker. If a mu'min remembers that he is bound, sooner or later, to know, then his actions will naturally be better guided. He will be brought to the good news that the All-knower, al-'Alim (العليم), encompasses and contains all His creation.

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ
يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا كَبَبْتُمْ قُلُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ
حَلِيمٌ

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- 225 Allah does not call you to account for what is vain in your oaths, but He will call you to account for what your hearts have earned, and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.

Through his frequent flippancy and thoughtlessness, man often swerves to the edges of the highway of 'imān, until such time that he becomes a skilled driver, sensitive to the pulling of the nafs. Man's real accountability is according to the quality and condition of his heart.

لِلَّذِينَ يُؤْلُونَ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ تَرَبُّصُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَشْهُرٍ
فَإِنْ فَآؤُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

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- 226 Those who swear that they will not go in to their wives should wait for four months — then if they return to them, Allah is surely Forgiving, Merciful.

وَإِنْ عَزَمُوا الطَّلَاقَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

○

- 227 And if they have resolved on divorce, then Allah is surely Hearing, Knowing.

وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ

أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ
 يُؤْمِنْنَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيُعَلِّمْنَ أَحَقَّ
 بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَهُنَّ مِثْلُ
 الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ
 وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

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And the divorced women should keep themselves in waiting for three menstrual periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs, if they believe in Allah and the last day. And their husbands have a better right to take them back in the meanwhile, if they want reconciliation. And they have rights similar to those held over them in a just manner, but the men are a degree above them — and Allah is Mighty, Wise.

Divorce is the most loathsome of permitted acts, because it separates, and Allah is the Unifier. Divorce signifies that even though the intention may have been sound, wisdom and knowledge of the union's potential was lacking. Oaths that were foolish or the result of hastiness, inconsideration, or ignorance, can quickly be remedied by the alert-minded person. Normally, however, a heart's intention that manifests itself in a contract or oath has to be carried out according to the clearly laid-out rules of conduct, so that proper order exists in the relationship, and it is defined without doubt. Doubt and uncertainty bring about turmoil, and from turmoil comes chaos. Allah's decree is cosmos, not chaos. A correctly acting community can only be increased in knowledge if it adheres to the divine laws that govern its affairs.

الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِإِحْسَانٍ
 وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا بِمَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
 إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ
 أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا
 فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا
 وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

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Divorce may be pronounced twice — then keep them in good relationship, or let them go with kindness. And it is not lawful for you to take any part of what you have given them, unless both fear that they cannot keep within the limits of Allah. Then if you fear that they cannot keep within the limits of Allah, there is no blame on them for what she gives up to become free. These are the limits of Allah, so do not exceed them, and whoever exceeds the limits of Allah, those are the ones who are unjust.

فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدُ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ
 زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا
 أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ

اللَّيْئُولِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ

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So if he divorces her, she will not be lawful to him afterwards until she marries another husband — then if he divorces her, there is no blame on them both if they return to each other (by marriage), if they think that they can keep within the limits of Allah. These are the limits of Allah which He makes clear for a people who know.

وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَبَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ
بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَلَا تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ
ضِرَارًا لِنَعْتَدُوا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ
نَفْسَهُ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ
اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ
الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ وَاتَّقُوا
اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

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And when you divorce women, and they reach their prescribed time, then either retain them in good relationship, or set them free with liberality, and do not retain them for injury, so that you exceed the limits — whoever does this, indeed, he is unjust to his own soul. And do not take Allah's communications in mockery, and

remember the favor of Allah upon you, and what He has revealed to you of the Book and the Wisdom, admonishing you by it. And safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, and know that Allah is the Knower of all things.

وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَبَلَّغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا
تَعْضَلُوهُنَّ أَنْ يَنْكِحْنَ أَزْوَاجَهُنَّ إِذَا تَرَاضَوْا
بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ذَلِكَ يُوعَظُ بِهِ مَنْ كَانَ
مِنْكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ أَرْكَى لَكُمْ
وَأَظْهَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

232

And when you have divorced women, and they have ended their term, then do not prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree among themselves in a lawful manner. By this, the one among you who believes in Allah and the last day is admonished – this is more profitable and purer for you. And Allah knows, while you do not know.

وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ
لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنَسِّبَهُنَّ الرِّضَاعَةَ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ
وَكَسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا
لَا تُضَارُّ وَالِدَةٌ بَوْلِدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَالِدِهِ

وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنِ
 تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا وَإِنْ
 أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تُضِعُّوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
 عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْتُمْ
 اللَّهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

233

And mothers should suckle their children for two whole years, for him who desires to complete the full time of suckling. And their maintenance and their clothing must be borne by the father according to custom — no soul shall have a duty imposed upon it, except to the extent of its capacity — nor shall a mother be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor a father on account of his child, and a similar duty devolves on the father's heir — but if both desire weaning by mutual consent and counsel, there is no blame on them, and if you wish to engage a wet-nurse for your children, there is no blame on you, so long as you pay what you promised, according to custom — and safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, and know that Allah sees what you do.

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا
 يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا

بَلَّغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ
 فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

234

And as for those of you who die and leave behind wives, they should keep themselves in waiting for four months and ten days. Then, when they have fully attained their term, there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves in a lawful manner – and Allah is aware of what you do.

وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُم بِهِ مِنْ
 خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْنَنْتُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ
 عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ سَتَذْكُرُونَهُنَّ وَلَكِنْ
 لَا تُوَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّا أَنْ تَقُولُوا قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا
 وَلَا تَعْزِمُوا عُقْدَةَ النِّكَاحِ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ
 الْكِتَابَ أَجَلَهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي
 أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ وَاعْلَمُوا
 أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ

235

And there is no blame on you respecting that which you speak indirectly in the asking of women in marriage, or keep concealed

within your minds. — Allah knows that you will mention them, but do not give them a promise in secret unless you speak in a lawful manner. And do not confirm the marriage tie until the writing is fulfilled — and know that Allah knows what is in your minds, so beware of Him, and know that Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing.

لَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ مَا لَمْ
تَمْسُوهُنَّ أَوْ تَفْرِضُوا لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً وَمَتَّعُوهُنَّ
عَلَى الْمَوْسِعِ قَدْرُهُ وَعَلَى الْمَقْتَرِ قَدْرُهُ
مَتَاعًا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُحْسِنِينَ

- 236 There is no blame on you if you divorce women when you have not touched them or appointed a portion for them — and make provision for them, the wealthy according to his means, and the straitened according to his means, a provision according to custom. This is a duty on those who do what is right.

وَإِنْ طَلَقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمْسُوهُنَّ وَقَدْ
فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ مَا فَرَضْتُمْ إِلَّا
أَنْ يُعْفُونَ أَوْ يُعْفُوا الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ عُقْدَةُ

التَّكَاحُ وَأَنْ تَعْضُوا أَقْرَبَ لِلنَّقْوَى وَلَا تَنْسُوا
 الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ إِنْ أَلَّ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا

- 237 And if you divorce them before you have touched them, and you have appointed a portion for them, then pay half to them of what you have appointed, unless they relinquish it, or the one in whose hand is the marriage tie should relinquish it — and it is nearer to fearful awareness that you should relinquish it. And do not neglect the giving of gifts between you — surely, Allah sees what you do.

All systems, tangible or intangible, have limitations and boundaries. In this life, the union between man and woman is usually conducive to quietening existential needs and balancing out each other's inadequacies. If the two partners' intention is along the divine path, to help each other in reducing and eradicating negativity, then the union will be conducive to their spiritual evolution. When it is realized that the union is futile, and that experiential, environmental, or other subtle elements are causing its purpose to be deflected from what Allah meant it to be, then it should be severed. Outer severance is division, and division is not in line with Allah's path of mercy, of *tawhīd*. It is better, however, to break the bonds than to continue being entrenched in a miserable state. As far as *sharī'ah* is concerned, the rules of breaking a marriage contract are clear. The seeker of spirituality is advised to go beyond the call of *sharī'ah* with generosity and good-naturedness to the divorced wife.

Man, who has the upper hand and guardianship over woman, must reflect the justice of the Creator. If he is divorcing for any reason other than pleasing Allah, there will be a lesson and an affliction for him in that divorce. For example, if he divorces his wife as a punishment, or out of vanity or jealousy, and then wants to regain her, the condition is that she should marry another man before she can return to him. In this manner, the wife will have had the opportunity of another union, which will broaden her exposure to the possibilities that Allah has created, and the man will also have had the opportunity to recognize jealousy, possessiveness, and any other lower tendency he may have harbored towards a creature in his charge.

The end of ayah 230 is the key: **وتلك حدود الله يبينها لقوم يعلمون** 'These are the limits of Allah which He makes clear for a people who know.' The boundaries of Allah are clear to people of understanding. Ma'rūf, معروف (ayah 231) here means fairness, beneficence, from 'arafa (عرف), to know, realize, understand. It also means known, famous, or recognized. Mount 'Arafāt is from the same root – it is that which stands out above the plain, known and recognized. He who is in true taqwā (تقوى) is constantly watchful and aware that he is not separate from Allah, the All-Knowing, and is guided by the Book of Allah and the wisdom that comes from it.

حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ
الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقَوْمُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ

- 238 Attend constantly to the prayers, and to the middle prayer, and stand up truly obedient to Allah.

Wasta (وسطى) means middle. It implies stability and moderation. The frequently used phrase, 'ummatun wasṭa' (امة وسطى), implies a nation which is balanced, anchored, excellent, well-behaved, long-lasting, and away from the danger of extremes. The middle prayer is the afternoon prayer, coinciding with the peak of daily activity. If a muslim performs his 'aṣr prayers (صلاة العصر) devoutly, he is likely to have kept the prayers which coincide with a decreased level of outer and worldly demands. Similarly, if the middle of a transaction – which constitutes the greatest part – is sound, then, generally speaking, the entire transaction will also be sound.

فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فِرْجَالًا أَوْ رُكْبَانًا فَإِذَا
أَمِنْتُمْ فَأَذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَمَا عَلَّمَكُم

مَا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

○

- 239 But if you are in danger, then (say your prayers) on foot or on horseback. And when you are secure, then remember Allah, as He has taught you what you did not know.

Pray where it is possible when the prayer time comes upon you. The early muslims were in constant danger from their enemies. Nowadays we are in constant danger of being swamped by the gushing mainstream of life and the materialistic quest. If one cannot pray in the prescribed manner, then one should pray in any manner closest to it, whether riding, or travelling, and so on. One should make one's aim the constant reversion to the most perfect way of worship, the Muḥammadi Way, according to the Qur'ān, as fully expounded and practiced by the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and by his deputies of the Ahl ul-Bayt.

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا
وَصِيَّةً لِّأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَّتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرِ
إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ
فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ مِنْ مَّعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ
عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

○

- 240 And those of you who die and leave behind wives, make a bequest in favor of their wives, of maintenance for a year without turning them out. Then if they go away by themselves, there is no blame on you for what they do of lawful actions by themselves – and Allah is Mighty, Wise.

A woman should be protected at all times, including when widowed. She should not have to be worried and insecure about her protection, provision, and livelihood. Man's authority over woman brings about the direct responsibility of her welfare upon him.

وَلِلْمُطَلَّاقَاتِ مَتَاعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى
الْمُتَّقِينَ

○

- 241 And for the divorced woman, provision according to custom – a duty on those who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَعْقِلُونَ

○

- 242 Thus, Allah makes His communications clear to you, so that you may understand.

These are additional proofs of the great regard for women, and of concern that their rights should be protected, and that they should be provided for to the fullest extent possible. These responsibilities place increasing demands on the piety and clemency of man.

الَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ
وَهُمُ الْوُفَّاءُ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ فَقَالَ لَهُمُ
اللَّهُ مَاتُوا ثُمَّ أَحْيَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ

لذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ
لَا يَشْكُرُونَ

- 243 Have you not considered those who went forth from their homes, for fear of death? And there were thousands – then Allah said to them: Die! Then He gave them life. Surely, Allah is Gracious to people, but most people are not grateful.

The most likely historical reference here is to the Israelites, fleeing from their homes in the thousands out of fear of the plague. The affliction, however, caught up with them, until their prophet Ezekiel prayed for the life of his people. Fear of bodily death in this life leads to moral and spiritual death. Equally, and more importantly, the moral death of a people can only be reversed by a revival of spiritual values. Allah brings the dead out of the living, and the living out of the dead.

وَقَانِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ
سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

- 244 And fight in the way of Allah! And know that Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

Uphold reality, haqq (حَقٌّ), because if you do not, you will eventually be overcome by the enemy of truth. Fight every instant, both within you and what is in front of you, fī sabīl illah (فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ , in the way of Allah). The order is to fight for what is right, with every possible means, without unnecessarily endangering life. Stretch your efforts to the limits!

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا

فِيضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ
يَقْضِي وَيَنْصُطُ يَقْرَأُ السُّورَةَ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

- 245 Who is it that will offer Allah a goodly loan, so that He can multiply it for him many times over? And Allah straitens and amplifies, and to Him you shall be returned.

Qarḍan ḥasanan (قرضاً حسناً), a goodly loan, is given without any consideration for its repayment, or time of repayment. In fact, the best loan is the one you completely forget about. In many cases, the most valued loan is one's time and attention, not goods at all. The rewards of a good loan are manifold. A good loan brings about echoes of the goodness of the Creator. As the giver's generosity increases and expands, it will become second nature to him – his state will be elevated and closer to his divine nature, the All-giving, Generous, Merciful Lord.

الْمُتَرِّ إِلَى الْمِلَّةِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ
مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّهِمْ لَمَّا نَبَتْ لَنَا
مَلَائِكَةُ نَقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ قَالَ هَلْ
عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ
أَلَّا تُقَاتِلُوا قَالُوا وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نُقَاتِلَ
فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا
وَأَبْنَاؤُنَا فَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقِتَالُ

تَوَلَّوْا إِلَّا قَلِيلاً مِنْهُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ
بِالظَّالِمِينَ

○
246

Have you not considered the chiefs of the tribe of Israel after Mūsā, when they said to a prophet of theirs: Raise a king up for us, so that we may fight in the way of Allah! He said: May it be that you would not fight even if fighting is ordained for you? They said: And what reason would we not fight in the way of Allah? Indeed, we have been compelled to abandon our homes and our children! But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned back, except for a few of them — and Allah knows the unjust.

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ
لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ
عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ
يُؤْتْ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِذَا لَمْ
اضْطَفِيهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ
وَإِجْسِمٍ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مَلِكَهُ مَن يَشَاءُ
وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

○
247

And their prophet said to them: Surely, Allah has raised Tālūt to be a king over you.

They said: How can he hold kingship over us while we have a greater right to kingship than he does, and he has not been granted an abundance of wealth? He said: Surely, Allah has chosen him in preference to you, and He has increased him abundantly in knowledge and physique, and Allah grants His kingdom to whomever He pleases — and Allah is Vast, Knowing.

After the prophet Mūsā, peace be upon him, the jews were repeatedly reminded of His message, which was refreshed and reinforced by the subsequent prophets and messengers. They repeatedly allowed denial, rejection and hesitancy to supercede trust, obedience, and adherence to the laws of Allah. The Qur'ān enjoins the fight for freedom from subjugation. If the believers are outwardly in subjugation, how can they turn toward inner and subtle freedom?

The example given, which highlights this, is the Israelites' bickering about Samuel. The same thing occurred among the muslims after the death of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Man's hypocrisy, doubt, denial, bickering and disagreement about leadership, in spite of clear and specific prophetic directions, arise in all religions. While the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was on his death-bed, the muslims began to lobby for, and squabble over, power and election, following simple human logic, intending to maintain the growth of 'islām and unity among the muslims, rather than following divine decree and clear prophetic direction. As long as man continues to passively remain under the influence of his lower tendencies, this state of affairs will continue.

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ
 أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ
 وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ آدَمُ مَوْسَىٰ وَالْهُرُودُ
 تَحْمِلُهَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ إِن فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ

And the prophet said to them: Surely, the sign of His kingdom is that there shall come to you the chest in which there is tranquility from your Lord, and the relics of what the children of Mūsā and the children of Hārūn have left, the angels bearing it – certainly, in this there is a sign for those who believe!

In the past, communities had more physical signs revealed to them, but at the same time were also more sensitive. The tābūt (تابوت), ark of the covenant, which contained divine blessing, was passed from one messenger to another, and was considered to have miraculous properties. The agitated and doubtful followers had direct evidence of the sanctity of their prophet when the state of calm and contentment was brought about. By divine grace, the prophet of Allah brings about evidences, in different forms and fashions, of the miracle of love which renders the human heart pure and free.

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ اِنَّ
 اللّٰهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ
 فَلَيْسَ مِنِّيْ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَاِنَّهُ مِنِّيْ اِلَّا
 مَنْ اغْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ
 اِلَّا قَلِيْلًا مِنْهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ
 وَالَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا مَعَهُ قَالُوْا لَا طَاقَةَ
 لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالَ الَّذِيْنَ

يُظَنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا اللَّهِ كَمَا
 مِنْ فِئَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِئَةً كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ
 اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

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So when Tālūt departed with the forces, he said: Surely, Allah will test you with a river – whoever then drinks from it, he is not of me, and whoever does not taste of it, he is certainly of me, except he who takes with his hand as much of it as fills his hand. But with the exception of a few of them, they drank from it. So when he had crossed it, he and those who believed with him, they said: Today we have no power against Jālūt and his forces. Those who were sure that they would meet their Lord said: How often has a small party vanquished a numerous company, by the permission of Allah – and Allah is with the patient.

The theme of Surat ul-Baqarah is discrimination, furqān, and this ayah depicts the differentiation between those who are the real followers of the path of submission and truth, and those who are not. Tālūt tests his soldiers by means of the river, but only a few of them are faithful. The parable notes that quality often overcomes quantity. The quality of patience is an aspect of timelessness, and therefore it is victorious.

وَلَمَّا بَرَزُوا لِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِغْ
 عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَانصُرْنَا

عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

○

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And when they went out against Jālūt and his forces, they said: Our Lord, pour patience down upon us, and make our footsteps firm, and assist us against the unbelieving people.

فَهَزَمُوهُم بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ دَاوُدُ
جَالُوتَ وَآتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ
وَعَلَّمَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ
النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ
الْأَرْضُ وَلَٰكِن لَّا يَكُنَّ اللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى
الْعَالَمِينَ

○

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So they put them to flight, by Allah's permission. And Dāwūd slew Jālūt, and Allah gave him kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of what He pleased. And were it not for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, the earth would certainly be in a state of disorder — but Allah is Gracious to the creatures.

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ

وَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

- 252 These are the communications of Allah. We recite them to you with truth — and most surely, you are of the messengers.

The few won over the many. The emergence of David was because Allah bestowed upon him the gift of wisdom and knowledge. The creational balance rests between the opposing forces of good/evil, knowledge/ignorance, submission with *īmān*/rejection with *kufr*, peace/turmoil. This dynamic flux constantly leads to, and points out, Divine Justice. By contemplating this, man gains knowledge, wisdom and nearness to Allah.

تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ مِنْهُمْ
 مَنْ كَلَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٍ
 وَأَتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ
 بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا اقْتُلَ الَّذِينَ
 مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ
 وَلَكِنْ اختلفوا فمنهم من آمن ومنهم من كفر
 وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا اقْتُلُوا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ

- 253 We have made some of these messengers to excel others. Among them are those to whom Allah spoke, and some of them He exalted in rank. And We gave clear miracles to 'Isā, son of Maryam, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. And if Allah had pleased, those after them would

not have fought one another after the clear arguments had come to them, but they disagreed — so there were some of them who believed, and others who denied. And if Allah had pleased, they would not have fought one another, but Allah brings about what He intends.

In the same way that some signs are clearer and contain deeper messages than others, so do we find that Allah's messengers are of different ranks. Allah's mercy is manifest through the messengers in an ever-cascading spring of freshness which revives and enlightens man. The ultimate choice, however, is left to man, the only creature with the capacity to recognize and adhere to the path of 'īmān, or to drown in the darkness of kufr.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ
 قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعُ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا
 شَفَاعَةٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

○
254

O you who believe! Spend out of what We have given you before the day comes when there is no bargaining, nor any friendship nor intercession — and the unbelievers, they are the unjust.

In day-to-day transactions, one bargains, befriends, and intercedes. On the Day of Judgement, when no more redeeming action is possible, what will matter will be the degree of the heart's purity, measured by one's heart's actions in the world. The mu'min's heart is polished by charity, generosity, abandonment, acting and expending energy in the way of Allah (في سبيل الله , fī sabīl illah), and by improving the quality of the motive for that giving. Those who lurk in the darkness of kufr will not be able to see this pathway, and therefore naturally do wrong.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا
 نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي
 يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ
 وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا
 بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَ
 لَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

255

Allah is He beside Whom there is no god, the
 Ever-living, the Self-subsisting, by Whom
 all subsist! Slumber does not overtake
 Him, nor does sleep. Whatever is in the
 heavens and whatever is in the earth is
 His. Who can intercede with Him, except
 by His permission? He knows what is be-
 fore them and what is behind them, and
 they cannot comprehend anything out of
 His knowledge except what He pleases.
 His knowledge extends over the heavens
 and the earth, and the preservation of
 them does not tire Him. And He is the
 Most High, the Great.

Ayat ul-Kursi is the ayah of dominion. Dominion is where power
 emanates from and is exercised. Allah is the One, Ever-sentient, Ever-
 subsisting, containing all the states that are manifest, all actions, crea-
 tions, and attributes that can be experienced, either visible or hidden,
 near or far. The laws of Allah are absolute, and no interference or in-
 tervention can change anything.

لا تأخذه سنة ولا نوم - Allah is beyond time and states, for
 He encompasses time and all states.

الابدانه , meaning that everything exists according to
 certain laws.

ما بين ايديهم وما خلفهم - He encompasses time.

What He wills is the degree of your closeness to Allah, and your closeness to Allah is directly proportional to your remoteness from other-than-Allah. The more you see Allah in everything, the more will be your knowledge of the King.

وسع كرسيه - It is the seat wherein the Dweller dwells. It spans the heavens and earth – there is nothing but Allah. Everything is saturated and sustained by Allah.

ولا يورده حفظهما -His control is absolute. Nothing can ever happen by other-than-Allah's decree.

This ayah is an ayah of protection, for if you abandon yourself into the knowledge that Allah encompasses all, then you will be held and protected by the seat.

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ
 فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ
 اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا
 وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ



- 256 There is no compulsion in the life-transaction. Truly, the right way has become clearly distinct from error, so whoever disbelieves in false gods and believes in Allah, indeed, he has taken hold of the firmest handhold which will not break off – and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

We are safe if we hold onto the 'urwatul wuthqā (عروة الوثقى), firmest handhold, upon which our safety depends. The 'holding onto' is the denying of our tughyān (طغيان), our rebellion, turmoil, and, instead, having complete trust in the Creator. Unless conviction comes from the individual himself, self-knowledge cannot be tapped. One cannot impose the journey along the path of mercy on others, those who may prefer to meander into the enticing woods that flank the straight path.

