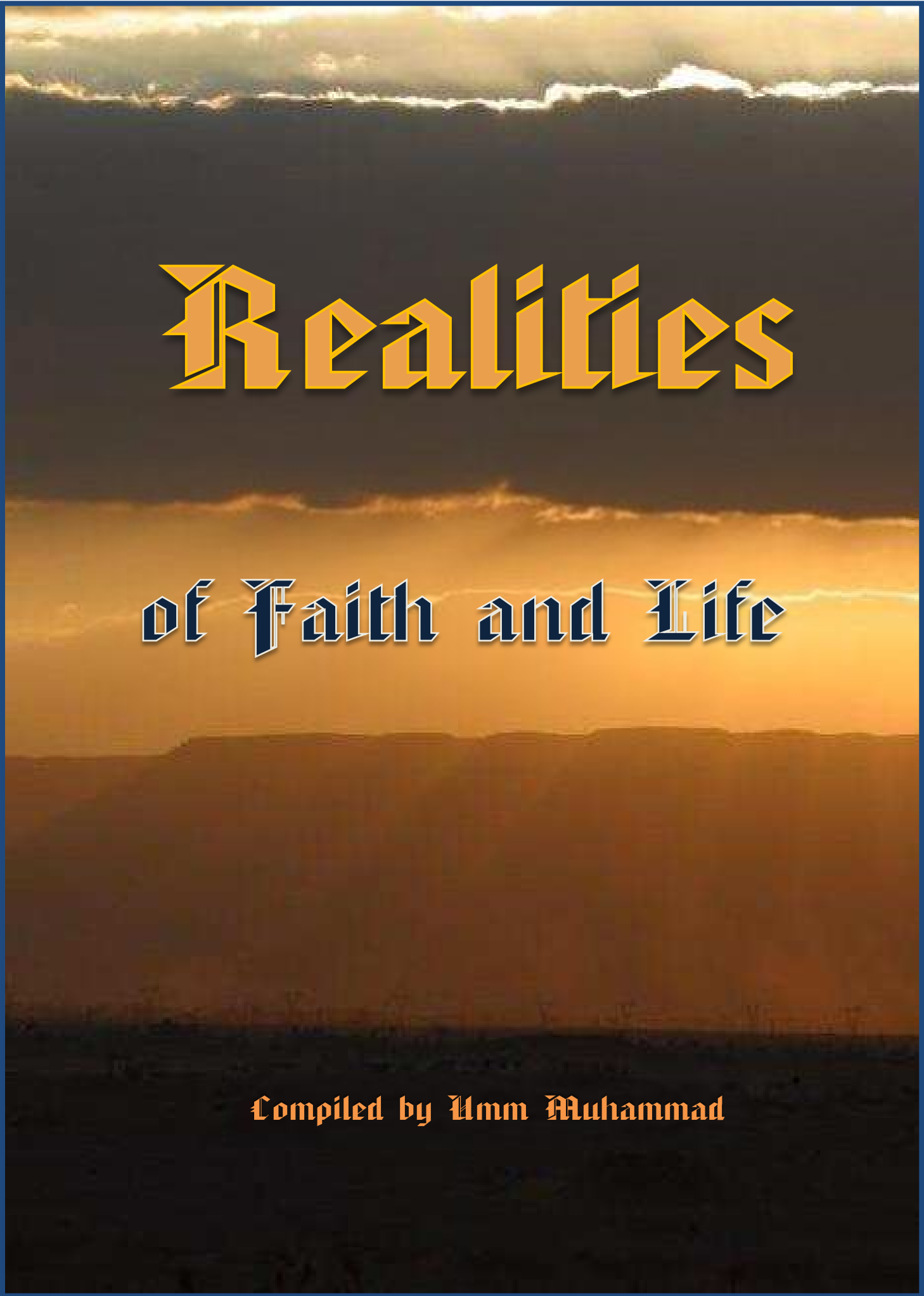




Realities of Faith and Life

Compiled by Umm Muhammad

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REALITIES OF FAITH

All praise is due to Allah, and blessings and peace upon His servant and messenger, Muḥammad, and upon his family and companions and all who follow his guidance until the Day of Recompense.

Realities of faith have always been reflected in human excellence. There is no shortage of proofs in the Qur'ān and Prophetic Sunnah of the fact that morality, both public and private, is an integral part of faith and worship and will be a deciding factor in determining any individual's destiny in the Hereafter.