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ
 الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
 أَوْلِيَاءُ لَهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ
 النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
 النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

257 Allah is the Guardian of those who believe.
 He brings them out of the darkness into
 the light. But as for those who disbelieve,
 their guardians are false gods who take
 them out of the light into the darkness —
 they are the inmates of the Fire. In it,
 they shall remain.

We are born in darkness, but, through 'īmān, 'ihsān and 'islām, we are
 brought to know the underlying Cause and Sustainership of creation.
 (نور) : the essence of rūḥ is nūr (الله نور السموات و الارض).
 Tāghūt (طاغوت , from tagha, طغى , to exceed the bounds, be
 tumultuous or tyrannical) makes sure that man's essence remains hid-
 den. Fihā khālidūn (فيها خالدون), they shall remain in it, because
 by earning it, they are the Fire's companions. Allah befriends only the
 faithful and guides them to light. Through true 'īmān, one gains entry to
 the state of the Garden of blissful submission, peace and contentment,
 ever anchored in trust of the beloved Creator. This journey is like
 coming out of the barrenness and ignorance of darkness into the lush
 Garden of beautiful sights and constant delight. Its opposite is the
 journey from the inherent light of creation to the darkness of the
 self-spun cocoon — the doomed tomb of selfishness, mistrust, and
 isolation.

الْمُرْتَلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَيْهِ

اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي
 وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ
 اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ
 بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ
 وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

○
258

Have you not considered him (Nimrod) who
 disputed with 'Ibrāhīm about his Lord,
 because Allah had given him the king-
 dom? When 'Ibrāhīm said: My Lord is He
 Who gives life and causes to die, he said: I
 give life and cause to die! 'Ibrāhīm said:
 So, surely Allah causes the sun to rise
 from the east — so you make it rise from
 the west! Thus, he who disbelieved was
 confounded. And Allah does not guide
 the unjust people.

Nimrod's tyranny and injustice polished and strengthened Say-
 yidnā 'Ibrāhīm's trust, faith, conviction and certainty about his path.
 This is a great example of the clear polarity between, and repulsion of,
 opposites.

أَوْكَ الَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ
 عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ
 بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ
 ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتُ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ

يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ لَيْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ
فَأَنْظِرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ
وَأَنْظِرْ إِلَى حِمَارِكَ وَلْيَخفك آيَةً
لِلنَّاسِ وَأَنْظِرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ
نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا لحمًا فَلَمَّا
بَيَّنَّا لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

259

Or the like of him ('Uzayr) who passed by a town, and it was empty, with its roofs caved in. He said: When will Allah give it life after its death? So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up to life. He said: How long have you tarried? He said: I have tarried a day, or part of a day. Said He: No! You have tarried a hundred years — look at your food and drink! Years have not passed over it. And look at your donkey! So that We may make you a sign to men. And look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothed them with flesh. So when it became clear to him, he said: I know that Allah has power over all things.

The cycles of life and death are repetitive signs for people who are close to Allah. The example here shows how the experience of time is relative to the observer. The parable of Ezekiel and the miracle tells us that in the same way that a nation can literally be resurrected in this life from dead skin and bones, so too can the light of the knowledge of the Almighty and Merciful shine through the actions of people who seem to be in the total darkness of kufr and injustice.

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي
 الْمَوْتَى قَالَ أَوْلَمْ تُؤْمِنُ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ
 قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ
 إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ
 مِنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَا تَيْنِكَ سَعِيًا
 وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

260

And when 'Ibrāhīm said: My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead! He said: What? Do you not believe? He said: Yes, but so my heart may be at ease. He said: Then take four birds, then train them to follow you, then place a part of them on every mountain, then call them – they will come flying to you. And know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.

The prophet's unease is answered by his Lord's demonstration. Just as the tamed birds inclined toward him and responded to his commands, so the entire creation, knowingly or unknowingly, is under the command of its Master, He Who blows life into all created beings, renders them sentient, and then slips life out of them again, moving from one phase to another, from one form to another.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ
 حَبَّةٍ أُنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ سُنبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ
 حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ

وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

○

- 261 The parable of those who spend their property in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears, a hundred grains in every ear, and Allah multiplies for whomever He pleases — and Allah is Vast, Knowing.

The Qur'an reinforces man's giving out, which is the means to giving in. In the habits of Arabic speech, the number seven often implies its multiples, or great numbers. Any good deed gets amplified and blown out of proportion as though echoing the greatest of all deeds, that of creation, which is expanding both microcosmically and cosmically to His final destiny. Allah wishes your wish to be in accordance with His. The sunnah is dictated by His rahmah.

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
ثُمَّ لَا يَتَّبِعُونَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا مَنًّا وَلَا أَذًى لَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

○

- 262 As for those who spend their property in the way of Allah, then do not follow up what they have spent with reproach or injury, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

True spending or giving should have no strings attached — it should be done *في سبيل الله* (fī sabil illah, in the way of Allah). Making it known causes harm and sadness, both of which are inseparable from meanness and attachment. If you part with something you were unattached to, you will not be sorrowful.

The willingness to give should not be accompanied by impulsive haphazardness. It should be what the word *nafaqa* (نفق) implies, directional and responsible. The natural spring gushing from its source

fills the nearest holes before moving on. Giving (other than zakat, which is obligatory and must, therefore, be openly accounted for), should be voluntary, and is best kept hidden.

قَوْلٌ مَعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتَّبِعُهَا
أَذًى ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَنِّي حَلِيمٌ

- 263 Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury – And Allah is Self-sufficient, Forbearing.

Ṣadaqah (صدقة , from ṣadaqa, صدق , to be sincere, true, fulfill one's promise) is zakat, purification. If it causes harm, it will only add impurity. The injury your arrogance causes to other people also touches you. If you are a lover of the ḥalīm (حليم), the forbearing, you will imitate His attribute.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ
وَالْأَذَىٰ كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِثَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا
يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ
صَفْوَانَ عَلَيْهِ سُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ
فَتَرَكَهُ صَدًّا لَا يْقْدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ
شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي
الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

- 264 O you who believe! Do not make your charity worthless by reproach and injury, like he who spends his property to be seen by men, and does not believe in Allah and

the Last Day — so his parable is as the parable of a smooth rock with earth upon it, then a heavy rain falls on it, so it leaves it bare — they will not be able to gain anything of what they have earned. And Allah does not guide the unbelieving people.

To begin with, we are barren like rocks. To be fertile and of benefit to ourselves and to others, we must cover ourselves with the moist earth of 'ihsan (احسان). If we cause harm or injury, it is as if the earth were washed off, leaving us once again barren and unable to support life.

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ
 مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَشْفِقًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
 كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَآتَتْ
 أُكُلَهَا ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ
 فَطَلٌّ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

○

265 And the parable of those who spend their property to seek the pleasure of Allah, and for the certainty of their souls, is as the parable of a garden on an elevated ground upon which falls heavy rain — it brings forth its fruit twofold. But if heavy rain does not fall upon it, then light rain is sufficient — and Allah sees what you do.

That which pleases Allah, and that which strengthens your soul, are the same, because your soul is from Allah. Spending and giving of what one wants to keep ennobles man twice over, and speeds up the process of inner purification. It is, however, written for us to be purified and ennobled in this life by making a direct effort in charity, for this is the

purpose of life in this creation. It is as though we were speeding up what is naturally intended to twice its speed.

أَيُّدٌ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ تَكُونَ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ مِنْ
 نَخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ لَهُ
 فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَأَصَابَهُ الْكِبَرُ
 وَلَهُ ذُرِّيَةٌ ضَعْفَاءٌ فَأَصَابَهَا إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ
 نَارٌ فَاحْتَرَقَتْ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ
 لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

○

266

Does one of you like it that he should have a garden of palm-trees and vines, with streams flowing beneath it? He has all kinds of fruits in it, and old age has overtaken him, and he has weak offspring, when a whirlwind with fire in it smites it so that it becomes blasted – in this way, Allah makes the communications clear to you, so you may reflect.

If one does not guard one's good actions, they will be wiped out. One's good actions are like one's offspring. If they are strong, powerful and large in number, the culture is preserved. Men or communities who do not build up spiritual strength will be wiped out.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِنْ طِبْعَاتِ مَا
 كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّا أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ سَوَ

لَا تَتَّبِعُوا النَّجِثَ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُونَ وَلَسْتُمْ
بِأَخْذِيهِ إِلَّا أَنْ تُغْنِوْا فِيهِ وَعَلِمُوا
أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ

- 267 O you who believe! Spend of the good things that you earn, and of what We have brought forth for you out of the earth, and do not aim at what is bad, that you may spend of it, while you would not take it yourselves unless you had its price lowered – and know that Allah is Self-sufficient, Praiseworthy.

A summation of the preceding ayats. The priority in life is to spend, and to spend you must earn. You are only authorized to earn if your intention is to spend to propagate and enforce Allah's will.

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ
بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُمْ مَغْفِرَةً مِنْهُ وَ
فَضْلًا وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

- 268 Shaytān threatens you with poverty, and enjoins selfishness upon you, and Allah promises you forgiveness from Himself and abundance – and Allah is Vast, Knowing.

Shaytān frightens you with loss. He rises in you at the time of giving. Fear of loss of provision is having fear of the Raḥmān, Who has promised you vastness, generosity, and forgiveness.

Allah promises that all his creatures will be provided for, so long as they follow the path of 'islām, 'īmān, 'ihsān. The negative tendencies in man – the shaytānic elements – rise to bring about doubt and mistrust,

covetousness and fear of provision being among the most gross shackles with which man so easily weighs himself down.

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَن يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ
فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا
أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

○

- 269 He grants wisdom to whomever He pleases, and whomever is granted wisdom, indeed, he is given a great good, and none but men of innermost core remember.

Allah gives license to fathom the depth of the great ocean of wisdom to whoever desires it. The essence of self-knowledge is already in the innermost core of all beings, but it is only the most discriminating of seekers who dive into the inner understanding of the self.

وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ نَفَقَةٍ أَوْ نَذَرْتُمْ مِنْ
نَذِيرَاتٍ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهَا وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ
مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ

○

- 270 And whatever alms you give or vow you vow, surely Allah knows it – and the unjust shall have no helpers.

A *nadhr* (نذر), vow, is a self-inflicted warning, a reminder of promised action, so that one may be sure of going in the right direction. If you do not constantly give alms and make vows, then you will find your way to loss. Inner victory comes from making a vow and keeping to it – in other words, from being just to yourself, and, by extension, to Allah. The process is that of the path of knowledge; otherwise one slips off the prescribed spiritual ladder.

اِنْ تُبَدُّوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَيَعْتَمِهِنَّ وَاِنْ
 تَخْفَوْهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ
 لَّكُمْ وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ مِنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ
 وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

- 271 If you give alms openly, it is well. And if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is better for you, and this will do away with some of your evil deeds — and Allah is aware of what you do.

This is a broader description of the courtesy of signs. You make public your charity if it serves as an example for others to follow suit, and as a means of upholding your and others' adherence to *shari'ah*. Extra and hidden giving is more noble than zakat, because it protects you from the danger of vanity, which may occur when charities are made public. Subtler still is the inner vanity that may arise by keeping all your alms secret.

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدْيُهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي
 مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
 فَلَا تُنْفِسْكُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا
 ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ
 خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ

- 272 To make them walk in the right way is not incumbent on you, but Allah guides aright whom He pleases. And whatever good

thing you spend, it is to your own good — and you do not spend except to seek the pleasure of Allah. And whatever good thing you spend will be paid back to you in full, and you will not be wronged.

If giving is *fi sabilillah*, then the *mu'min* expects no reward. The reward is the act of giving itself, instantaneously and spontaneously.