The following pages contain a few brief studies pertaining to the heart and soul. They are addressed to believers, and within them are some stops along the path of life which ultimately leads back to the Creator. The subject matter has been taken largely from the writings of early scholars, who, in their own times, were disturbed by changes taking place – not only in society as a whole, but initially in the individual Muslim and his relationship with Allah. For it is that relationship which must always be the primary concern of the believer, who is mercifully never held accountable for more than his own capacity.

It is only through the reform of many individual souls that the reform of the community as a whole will follow as a natural result.

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ

Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah and what has come down of the truth? And let them not be like those who were given the Scripture before, and a long period passed over them, so their hearts hardened; and many of them are defiantly disobedient.¹

¹ Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, 57:16.

Awakening (at-Tanbeeh)

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ تَحْمِلَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا
الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا

"Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant."²

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ

"Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him."³

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَآتِيَةٌ

"And We have not created the heavens and earth and that between them except in truth. And indeed, the Hour is coming."⁴

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهَرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَى
أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى

"And if Allah were to impose blame on the people for what they have earned, He would not leave upon it [i.e., the earth] any creature. But He defers them for a specified term."⁵

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ

"O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow – and fear Allah."⁶

* * * * *

All things in creation have a beginning, and our beginning is an awakening... the realization that within oneself all is not well. This awakening may come early in life, or it may come quite late. And even, perhaps, there might be several beginnings after periods of stagnation. Yet, each beginning holds the highest potential, and this is a great mercy from Allah.

The lifetime is a short journey through one aspect of creation. Its length is not our concern, for Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā* has determined it according to His own knowledge

² Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:72.

³ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:41.

⁴ Sūrah al-Ḥijr, 15:85.

⁵ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:45.

⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥashr, 59:18.

and will, making it entirely adequate for every soul to establish whatever will be a witness for it on the Day of Judgement.

A further mercy to mankind is that every new beginning nullifies all that preceded it, be it disbelief, sin, or mere failure to make the best use of one's time and resources. Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) affirmed, "Islam destroys what was before it, and repentance destroys what was before it."⁷ What greater generosity could there be than that of Allah ta'ālā, who, after mentioning the eternal humiliation and punishment of those who commit the gravest sins, adds:

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

"...Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful."⁸

Know then, that however long or short a life span might be, its quality, by the grace of Allah, is determined from that point when one asserts his human faculties of thought and reason and awakens to the purpose of his creation, undertaking to fulfill his responsibilities on earth in obedience to his Creator. The length of this period is again determined by Allah in adequate measure, according to His perfect knowledge of every soul. From this beginning, true life emerges – life of a higher quality which only the believer can achieve...

أَوْ مَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِّنْهَا

"And is one who was dead and We gave him life and made for him light by which to walk among the people like one who is in darkness, never to emerge therefrom?"⁹

⁷ Muslim and Aḥmad.

⁸ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:70.

⁹ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:122.

Taking Account of the Self (al-Muḥāsabah)

الْم. أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ. وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ
فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

"Alif, Lām, Meem. Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe' and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars."¹⁰

* * * * *

The duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is especially difficult when practiced on one's own self. Familiarity takes the edge off of criticism; and Shayṭān is ever prepared to defend the erring soul with countless excuses, for this is his last stronghold and he will never abandon it willingly. When Shayṭān loses hope of affecting a believer's deeds or speech, he seeks to invade the heart and strike at the root of righteousness – intention. By corrupting the intention, he will win the soul; by injecting it with *shirk*,¹¹ he will make it unacceptable to Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*, because in His sight, "Deeds are only according to intentions."¹² A sensitive believer who knows the weaknesses of the soul can be on guard against the whisperings of Shayṭān and not lose sight of "*aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqeem*."

‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb advised, "Call yourselves to account before you are called to account." Undoubtedly, Allah has given us the means by which to do this:

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

"And have shown him the two ways."¹³

In other words, mankind has been given the tools with which to distinguish good from evil, and right from wrong: observation, perception, conscience, judgement and emotion, all in a delicate balance. But even so, as we are reminded by Imām Ibn al-Qayyim, such assessment is difficult unless one has the following:

1. The light of wisdom – the light by which Allah has enlightened the hearts of those who follow the teachings of the prophets
2. The ability to discern between blessings and trials in what Allah has provided, i.e., one's wealth, time, skills, opportunities, influence, etc. – That which is used in ways pleasing to Allah contains blessings and benefit, but that which is used otherwise will be evidence against the soul on the Day of Judgement.
3. Suspicion of the self, which leads to a more complete inspection – For indeed, none will harbor a negative thought about his own soul except one who knows it well, while one who thinks well of his soul is most ignorant of himself.¹⁴

¹⁰ Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt, 29:1-3.

¹¹ Associating another with Allah, attributing His characteristics to others beside Him, invoking other than Him or obeying others instead of Him.

¹² Part of a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹³ Sūrah al-Balad, 90:10.

Except for the most private forms of worship, most of our deeds are observed by others and judged by them. However, Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā* is concerned with what is in the heart. "Allah does not look to your bodies or your faces, but He looks to your hearts and deeds."¹⁵ The quantity of deeds is therefore less important than the quality (how and why). No matter what the impression of our fellow men, the true intention behind every word and action is known only by Allah, and it is He who judges from the position of absolute familiarity with every soul and every circumstance.

يَعْلَمُ خَائِنَةَ الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَا تُخْفِي الصُّدُورُ

"He knows that which deceives the eyes and what the breasts conceal."¹⁶

How easy it is to make excuses or justify oneself to others. However, one must constantly remember that Allah is aware of the entire truth; therefore, we ourselves must face the truth as well. Speaking directly to His servants in the Qur'ān, Allah says:

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ

"And know that Allah knows what is within yourselves, so beware of Him."¹⁷

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

"And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that to Him you will be gathered."¹⁸

فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْسِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى

"Indeed, He knows the secret and what is [even] more hidden."¹⁹

فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَى

"So do not claim yourselves to be pure; He is most knowing of who fears Him."²⁰

وَإِنْ تُبْدُوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ

"Whether you show what is within yourselves or conceal it, Allah will bring you to account for it."²¹

These verses were terrifying to the Prophet's companions. Because of their intense devotion and their consciousness of Allah, they often worried about certain thoughts and feelings that came to them, repeatedly asking the Prophet (ﷺ) about them until they were finally reassured, "Allah has overlooked for me in my community that which occurs to their minds as long as they neither speak of it nor act upon it."²² The pious companions and their

¹⁴ Words of Ibn al-Qayyim in *Madārij as-Saalikeen*.

¹⁵ Muslim.

¹⁶ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:19.

¹⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:235.

¹⁸ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:24.

¹⁹ Sūrah Tā Hā, 20:7. More hidden than the secret are man's innermost thoughts and intentions.

²⁰ Sūrah an-Najm, 53:32.

²¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:284.

²² Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.

followers were the most critical of their own souls, always seeking to correct themselves in anticipation of the Judgement; and indeed, they were the best of the community. After the Prophet (ﷺ) had confided to Hudhayfah the names of some of the hypocrites, 'Umar asked him fearfully, "Am I among them?" Thus, when Allah wishes good for His servant, He makes him aware of his own faults.

Keeping the soul in line involves a continuous struggle against the Shayṭān:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا

"Indeed, the Shayṭān is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy."²³

Through knowledge, one can protect himself from the Shayṭān's strategies, so every believer should be aware of the following facts:

1. Every soul has certain weaknesses, and Shayṭān is always looking for the opportunity to take advantage of them and exploit them to the utmost degree. Each individual soul is susceptible to certain kinds of temptations more than others; thus there is a need for one to recognize his own particular weaknesses and guard against them. In several verses the Qur'ān refers to disbelief (*kufr*) and hypocrisy (*nifāq*) as "disease in the heart." Lesser faults and weaknesses were also labeled by scholars as "diseases of the heart." These include tendencies toward anger, hate, envy, selfishness, conceit or injustice, as well as love of wealth, prestige, physical pleasures or excess – even in those things normally permissible. All of them are doors open to the Shayṭān.
2. Two conditions are required for Allah's acceptance of any deed:
 - a. Sincerity of intention, i.e., it must be done for Him alone to seek His pleasure or to prevent His anger – Even ordinary daily tasks become forms of worship when performed with this in mind. Honesty, precision and conscientiousness in every deed is required by Allah and rewarded by Him.
 - b. Correctness – It must be done according to His ordained religion, i.e., lawful according to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).