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الَّذِينَ أَحْصَرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ضَرْبًا فِي الْأَرْضِ
يَحْسَبُهُمُ الْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَاءَ مِنَ التَّعَفُّفِ
تَعْرِفُهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ لَا يَسْأَلُونَ
النَّاسَ الْخَافِطَ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَاِنَّ
اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ

273 (Alms are) for the poor who are confined in the way of Allah — they cannot go about in the land. The ignorant man thinks them to be rich on account of their abstaining (from begging). You can recognize them by their mark — they do not beg from men importunately. And whatever good thing you spend, surely, Allah knows it.

The definitive traits of the *faqir* are *ta'ffuf* (تعفف, modesty, self-control) and *ḥaṣr* (حصر, containment). The *faqir* has, however, sacrificed or transformed himself, so that he does not seek to transform what is beyond him. You will recognize them by the light of their faces, the light of contentment and positive acceptance of the decree of Allah.

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ
وَالنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

- 274 (As for) those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they will have their reward from their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

بِسْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ (Those who) spend their property by night': giving at night enhances the nobility of secret giving. Willingness to give will not engender grief. Night symbolizes secrecy, as well as going out of one's way at a time meant for rest.

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا
كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَخْتَلِعُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِئَةِ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا
وَاحْتَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا فَمَنْ جَاءَهُ
مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَانْتَهَى فَلَهُ مَا سَلَفَ
وَأَمْرٌ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

- 275 Those who swallow down usury cannot arise

except as one whom *shaytān* has prostrated by his touch arises. That is because they say: Trading is only like usury – and Allah has allowed trading, but forbidden usury. Then to whomever comes the admonition from his Lord, if he desists, he can have what has already passed, and his affair is in the hands of Allah. But whoever returns to it, these are the inmates of the Fire – they shall remain in it.

Ribā (ربا) is usury, abuse or misuse, holding the upper hand over the weak or needy. Trade, on the other hand, is a mutual transaction in which both parties feel satisfied, or in which both either win or lose. Practicing usury is akin to being confounded by *shaytān*, it is like digging your own grave. It should be inconceivable, for is it not illogical that in a healthy society one would be increasing rather than decreasing someone's need? Inherent in a transaction of usury is the element of enslavement and abuse, for how can a person who is in need of material help pay back more than what he had originally needed? If, however, his requirement was for business or trade, a different relationship could have been structured between the two parties, such as a partnership.

يَمْحُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَا وَيُرِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ
 كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ

○

276 Allah does not bless usury, and He causes charitable deeds to prosper, and Allah does not love any ungrateful wrong-doer.

Allah's laws do not harbor the act of usury, but will annihilate and strike it out (*yamḥaq*, يَمْحَق). The act of usury itself lights the fuse of the ultimate destruction of the system that perpetrates, builds and supports it.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَقَامُوا

الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنُؤُوا الزَّكَاةَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ
وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

- 277 Surely, they who believe and do good deeds, and keep up the prayer, and pay the poor-tax, they will have their reward from their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

If the four are adhered to, then there can be no fear or sadness for the mu'min, *ولا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون*. Grief is the direct experience of having strayed off the divine path.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِيَ
مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

- 278 O you who believe! Safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah, and relinquish what remains due from usury, if you are believers.

Your original investment will be returned to you once knowledge has banished ribā. Historically, this ayah instructs the mu'minūn to stop taking usury on what they have already put into that system, once they have clearly seen its trap. At the time of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, over half of the muslims were involved in usury.

فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ
وَإِن تَبِيتُمْ فَلِكُمْ دُؤُسٌ أَمْوَالِكُمْ لَا تَظْلُمُونَ

وَلَا تَظْلَمُونَ

○

- 279 But if you do not do it, then be warned of a war from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, then you will have your capital. You shall not make the debtor suffer loss, nor shall you be made to suffer loss.

There is no hazy no-man's-land between good and wrong actions. If the mu'minūn do not desist from evil acts of abuse, they will bear the consequences of the divine laws.

وَإِنْ كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ
وَإِنْ تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ

تَعْلَمُونَ

○

- 280 And if the debtor is in straitened circumstances, then let there be postponement until he is in ease. But that you give it as alms is better for you, if you knew.

It is better if you can postpone demanding payment forever. Know that we are only here for a short while!

وَأَتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَىٰ اللَّهِ
ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ
لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

○

- 281 And safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness against a day when you will be re-

turned to Allah. Then every soul will be paid back in full what it has earned, and they will not be dealt with unjustly.

The injunction is to improve the quality of one's actions at all times, until one's entire life is *ṣadaqah* (صدقة), charity, echoing the *ṣiḍq* (صدق) of Allah, His absolute charity and love. This ayah encapsulates the previous ones. At the end of your lifetime, you will be the sum total of your actions and intentions.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدِينٍ
 إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ وَلْيَكُنْ
 بَيْنَكُمْ كَاتِبٌ بِالْعَدْلِ وَلَا يَأْبَ كَاتِبٌ
 أَنْ يَكْتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْ وَلْيُمْلِلِ
 الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا
 يَخْسِفَ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا فَإِنْ كَانَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ
 الْحَقُّ سَفِيهًا أَوْ ضَعِيفًا أَوْ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يُمْلِ
 هُوَ فَلْيُمْلِلْ وَلِيَّهُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَاسْتَشْهِدُوا
 شَهِدَيْنِ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا
 رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّنْ تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
 أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا
 الْأُخْرَىٰ وَلَا يَأْبَ الشُّهَدَاءُ إِذَا مَا دُعُوا

وَلَا تَسْمُوا أَنْ تَكْتُبُوهُ صَغِيرًا أَوْ كَبِيرًا
 إِلَىٰ أَجَلِهِ ذَلِكُمْ أَقْضَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأَقْوَمُ
 لِلشَّهَادَةِ وَأَذْنَىٰ الْاِتْرَابِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ
 تِجَارَةً حَاضِرَةً تُدِيرُونَهَا بَيْنَكُمْ فَلَيْسَ
 عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكْتُبُوهَا وَأَشْهَدُوا
 إِذَا تَبَايَعْتُمْ وَلَا يُضَارَ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا
 شَهِيدٌ وَإِنْ تَفَعَّلُوا فإِنَّهُ فُسُوقٌ بِكُمْ
 وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ
 بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

○

282

O you who believe! When you deal with each other in contracting a debt for a fixed time, then write it down. And let a scribe write it down between you with fairness, and the scribe should not refuse to write as Allah has taught him — so he should write. And let him who owes the debt dictate, and he should safeguard himself with fearful awareness before Allah, his Lord, and not diminish anything from it. But if he who owes the debt is unsound in understanding, or weak, or if he is not able to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate with fairness. And call in to witness from among your men two witnesses, but if there are not two men, then one man and two women from among those whom you choose to be witnesses, so that

if one of the two errs, the second of the two may remind the other — and the witnesses should not refuse when they are summoned, and be not averse to writing it (whether it be) small or large, with the time of its falling due. This is more equitable in the sight of Allah, and assures greater accuracy in testimony, and the nearest way to not entertaining any doubts afterwards, except if it is ready merchandise which you give and take among yourselves from hand to hand — then there is no blame on you in not writing it down. And have witnesses when you barter with one another, and let no harm be done to the scribe or to the witness — and if you do it, then surely it will be a transgression in you, and safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness before Allah. Allah teaches you, and Allah knows all things.

There are two types of debts — one is outer, and one is inner, and both are urgent and not to be forgotten. Everything in the dīn points to clarity and certainty. Therefore, it is correct and advisable to record debts. Similarly, it is incumbent upon the muslim to act as mediator, witness, or scribe when called to do so. A true witness, *shāhid* (شاهد), is always aware and alert, and therefore does not forget anything he does or sees.

Regarding the inner debt, one can look upon the soul as the witness. This ayah reminds us of the tendency in man to forget to be in *dhikr* (ذكر), remembrance. The medicine is in the form of outward, written reminders, and inward remembrance through 'ibādah (عبادة), and *du'ā'* (دعاء).

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ وَلَوْ تَجِدُوا كَاتِبًا
فَرِهَانَ مَقْبُوضَةً فَإِنْ أَمِنَ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا
فَلْيُؤَدِّ الَّذِي أُؤْتِنَ أَمَانَتَهُ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ

وَلَا تَكْمُمُوا الشَّهَادَةَ وَمَنْ يَكْمُمْهَا فَإِنَّهُ
 إِثْرُ قَلْبِهِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ

- 283 And if you are on a journey, and you do not find a scribe, then (there may be) a security taken into possession. But if one of you trusts another, then he who is trusted should deliver his trust, and let him safeguard himself with fearful awareness before Allah, his Lord. And do not conceal testimony, and whoever conceals it, his heart is surely committing wrong – and Allah knows what you do.

Take collateral if need be. What you witness is what occurs – it is real. If you then try to hide reality, you condemn your heart to the pain of shattered two-ness.

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدُّوا
 مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفَوْهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ
 اللَّهُ فَيَغْفِرْ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ
 يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

- 284 Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allah's – and whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. Then He will forgive whomever He pleases, and punish whomever He pleases, and Allah has power over all things.

The heavens and earth, and all that they contain, always belong to Allah. He to which everything belongs will take you to account for your transaction with His belongings. Where then can you run to? Punishment is mercy for the transgressor.

أَمَّنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ
 كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَكَاتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ
 وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ
 رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ
 رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

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285 The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in Allah, and His angels, and His Books, and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers. And they say: We hear and obey, our Lord! We crave Your forgiveness, and to You is the eventual course.

All the Books are one Book. There are differences between them, but no differentiation — they are from the Creator, and the message is the same: see and worship the only Creator, and trust in His All-encompassing Mercy, as transmitted through His messengers.

اطعنا وسمعنا , 'We hear and obey': If you let go of the past, Allah forgives you. You will transform into light, because your essence is Allah's Light. Maṣīr (مصير , destiny, place at which one arrives), is from sāra (صار , to become). All returns back to the first and final abode.

لَا يَكْلِفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا مَا
 كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا
 تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا
 رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَجْعَلْ عَلَيْنَا إِصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ

عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ
لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ
مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

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Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability – for it what it has earned, and upon it what it has wrought. Our Lord! Do not punish us if we forget, or make a mistake. Our Lord! Do not lay on us a burden such as you laid on those before us! Our Lord! Do not impose upon us what we have not the strength to bear! And pardon us, and grant us protection, and have mercy on us. You are our Master, so help us against the unbelieving people!

Reality expects from you only the natural limits which you can expand to. It implies that Allah expects from you as much as you are able to give, for which you have to go to the *limit* of your potential.

لها ما كسبت , 'For it what it has earned': you will receive what you have earned through your intentions and actions. Move to the extent to which you can – know your limitations. Having realized them, being honest with oneself, the mu'min asks: لَا تَوَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا : 'Do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake.' If one truly recognizes one's forgetfulness and mistakes, then they will not be repeated, because the natural path of awareness will thereby be lit.

لا تحمل علينا : 'Do not lay on us...' The burdens of those believers before Muḥammad could have been greater because of the incomplete state of the dīn (دين). They, therefore, may have meandered further afield. It could also mean that our ancestors, who were closer to the emergence of the light of 'islām, had a greater burden simply because of the greater awareness that was expected from them by being closer to the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. It could be a prayer to Allah not to afflict us with situations that may result in us committing misdeeds, and, by extension, burdening ourselves. We expect from our Lord and Sustainer to know our limitations, pro-

vided we are working at our maximum capacity, as is expected from us. The true seeker also expects his Lord, the Life-giver, the Reviver, to rejuvenate and replenish his slave by wiping clean and erasing what he had undesiringly and inadvertently accumulated from his journey on thorny paths, through 'afw (عفو), rubbing out all traces of it and, therefore, pardoning.

The mu'min-muwahhid (مؤمن - موحد) expects from his Lord protection, mercy, guardianship and the ultimate prevalence of true 'imān and 'islām throughout the world. These supplications merely echo Allah's own laws and promises. There is no doubt that they will all be accepted if they emanate from a truly sincere heart, humbled by the conviction of its nothingness and wretchedness until it believes, and abandons, and submits to its all-embracing Creator, Whose mercy will ultimately and universally prevail in a world containing no kufr (كفر). Of those before us, more was expected, since there were more gaps in their shari'ah. Thus we ask for more constriction, in order that we may be safe and certain.

SUMMARY

Summary

The word surah (سورة) means to separate or to divide. The verbal root of that word is sūr (سور), a noun which means a wall, a boundary, a very high wall, the wall of a fortress or city. Surah is, as well, a stage in the construction of a building. It implies that the Qur'ān is based on all these stages which have come one after the other, separate from each other in form, but unified in source and content, because the essence of the Qur'ān is tawhīd (توحيد), which means unity, and because the Qur'ān is revealed from Allah, and Allah is One.

The first twenty ayats (آيات) of this surah are general and profound. They describe and define those who submit to Reality and Truth as 'muslims' (مسلم), whereas the 'kuffar' (كافر) are those who cover up actions or intentions. What we read are words, but Qur'ān is beyond words. 'Qur'ān' (قرآن) comes from the word qara'a (قرأ), which means to recite, or to read out. Qur'ān is that which is read. Iqra' (اقرأ), which is the command to read, has the additional meaning of to collect that which is related. So it is a collection of related things. Qur'ān is that which is to be read, and that which is to be read is cohesive, comprehensive and real. You cannot read what is not there, and what is there is *truly there*.

Thirteen ayats describe the sickness of the heart. Hypocrisy, or nifāq (نفاق), is a sickness that can only increase if it is not combatted. Allah does not terrorize His creation, but it is a fact that if you do not overcome your disease, it will, by its nature, infect you more.

Qalb (قلب), the heart, is that entity whose nature is to turn (from qalaba, قلب, to turn). The heart is not supposed to be attached. If it is attached to anything, it can only be broken, no matter what it is set on, no matter how good the cause. The bond will ultimately break by death. Even those working totally for charity will come to experience disappointment, breakage, and dislocation if there has been any attachment in their original intention. Once the heart is set, friction sets in, and then it is not qalb, it is not turning. The test of a heart that is healthy is that it is able to scan at infinite speed. If its speed is reduced, then there is suffering in proportion to that reduction. The extent of the reduction in movement is the extent of your attachment, your unwillingness or willingness to die. This is the meaning of jihād (جهاد).

The first part of the surah describes *khalīfah* (خليفة), and the meaning of *shayṭān* (شيطان), and then it gives us the story of the beginning of creation. The matter as a whole is not comprehensible to us as human beings in terms of a physical model. We are living at one level of consciousness, which is wakefulness. This has its boundaries – on one side the boundary is sleep, on the other side the boundary is death. We are between these two, mini-sleep and maxi-sleep. This level of consciousness cannot transcend these boundaries. By 'aql (عقل), or analysis, we cannot fully take in the meaning, or have full understanding of the beginning of creation, because we ourselves are created. We ourselves have come about *within* the creation, so how can we analytically and logically comprehend this system? It is not possible – yet everybody is seeking knowledge of the beginning. You want knowledge of your origins. You want to know why you are chained to this situation of being born and having to die. If you know the beginning, you know the end.

The *rahmah* (رحمة), the mercy, of the Qur'ān unfolds visibly and dynamically, explaining and descending (*tanzīl*, تنزيل), in a manner we can comprehend – how the creation came about, how the heavens were created from a command, and then held in balance. It explains how the earth came into existence, how the mountains were floating, then were cooled down and anchored. We are told about Adam (آدم). *Adīm* (آدم) is the dust of the earth. Adam was put together from the elements of earth and contained all the minerals of the earth. This is part of the oneness of it all. It is all in perfect line. It is a chain reaction. A chain reaction has a beginning and an end.

There is a description of the fall of man. Man is distinguished from all creation, because when he was created Allah and the angels prayed over him. Look what an exalted being he is! All the angels prostrated to him, except one – *shayṭān* (شيطان, from the verb *shatana* شطن, which means to be cast off the mainstream). As soon as man came into existence as part of this stream of expansion, another element raised itself from within the creational stream and said, 'I am better!' This is arrogance, self-assertion, and independence. The implication is that the 'I' is from *shayṭān* – the 'I-ness' is from that attribute which has gone off the mainstream. As long as you say, 'I,' and that 'I' is not subdued in your heart by the recognition that you have only come to die, and that you are only an instrument, and that the instrument functions well only if it is not attached, then you are asking for trouble. The moment you say 'I,' the ego arises, and separation and rebellion become manifest. We begin action with 'Bismillah' (بسم الله), in the Name of Allah, and then say, 'I would now like to do this.' This is practiced until such time as it becomes second nature, and one is in total, absolute aware-

ness that everything emanates from Allah, and is sustained by Allah. You have to be present all the time, visibly, physically, and mentally. If you are not, rectify it! You must catch yourself instantly. Do not delay! If you delay, you will become fossilized, fixed, and it will be more difficult to change. It is about being available for any situation as a full-grown human being, with faith, good opinion, optimism, and with the inner realization that you have come from the ocean of infinity, and it is to that ocean of infinity that you will return. And in between, existence is just a tiny flicker.

From the beginning of creation *shayṭān* arose, ever-present, ever-close. He tells Allah, 'I will do my best to fool them all!' But he makes an exception — except for those who are *ṣāliḥ* (from *ṣalaḥa* صلح , good, honest, upright), except for those who are constantly in *dhikr* (ذكر), in remembrance of their Creator. These he cannot beat because they are too watchful and aware of him. They are constantly saying, 'Allah! Allah! Allah!' or at least five times a day when the prayers are called. They suddenly remember to praise and submit to their Creator, and *shayṭān* is rejected.

In the creation of Adam, we find the existential parallel to the life-situation of those who become the friends of *shayṭān* and fall into his trap. Nothing has changed since the time of Adam, and nothing will change. Everything is part and parcel of One Lord Who governs the cosmic reality. Adam was given everything, and there were no whims, thoughts, or desires, only inspired and divinely guided, on-going submission. He was in that secret garden which is beyond our realm of comprehension, a garden fed and sustained by unseen rivers.

جنة تجري من تحتها الأنهار , *jennatin tajrī min taḥtiḥā al anḥār*. It is the realm of *arwāḥ* (ارواح), the realm of pure spirit, the realm of pure energies, the non-physical, where there is no creational growth or destruction. It is permanency. They were in that garden indefinitely, but there was one thing they were not to go near. The *shayṭān* in Adam said, 'What about this? This may be better!' The heart stopped for a split second. A different state came about which is apparent now. This realm is one whose essence is pure, but which is tarnished, having the ever-present possibility of attachment.

Read Surat ul-Baqarah alone, quietly, and you will see it. Dive into the words. The key is the condition of the heart wherein dwells the Adamic guiding principle. It is about whether the heart is completely pure and unattached, or whether it is set. Adam's heart was set — it was focused on that outer curiosity about the plant, tree, or fruit. By the rising of that question, a change of state took place. The story of Adam is an explanation of how this reality, as we observe it, came about. We are the inheritors of a pure father, who became afflicted and tested, so

that we can reclaim our original condition through direct effort and proper direction. We have, therefore, to move from being afflicted through attachment, to freedom of submission to the will of Allah. This is the meaning of 'islām.

The story is repeated then, but in terms of communities. The Banī 'Isrā'īl (the tribe of Israel), had many visible shake-ups. Because of their grossness and insensitivity, they brought about tyranny and trouble in the form of *shayṭānic* Egyptian despots, creating a demand from themselves, from their hearts, to be saved. That demand spun off in creation as Mūsā (Moses). He came to them from among them. One opposite brings about another — action and reaction are equal and opposite, inwardly and outwardly. All the opposites are contained within the mercy of Oneness. Your heart, if it is pure and sincere, will bring about an element which will enable it to spin free, because it is its nature to do that. Its nature is *qalb* (قلب , from the root *qalaba* قلب, which means to turn, or to spin). The Banī 'Isrā'īl, who were suffering, brought about Mūsā from among themselves. But they soon grew insensitive and dissatisfied. They said, 'Oh, but he is like us!' They wanted to be convinced by a miracle. But the whole event of Mūsā was a miracle. Creation is a miracle. How can there be a miracle within a miracle? How did you come into existence? That recognition in itself is a miracle. It is as if you were seeing a film and watching a television scene within that film.

Thus, the miracle occurred, and they evolved by seeking the guidance and by following Mūsā. Look again at the Adamic situation. Mūsā leaves Banī 'Isrā'īl in charge of his trusted and divinely guided brother, to answer a call on the path of knowledge of Allah. He is gone for forty days. Upon his return he finds his people worshipping a calf. To correct their actions, he asks them to sacrifice a cow. Look at the meaning of this! The act of sacrificing a cow was in order to destroy the root of the myth of the cow, to smash the idol, as it were. The calf comes from the cow. But the Banī 'Isrā'īl lapse into arrogance and begin to argue in order to avoid carrying out the simple outward act of sacrificing a cow, because, in fact, their intentions had not changed. They ask, 'What sort of cow? What color is it? Where can we find it? There are too many cows, we are confused!' This is the condition of arrogance, vanity, and disobedience. This is the condition of disbelief. In it, *shayṭān* is the master and teacher.

Man has to strive for *jannah* (جنة , from the verb *janna* جن , which means to be hidden). We have to qualify for the hidden garden. We were dropped into this worldly condition in order to be proven, to evolve through 'imān (ايمان , from 'amana امن , which means to trust) and correct action stemming from pure intentions. The result is

the experience of a pure condition, one parallel to what appears to be a contaminated worldly condition. This is why Allah commanded Adam, 'Get down from it, some of you enemies to others!', implying that enmity and disagreement are veils over the pure, original condition.

The name of man as a creature is 'insān (انسان , from 'anisa انس , meaning to be companionable, familiar with, sociable) — he who loves familiarity and sameness. It is quite natural that he must earn the inner state of complete freedom. But look again at the creational reality. Initially, Allah gave freedom to man. 'Here you are, you have nūr (نور , means light) in you, you have everything!' But having everything also means having knowledge, and wisdom, and discrimination of the good and bad. So man must fluctuate and discriminate between these two thresholds, these two grinding stones, in every situation, in order that he may emerge from within. Allah first made Adam, and he was in jannah (جنة) having no needs. It is as though Allah says, 'Now I want to see those who qualify come back to Me!' By abandonment, submission and tawbah, the qualification starts with knowledge. The beginning is the understanding of the message. Early in the surah we are taught about the message of the last and greatest prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Allah challenges, existentially, the people upon whom this Qur'ān is sent. The voice of Reality says, 'If you are in doubt about it, bring a surah like it! But if you do not, and you will not, then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones', that is, a vapor, heat and constant agitation in which nothing can take hold or germinate.

Allah tells us repeatedly of the fate of those who do not travel the path of knowledge. They are said to be as dead, without movement, because this existence is based entirely on motion, seen or unseen, including the sub-atomic world. They are said to be dead, without movement. We are given the example of how forgiving Allah, the Ever-forgiving, is to man. On numerous occasions, the Banī 'Isrā'īl were forgiven. Whenever a messenger was sent to them, they rebelled or left the path, but they would be forgiven again. The meaning of forgiveness is knowledge and protection. If you know what is going to cause you harm, if you know what is going to cause you misery, you will avoid it if you are a sensible person — this is the meaning of taqwā (تقوى , from waqā وقى , meaning to have fearful awareness of Allah). So if you have taqwā, for Allah, for the Creator, then you are forgiven by His decree. You are taken into the bosom of the Creator, so to speak, you are accepted by the Creator. 'Afā (عفا) is to forgive, to wipe the slate clean. If you forgive somebody, it is for your own sake, not for the other person. It is your slate which is wiped clean. It is so your heart does not become tarnished. Otherwise, you will not be able to function

fully, and you will be sleeping with a heavy heart.

The situation of the Banī 'Isrā'īl is very common. The same things that they did, the constant doubt, the constant hankering after this and that, the constant disobedience, happened later on with the muslims during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and thereafter. The two surats that follow surat ul-Baqarah refer to the muslims, to those who were with the Prophet, but who were also bickering among themselves. So we must realize the continuation of this dilemma into our own time. It is not an attack upon 'those jews', and so on. It is an attack on that type of mentality.

Allah is the Ever-merciful, and He acquaints with mercy those who follow a Book which has been revealed through one of His prophets. If you are linked to a knowledge that relates to the Permanent, to Allah, then you are all right. The Qur'ān, from the point of view of Islamic law, allows muslims to transact, to intermarry, and to have every other kind of healthy, existential situation with the 'People of the Book.' A muslim may marry a christian woman or a jewess. But who has knowledge of the Book? Who nowadays are the true 'People of the Book?' There are church-goers, and synagogue-goers, and mosque-goers. But the definition used is 'People of the Book.' You must look deeply and discriminate.

There are many dogmatic people who want to fix and render permanent the letter of the law. The majority of the world is dogmatic. In fact, dogma is due to insecurity, to the need for permanency. One who is dogmatic is really a lover of Allah, but he wants to fix what has come. He wants to hold on to it. But there is nothing to be fixed. It is all a living continuum, and it is moving at infinite speed. The dogmatic person wants to know, and he wishes it would all slow down and stop so that he could get a really good look at it. But there is no stopping it, because his own existence itself is based on motion. Therefore, he becomes dogmatic. When this occurs — and it happens to all of us occasionally — realize it immediately, and realize that it is actually love for an attribute of the Creator, the Ever-preserved, or as-Ṣamad (الصمد). But the essence of the Creator contains all the attributes, and you cannot hold on to any one of them. Do not worry, but recognize.

You must transcend, and you must begin at the starting point. You cannot come halfway. You are either in submission, or not. You are either born, or not. You cannot have a half-life, which is the preserve of metals, mainly of lead. The reason that the world is afraid of 'islām and is the enemy of 'islām, is because the real muslim cannot be bourgeois, living for halal cocktail parties, drowning in non-alcoholic beer. They are quite right to be afraid. However, the muslim does have respect for matter, because matter is from Allah. It is 'ard (ارض). He has respect

For the stuff of existence, he has respect for relationships, and for the law of the land in which he lives. The muslim is not an outer revolutionary. He is an evolutionary revolutionary. What is the point of changing the government, or the head of the government, when the people are ignorant and do not want to know? Materialists are much more afraid of the Real, because they know that there will be a transformation. If I have invested all my life in creating a bank which only puts chains around people, like the students who have been given loans for school, and who are then enslaved for the rest of their lives trying to pay them off, and if I own this bank, am I going to like it when suddenly students begin to say, 'Look, I don't want university, I don't want this kind of life!?' You will immediately try to convince them how important it is to go to university, to get a good job, to be able to buy a house and a car, etc. What is so important about having everybody on this earth on four rubber wheels, burning away? Running from one end of the earth to the other, to see what? They are like lemmings, racing blindly into the sea! What a tyranny! Instead, we could walk more quietly, more slowly, with two feet on the ground.

An ambassador from India to the Court of St. James was supposed to present his credentials after having arrived by plane. He was unable to be there on that day, and wrote a letter to the Queen explaining that due to the rapid jet travel, his soul had not yet caught up with him. It would be necessary for him to wait five more days, he said. Nowadays, few people have souls, or admit their existence, so it does not matter. There is nothing that needs to catch up! The meaning here is that there are no fast cures. There are limits to any system, and the jet age has over-stretched many systems beyond their limits — such things as fast food, fast travel, and fast marriage and divorce, exemplify this. The cure for this can only be found in fasting. It is noteworthy that the word 'fast' has the same spelling, but with an opposite kind of meaning. There is an Arabic proverb: 'Where there is the sickness, there is the cure' (لكل داء دواء). As the Commander of the Faithful, Sayyidnā 'Alī, said, 'Your cure is in you, but you do not recognize it. And your ailment is from you, but you do not see it.' And he also said, 'You are the clear Book. By its signs the obscure becomes clear.' And he also said, 'You allege that you are a small world, but in you the whole cosmos is contained.'

In Surat ul-Baqarah, repeatedly comes the plea, 'Do you not use your reasoning?' (افلا تعقلون). This is asked in order to ruffle and unravel us. It is all about reflection. 'Can you not see? Can you not hear? Do you not use your intellect? The dhikr we do in a regular rhythm is reminiscent of our state in the womb — A-llah, A-llah, A-llah. In the London Science Museum, there is a room in which they

have picked up sounds in the womb exactly as the foetus hears them. If you go into that room, you will remember exactly the *dhikr* of *Ismu'l-A'zam* (*ismu'l-Ilahi'l-a'zam* اسم الله الاعظم). It is precisely that pulsating sound of the heart — A-llah, A-llah, A-llah — just like that. Of the letters of the Name 'Allah', the alif (الف) is the start, and the ha' (هاء) is the circle at the end of it. Alif is *as-Safā* (صفا) and al-Marwah (مروة), the two mountains in Mecca which are stations of *hajj*, situated at the side of the Ka'bah, and the circle is the Ka'bah, the heart. After you have hurried purposefully, without purpose, from *as-Safā* to al-Marwah, you will then come to run around the heart and encircle it, and the heart of the matter is the Ka'bah, with its four corners. You run seven times — seven heavens, seven layers of energy around the atom — seven times you run, and then you are qualified to pray. Allah says: 'Did We not expand and relieve your breast for you?' (الم نشرح لك صدرك) (Qur'ān 94:1). And when you have emptied out, you have qualified to desire knowledge of Allah. Now, correct action begins at the *maqām-'Ibrāhīm* (مقام ابراهيم), the station of 'Ibrāhīm. Outwardly, it is the prophet 'Ibrāhīm building Ka'bah — inwardly it is his abandonment and sacrifice. It was only after he had emptied out inwardly that he began building outwardly for Allah's sake. *Hajj* is nothing but 'Arafāt. The mount of 'Arafāt is in barren wilderness. The hillock is like any other hillock, and the wilderness is desert and emptiness. You stand there with millions of others. Nothing distinguishes anyone from anyone else, since everyone is in 'ihrām (اهرام, the name for the unsewn garment used on the *hajj*). This is how we have come. Nothing distinguishes any one man from any other, just as when you were born. And nothing will distinguish you from anyone else after you are under six feet of dust.

The surah constantly reminds us of our reality before consciousness and after. 'Do you not remember? Do you not recall? Do you not reflect?' (افلا تتذكرون). This is to remind us and tell us that if we do not remember, there will be a block in our consciousness. The cures are clearly prescribed. The first is to have faith that life is not without purpose. We have not come into this world just to run about like fools in order to survive, and then, eventually, end up by being devoured by worms. Faith is the good news — the good news is that you are from Allah, and to Allah you are returning. Faith will start you on your path of inner joy. But faith alone is of no use. It is meaningless and barren, like a seed all by itself. A seed has to act. The way it acts is to interact. When it is put into the ground with the soil, it interacts chemically with water and sun. You are the same, containing the seed of the highest in this cosmos, and the way you blossom is by interacting, by rubbing off your shield, that is, the ego, or *nafs* (نفس), means self, and is also related to the Arabic word for breath, from

nafasa نفس). 'Imān (إيمان) can only take root and manifest its meaning by virtuous deeds. In the Qur'ān, the term 'Imān appears with the term for virtuous deeds (ṣāliḥāt صالحات). Zakat (زكاة) is purification, and therefore, increase. Ṣalat (صلاة) is connection. Ṣalat is a desire to give up desires, to pray, to connect, to give up. That is why the prayer starts with the surah of 'Al-ḥamd' (الحمد). You say 'Al-ḥamdulillah, الحمد لله. Praise belongs to Allah, and can only come about because creation has taken place as one of the mercies of the Creator. It means you are most grateful. If you are most grateful, then you are content. You may say that you are content, and say that you have no desires, but most of us lie. This, however, is a good lie, a healthy lie. Let us continue lying in a healthy way, until such time as it becomes real.

There are several occasions in this surah when we are told that the responsibility is solely ours. It rests upon each one of us. If you move toward knowledge, it is for yourself. And if you do not move, it is against yourself. If you do virtuous deeds, it is for yourself, and if you do evil deeds, it is against yourself (ان احسنتم احسنتم لانفسكم , وان اساتم فلها , Qur'ān 17:7). No one else is responsible besides yourself. No one else is accountable. We have no responsibility or control over others. Look at the two sides. You have got to do good, yet you have no responsibility. You are not accountable for the results, the outcome. The only way out of the dilemma of Adam, the way out of the afflictive misery of that fall, is to find reasons which enable your heart to flow in virtuous actions. It is clearly demonstrated that intentions (niyyāt, نيات) and actions are not separate. Actions stem from intentions (انما الاعمال بالنيات , Hadith: 'Indeed, actions are judged according to the intentions.') The hypocrites mean one thing and say another, or say one thing and do another. It is the story of man at a loss, confused and broken.

How can anyone on two legs understand his situation unless he is intelligent, unless he takes time off to reflect, unless he catches himself in a real situation? Not only once in a while, when there may be a spiritual gathering or some special event. The maximum learning about yourself takes place when you are at what you think are the most difficult times in your life, because it is precisely at those times that all of what is inside comes out. All the froth is maximally visible at that time. It is then that you can improve most by recognition. You cannot progress along the path of recognizing the various aspects of desire unless you are actually in trouble. If you have eaten a reasonable meal and nobody is bothering you, then you are not in trouble. So nothing happens. Is that not so?

The deeper you dive in, the subtler is the test. There is nothing

higher nor purer than the relationship between the teacher and the taught, especially in spiritual teaching, because it is *fī sabīl illah* (*فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ*, in the way of Allah). The condition placed upon spiritual teaching from man's beginning thousands of years ago up to the present, is that it is given free. Throughout the ages, whenever it was possible, the teacher cared in every way for those who sought his teaching. A teacher of *tawhīd* (the Oneness of Allah) cannot but care for every aspect of those who are on the path of knowledge of *tawhīd*. They, in turn, should reciprocate by respect and sincere application of the teaching. Throughout time, the closest people to the teacher have always been those who need him most, and have recognized their need. This has a subtle reason. Basically the seeker of Allah will, on occasion, find himself dependent for knowledge on this teacher, and so, it is said, he will bite the hand that feeds him. It is natural. If a teacher gets surprised, he is not a real teacher. He cannot be, or he would know this. So look, it is all in Qur'ān! The whole surah is about 'iṣyān (*عصيان*), rebellion. Often you find seekers of spirituality to be the most rebellious, and these, in fact, often happen to be the closest ones to the teacher, because within them is a dynamism and *ḥimma* (*همة* determination, longing) that can be channeled. But it takes somebody who loves and who is acting *fī sabīl illah* to carefully channel it. On the other hand, take someone who is always obedient, well-behaved, never causes a ripple, somebody who says he is very spiritual. The shaykh is suspicious of him, for he has appeased everybody. Man is 'iṣyān (*عصيان*), his nature is at a loss. This is his normal nature, because he is a seed until he is cracked. The answer to rebellion is the stick. 'Stick' in Arabic is 'aṣā (*عصا*), which has the same root as 'iṣyān (*عصيان*). There is no other way. If you do not follow the stick, reality will hit you. There are no two ways about it. The whole of creation is about 'iṣyān. When Adam disobeyed, Allah, Reality, Oneness, Ever-effulgent, had to contain him. Allah is Ever-forgiving. It is the law He has prescribed. You have an option of being in 'iṣyān until you die. You have that option, but in reality you are forgiven any instant that you truly demand forgiveness. And the proof of it is the *sunnah* (*سنة*, way, the manner, the tradition) of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. The people of Mecca could not have been more belligerent to him those first thirteen years. The people who were around the Prophet were filled with rebellion. Read the stories about it. They clearly describe the forgiveness and the compassion of the Prophet. Because since he was a perfect man, he reflected the perfect Creator, he reflected Allah. After all the trouble they gave him, he went back to Mecca and married from the families who were the most belligerent. There could not have been a family more belligerent than that of Abū Sufyān, who later came and forced the *khālifah* (*خلافة*, the office of

succession) away from the true heirs of the Muḥammadan knowledge. It was not finished with the death of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Man is always the same. At the death of the Prophet, the trouble started again, and quarrels ensued. They compromised and chose Abū Bakr, to reconcile differences and preserve the unity of those who professed to be in 'islām. They did this, although the Prophet had clearly willed that they should follow Sayyidnā 'Alī.

الحديث الشريف عن زيد بن ثابت ان رسول الله قال: انى تارك فيكم خليفتين: كتاب الله حبل ممدود بين السماء والارض وعترتى اهل بيتى وانما لن يفترقا حتى يراد على الحوض . ثم قال: اتعلمون انى اولى بالمؤمنين من انفسكم قاله ثلاث مرات فقال الناس: نعم: فقال رسول الله (ص): من كنت مولاة فان عليا

It is reported by Zayd bin Thābit that the Messenger of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: 'Indeed, I leave two successors for you, the Book of Allah which is a rope extending from the heavens to the earth, and the people of my house (Ahl ul-Bayt) — they will never be separated until they are returned to me at the pool of Kauthar.' Then he said, 'Do you not know that I am the most suitable for the believers from among you?' And he repeated this three times. The people replied, 'Yes!' Then the Messenger said, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, 'Whoever has taken me as their master should take 'Alī as their master.'

When Abū Bakr died, 'Umar and others confessed that they all, in fact, had made a mistake. So man learns. May Allah forgive us all, and may we all rest in peace. Humanity is mixed up. They martyred Sayyidnā 'Alī, and he won. As he was struck, he said, 'By the Lord of Ka'bah, I have won!' As he lay dying, he would not finish the cup of milk he was given unless it was passed to the fellow who had struck him, and at the same time he was concerned that they not tie his assassin's hands too tightly. Look — forgiveness!

Your Lord is the Ever-forgiving. Look at how much He loves you, that He gives you the option, but does not give Himself an option! You have the option of being an idiot, selfish, desirous, and leaving the inner joys of abandonment, of jinnah — you are allowed all this. But Allah will never reject you the moment you say, 'Astaghfirullah' (استغفر الله) beseeching His forgiveness). It all hinges on approaching your Lord with a wholesome heart. 'Idh jā'a rabbahu biqalbin salīm' (إذا جاء ربه بقلب سليم): 'Among His followers was 'Ibrāhīm, when he came to His Lord with a sound heart' (Qur'ān 37:84). A sound heart

is a heart that is not attached, not stuck. If you are attached to your family, or the community, and it is not a means for you to serve and get out of your smallness, then run away from it. If your family is not a means for you to expand beyond them to the neighborhood, to the community, to the society, to 'islām at large, and mankind, then it is not a family. The message is simple and clear.

Once a man takes a position, once a heart takes a position, it wants to stay there, to fossilize. We have many ayats in this surah which refer to those who are in doubt, and not in 'īmān (إيمان, trust and faith), and who do not want any goodness to come to others, who are jealous, and who put up a barrier. Why a barrier? Allah's mercy is upon everybody forever, upon all humanity, so how can a human being who was created by the Creator contain it? The meaning of the attributes of selfishness, silliness, foolishness, jealousy, meanness, greed, and lust, finds its origin in the fear of poverty, which is clearly indicated in Qur'ān. Allah says it is *shayṭān* that makes you afraid of provision, and gives you anxieties, but if you give out you will find that everything comes to you. Even if you are only interested in giving out to your own family, and you give to them genuinely, and you want to give more, then somehow greater energy comes to you to work harder and gain more goods. What if your giving is on a vaster scale, from the inward, from the meaning-center? It must begin somewhere — the tap must start dripping.

So it is all about openness. Knowledge comes with willingness to receive. 'And that which you put forward of goodness for yourselves, you will find it with Allah' (وما تقدموا لأنفسكم من خير تجدوه عند الله, Qur'ān 73:20). There is only the All-seeing. Everything is on record. Everything is recorded, and you are the recorder, you are the recording. Your biographies are all the same. 'I ate and I slept.' Your inner biography is that you are doing it by your intention, and by the condition of your heart, so that your inner biography, in fact, dictates the outer.

Your inwardness, one way or the other, will show in your outward. In Surat ul-Faṭḥ, ayah 29, it says: 'Their marks are on their faces' (سيماهم في وجوههم) This reference is to those who have abandoned inwardly. It is not outward abandonment. It is the example of the true 'islām of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. He did not marry unless it was a perfect action. He paid the dowry, and every wife of his had a house. It was a small house, but in conformity with the standard in those days. While they were building the mosque, the first thing he did was to build each of them a house, and to provide each of them with enough provisions to last a year. Now, why do you not follow the Prophet's footsteps? You had

better wake up, for time is running short!

The test of jannah (جنة) is given to us very clearly in this surah. The test of whether you are qualified for the Garden is your willingness to die and abandon. It is repeated here to the rabbis of the Jews. It was told to them when they said, 'Nobody will enter the Garden of Paradise except those who are yahūd, Jews, those who are shown the way.' The answer Allah gives them is, 'Tell them then to wish for death! (Ayah 94). The Qur'ān is talking to men of understanding. He tells them, 'Wish to die!' It is about sensitive beings who can read and understand. If you are not willing to die, then you are not qualified for the Garden, because you are attached. You may have a family and all the things that go with that, and yet you must be willing, at a moment's notice, to drop it all and leave it. Are you carrying them inwardly? You should be carrying them outwardly. Your children should ride on your back, as Ḥasan and Ḥusayn did with the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Let your children and your family break your back, but not your heart. Guard your heart, and strive diligently outwardly. But we are reversed: our hearts are in a palace, and we are living in a cave. You have to turn it upside-down. Live in a palace, but put your heart in a cave. Be willing at any moment to be in the cave, and keep it clean and orderly. Allah says, 'We have sent you to give them the good news and the warning.' The good news is that you are an eternal bird. Learn how to fly, and the cage will open, once the heart revolves. Give them the warning that if it does not, they will have nothing other than misery. The Qur'ān says, 'And you will not be asked about those who are fit for the Fire' (ولاتسئل عن اصحاب الحميم , ayah 119). You have come alone, and you will go alone. Be wary of that Day! Your rūḥ (روح, means spirit, soul. It is derived from the Arabic root روح, which is connected in meaning to 'wind', i.e., it is that subtle essence through which our bodies are given life) is yours only. Nobody can help you, and you cannot help anybody. You are in this body, connected outwardly, yet disconnected inwardly. You find the Garden where everything is beautiful, everything is according to the sunnah, everything is correct, even the backbiting, even those who hit you on the head — all are acting according to the laws of the Creator. The laws of the Creator are explained in detail in this surah. We are told how to behave in a community, the meaning of marriage, the meaning of caring for the weaker ones, the orphans, etc. We are clearly given the boundaries of shari'ah. A woman whose husband is dead should be provided for with whatever he had left behind. She should remain in the house for a year. Then if she desires to leave, it is alright. Concerning divorce, it is the same thing. In the days before 'islām, it was the same as now. Women were regarded as sex objects, and were accorded no respect. This was put right. As an equal, she should be looked after, res-

pected, and protected, and not treated as a play-object or body-toy. The husband's responsibility is to provide for the woman in order to quieten her mind, so that she may evolve. If he cannot do it, and she is not satisfied with his means, he should admit his limitations to her and be prepared to release her so she can perhaps marry a fellow who can fulfill her needs. Men, who biologically and emotionally are inherently more steady than women, are given greater power because of this, and with greater power comes greater responsibilities. In the last *khutba* (خطبة, discourse) of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, the most important paragraph concerns women. We, as professed muslims, often abuse the privileges, and do not stand up to the responsibilities.

The Qur'an gives the description of the true muslim community. 'We made you a community in the middle' (و كذلك جعلناكم امة وسطا, 2:143) – a community of the middle course. We are in between the beginning and the end. We are in the middle, as far as health is concerned. We are in the middle, if you like, as far as the condition of the stomach is concerned. If you are overstuffed you cannot understand a word of what I am saying. If you are too hungry, you also cannot understand, because physical weakness takes over. The gross will always take over. So we have to be in the middle, always steering a middle course. Sayyidnā 'Alī, peace be upon him, says, 'The best of affairs is the middle course' (خير الامور اوسطها).

We come to the point where the people are tested about qiblah (قبلة), the direction one faces when one prays. Originally, the qiblah was in the direction of Mecca, but then it was changed to the direction of Jerusalem. After some time, Allah commanded that the direction be changed, so that they would again face toward Mecca. If anybody loves the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, he turns his face in the direction the Prophet turned his. He went back to the direction in which they worshipped at the time of Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, toward Mecca. We all follow that. Try to find out as best you can where that direction is. Do not bicker. Do not be like Banī 'Isrā'īl when Allah commanded them to sacrifice the cow (2:67). 'Where is it? Which direction? Which compass do we use?' We are told in an ayah immediately after that, 'Wherever you turn, you are facing Allah' (فاينما تولوا فثم وجه الله, 2:115). And you are told, when you are riding and so on, to pray while you are riding. Do not stop the whole caravan. Point your heart toward qiblah and do not deviate from that orientation. Your action will be polarized in the right direction if you are single-pointed.

In the duality of created reality comes the goodness. 'Ibn al-'Arabī says, 'Creation hinges on desire for good and fear of the bad.' In one of

his *dīwāns* (collected writings), he says, 'Creation is hanging on these two.' This is the meaning of pearl and of coral. In essence, they are the same. Pearl is a protection against sand. The oyster protects itself from the substance it does not want by coating it with a substance we call pearl. Coral secretes what it does not want, to keep itself alive. All that one does in this life fits into one of these categories. You either run for that which you want, or you avoid that which you do not want. The prime example of duality is the creation of the heavens and the earth. Heaven is beyond us, earth is below us. Earth is what we look down upon, heaven is what we look up to. They are opposite, and one cannot be without the other. The balance would not exist without these differences, such as that which exists between night and day. Energies are different. The Qur'ān says that there are signs for people who have 'aql (عقل), who reflect. You cannot be other than stretched between the two: wanting to live forever, or wanting to give up and die. The muslim is in the middle. At all times he is enjoying life, he is smiling, he is available. The choice is yours. Do not blame anybody.

There are several ayats which have to do with *sharī'ah*, and what to avoid – for example, what one is not supposed to eat. However, all of them end up by saying, 'Do your best! If you have nothing else, eat grass, but do what you can.' It says that you are only accountable for yourself. The *dīn* (دين), the way you transact toward yourself, is *yusr* (يسر), ease. But do not abuse it. Go to the limit of your capabilities. Do not say, 'I can't,' and then indulge yourself. Ask yourself if you have genuinely changed your circumstances and companions.

We are told in this surah, 'And it (the soul) will receive that which it has earned' (لهما كسبت , ayah 286). You get what you deserve, not what you desire. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. Life is a mercy, and the laws of creation are absolute. By going against them, you create havoc with yourself, your family, and the community. You can do this, of course, but that is all you can do. The imams that we have were slaughtered or poisoned by the people closest to them, mostly poisoned by their wives. Who could care? Sayyidna 'Uthmān was sitting down while they were trying to break into his house. He would not raise his head from the Qur'ān. Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were holding the door, until Ḥasan's arm was nearly broken, and he was forced to let go. The people came in and slaughtered 'Uthmān while he was sitting with the Qur'ān, and he could not care less. Later on, the wife of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, 'A'ishah, came running after 'Alī for the blood of 'Uthmān. She was so mistaken! May Allah forgive her and rest her soul. The Prophet loved her, and so we love her and respect her because of that. A great many lessons came from her, so therefore we are content with 'A'ishah,

'Umm ul-Muminīn (أم المؤمنين , mother of the believers). She led an army against Sayyidnā 'Alī, peace be upon him, at the battle of Jamal. Look at the greatness of the lady! She had been misled by two close companions of 'Alī who told her something which upset her. She went to do battle, but at dawn she heard the hooting of owls along with the barking of dogs, and the call of some other animal. Suddenly she called her troops together and gave the order to surrender right then and there. She remembered the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, telling her that she would be going against his wishes and what he stood for when she would hear those three things together. So the instant she remembered, she repented without hesitation. Who would do such a thing now? Allah is the Ever-merciful.

We are told about the month of Ramaḍān, the door to expansion. If you want to expand, to have more, then shrink. The door to the knowledge of life is through death. The door to increase is decrease. This is the meaning of 'islām. If you want to flow, stop taking and give, and you will see! Nobody else can call your bluff but yourself. Allah cannot do it, and it says so in Qur'ān. 'Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves' (ان الله لا يغير ما بقوم حتى يغيروا ما بانفسهم , 13:11). Do not say, 'If only I had this, if only I had that. If only I could go there. If only, if only...' This is superstition. It is romanticism. This is not the place for romance. This is real. This is the world, and it has come from the Real. It is not a place for dreamers. You are only allowed dreams in your sleep. Use your 'aql (عقل), use your intellect! What is the use of wishes or desires? Who are you? Have you found out what your limitations are? Have you also found out that you have license to expand to the Limitless?

We are told to observe the fast of Ramaḍān. Whether we like to or not, we have got to face it. And we must give zakat (زكاة , a tax of 2½% on wealth held for one year) if we have the means at all to do so. And we must attempt that arduous journey to Mecca, the ḥajj (حج), if we are financially able. And it is all the more difficult at this time in history. But we must be in difficulty in order to appreciate ease. 'Indeed, with difficulty comes ease — indeed, with difficulty comes ease' (فان مع العسر يسرا ان مع العسر يسرا) (94:5). Be on time for the prayer whenever possible. If you do not perform these duties, the rest is useless. Ḥaqīqah (حقيقه , the true essence, or Reality) without shari'ah (شريعه , the law dealing with the outward aspects of life) is not possible. And shari'ah without ḥaqīqah is worthless. It is like a body without a heart. The two are two branches of the same tree. Surat ul-Baqarah is completely balanced between the two. These are the boundaries of Allah.

'And fight in the way of Allah' (2:190, وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ). 'Islām is all about peace. The main door to the Masjid ul-Harām (المسجد الحرام, the Mosque of the Ka'bah in Mecca) is the Door of Peace. Peace can only occur if you fight. Fight your nafs, fight yourself, and you will find your heart is at peace. Fight ignorance in yourself, then you can fight the ignorance beyond you, until mercy and knowledge prevail throughout the whole world. Life is a struggle. With outward struggle there is inner contentment. Outwardly, you have to be in perpetual struggle and toil, while inwardly you have to be perpetually content. That is the sunnah. It is clear.

'The life of this world is made to appear beautiful for those who deny (the existence of Allah)' (زَيْنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا) (2:212). This world is made easy. It is decorated. Evil summons the human by its attractiveness. So people suffer, and the affliction of Allah for them starts with that attachment. They get attached to this, that, and the other thing. They start collecting, and they do not know where to put it, how to insure it, or which closet to put it in. Eventually it ends up in the safe. The poor fellow is working for stuff all his life. He is working for that thing which is kept in darkness behind steel. He does not even enjoy looking at it. It is so clear and obvious!

The breaking of attachment is an important aspect of hijrah (هجرة) flight, or migration. Historically it refers to the hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 christian dating, which marks the beginning of the 'islāmic lunar calendar). It is the highest act, because a person leaves behind that which he loves. Those who have 'imān (إيمان), and those who have made hijrah (هجرة), who have left what they love fī sabil illah (في سبيل الله, in the way of Allah) are seeking mercy. They are seeking mercy by avoiding that which is not conducive to abandonment. You have tried to change it, to improve and to better it. When you cannot, or it does not work, then you leave.

Do not marry women until they leave the worship of other-than-Allah, until they believe in the One. You are only supposed to marry believers. Muslim women must not marry any but muslim men. This is clear in the Qur'ān. It is because the children follow the mother. We want to increase in 'islām, We want to increase those who will abandon, those who are not attached, and who are happy. We want to improve society. We want to improve the world. If you do not want to improve the world, then you will not be able to improve yourself, because you are the reflection of the world, and the world is a reflection of you.

In Surat ul-Baqarah we are told about children – the first two

years. It is important that the child is in the company and protection of the mother for the first two years.

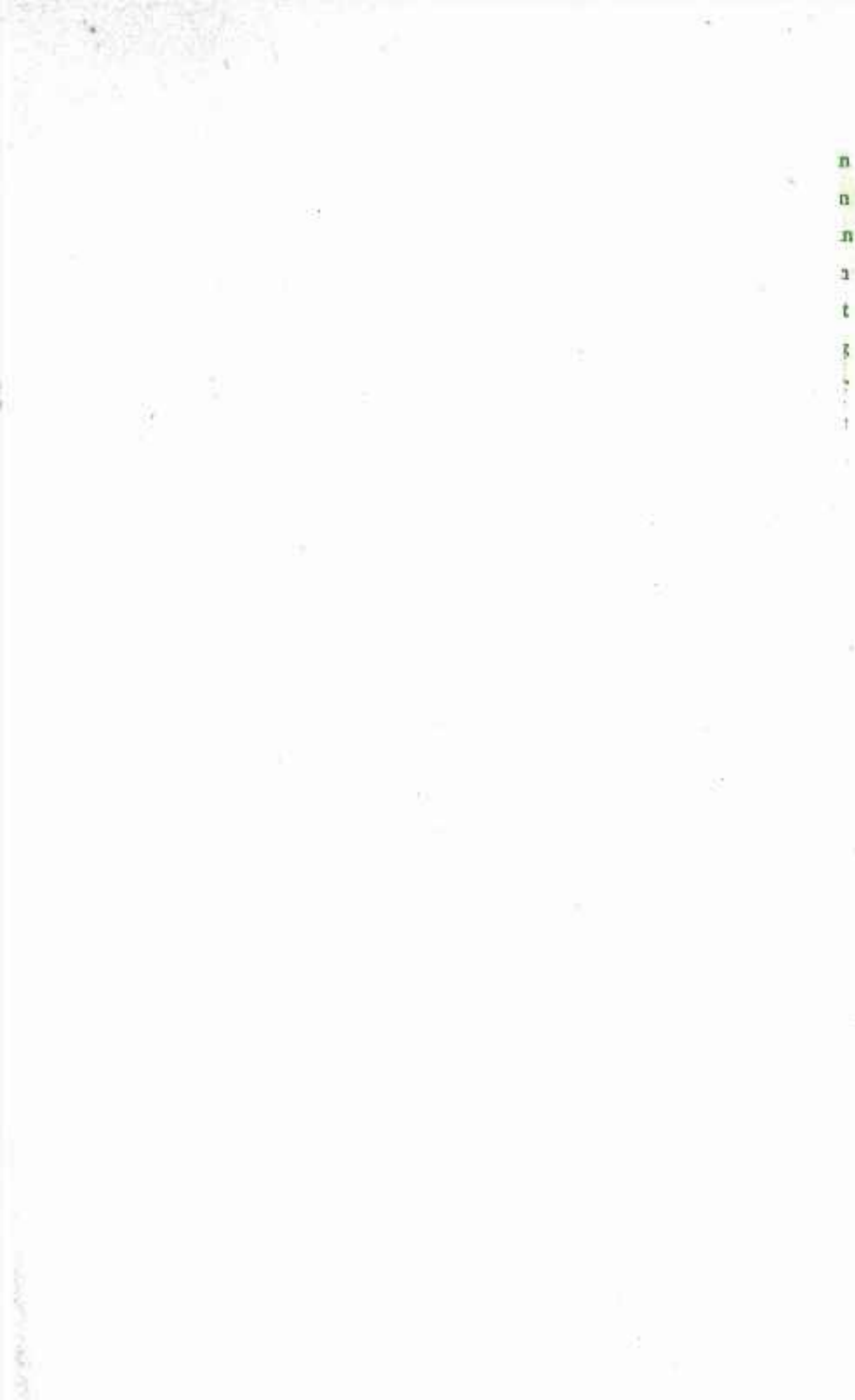
Then we are told about how Allah protects us, and the meaning of this. If you pronounce divorce three times for a woman, then you cannot remarry her until she has married someone else. This is to put you in your place, so that you are not just playing games — one day this, one day that. The worst thing of all the things allowed by Allah is divorce.

We are given the example of Dāwūd and Ṭālūt. We are told how a small band of good people won over the large band. The meaning of this is that you must not judge quantitatively, but qualitatively. The quality of Dāwūd combined both the kingdoms. He was the king of the outward and the king of the inward. This is how we, as the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad and his family, peace and blessings of Allah be upon all of them, expect a leader to be. The khalīfahs were both kings of the outward and the inward. They combined the two. They were both leaders of the country and representatives of Allah. So the Emir and the Imam should be one. Now, if circumstances cannot allow them to be one, then the next best thing is that the two of them be hand in hand. And look, when they are hand in hand, everything happens! The man of action puts his hand in the hand of the man of knowledge.

In Iran this sort of situation was attempted, whereby the executive authority would obey the authority of an imam, or imams, or a band of two or three people who were acclaimed as men of Allah. Men of Allah are available. They are always available. We have this example of Dāwūd and Ṭālūt.

We are told that man is a doubter. We are given the example of Sayyidnā 'Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, when he asked Allah how the dead are brought to life. He wanted to know, just as some of us ask scientifically, 'How does this happen?' He asked only to confirm it in his heart, because the heart dwells in the body — he is a human being. Allah said, 'Do this: cut up four birds and spread out the pieces, and then see how they come together!'

The Qur'ān says, 'O you who believe, spend and give out!' It mentions showing off your good actions. There is nothing wrong with that, if it is *fī sabīl illah* (في سبيل الله , in the way of Allah). Show off some of them, and hide the majority of them. Show off so that others learn from you. If it is only for the good of others, if it is only to teach others, then it is alright. If it is only to show off in order to increase your own arrogance, then you have counteracted everything. Of course, if you give secretly, it is for your heart. So always reflect. There are five ayats, in fact, that say it is better to give out secretly so as not to embarrass others. Judge, because you are your own witness upon yourself.





Due date

Due date	

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بموقع وقت (اوپر درج آخری تاریخ تک) واپس کریں۔ تاخیر کی صورت میں جرمانہ ادا
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During his visit to Pakistan in 1981 Shaykh Fadhlallah decided to set up Al-Serat Trust in Pakistan. Its objectives were described by him in a talk at Punjab University Lahore in October, 1981 when he said "Our intention in Pakistan is to establish a 'Waqf' so that those of you who are interested in pursuing self knowledge - wanting to discover for yourself what life is really about, why we are born, why there must be death and what the meaning of this puzzle is—can come and join us".

Consequently the trust was established in March 1982 and has since been engaged in serving in the fields of health, education and publishing. A model village centre is also being constructed in Ahmadpur where the main activities of the trust are taking place. Further information can be obtained by writing on the following addresses:

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