It must be remembered that any action carried out according to erroneous traditions, unlawful innovations or personal preferences can be faulted in both categories. In reference to this, the Qur'ān states:

فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

"So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord – let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone."²⁴

3. *Shirk*²⁵ destroys any good deeds a person may have done, no matter how great or numerous. And this also is affirmed clearly:

لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ

"If you should associate [anything] with Allah, your work would surely become worthless."²⁶

²³ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:6.

²⁴ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:110.

²⁵ Directing worship in the form of good works to other than Allah.

²⁶ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:65.

A lesser form of *shirk* is showing one's deeds to others or speaking about them in order to gain respect or some other worldly benefit. This kind of "showing off" is called hidden *shirk* because it is not usually evident to others. In fact, the Prophet (ﷺ) described it as "*more hidden than the creeping of ants*."²⁷ Only the sincere believer recognizes hidden *shirk* and feels pain and sadness if he should succumb to it from time to time; but others practice it continually, without even being aware of it. They are the ones who have forgotten Allah to such an extent that the opinions of people become all-important.

Showing off, when done consciously and purposely, nullifies the deed and can lead to punishment. The Prophet (ﷺ) has stated that the first to be condemned on the Day of Judgement will be a martyr, a *qāri'* (a reciter of the Qur'ān), and a giver of charity. When each of them comes before his Lord declaring that his great work was done for Him, he will be told, "You have lied." Allah will say to the martyr, "You fought to be called brave, and it was said." And He will say to the reciter, "You learned and taught to be called a scholar, and you recited to be called a *qāri'*," and it was said." And to the charitable one, "You spent to be called generous, and it was said." Then it will be commanded that each be dragged on his face and thrown into the Fire.²⁸ Thus, when a person seeks a worldly result, preferring it to the reward of Allah, he can no longer expect that reward in the Hereafter.

In another ḥadīth it is related: "If someone makes himself heard, Allah will make heard [that which he concealed]; and if someone shows off, Allah will expose him."²⁹ This indicates that those who make their deeds known with the intention of being recognized in this world will be exposed by Allah on the Day of Judgement when they are most in need of His acceptance.

The following are some examples of deliberate hidden *shirk*:

- Lengthening the prayer, or perhaps, only the period of prostration in the presence of others
- Purposely displaying the effects of fasting or other deeds on the body
- Wearing certain clothing known to be that of ascetics or scholars, or taking care to be seen with them
- Speaking unnecessarily about good deeds done previously, seeking admiration
- Lowering the voice to imply fear of Allah or other affected mannerisms
- Showing off knowledge or skill in conversation or using the remembrance of Allah repeatedly to give an impression of piety, or giving advice and warnings in order to be considered a wise and caring benefactor – This is most prevalent among some scholars and religious leaders who feel compelled to live up to the expectations of their followers.

Undoubtedly, there are those who reason that if a deed is done initially with the intention of reward in the Hereafter, then what harm is there in looking for a worldly benefit in it as well? But Allah has disclosed in a ḥadīth *qudsī*, "*I am the most self-sufficient of partners, needing no partnership; so if one does a deed for Me and for another [simultaneously], then I am disassociated from it, and it is [only] for the [other] partner*."³⁰

²⁷ Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim – ṣaḥeeḥ.

²⁸ Abridged from a ḥadīth narrated by Muslim, at-Tirmidhī and an-Nasā'ī.

²⁹ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.

³⁰ Muslim and Ibn Mājah. A ḥadīth *qudsī* is a revelation from Allah reported in the words of the Prophet (ﷺ).

There are, as well, some non-deliberate mistakes which may lessen one's reward without canceling it completely. These include the following:

- Mentioning one's good works after their completion
- Taking pride inwardly in one's deeds or even in one's sincerity
- Performing righteous works because of pleasure found in them (other than the pleasure of serving Allah)
- Showing that which reveals much worship on the body or in the voice (other than speech)
- Being unhappy if one's charity or help is not appreciated by the recipient – Appreciation and reward should be expected only from Allah.
- Finding acts of worship easier to perform if others are aware of them and experiencing pleasure in others' observance of these acts

Those most faithful to Allah are in constant fear of hidden *shirk*, and they continually exert efforts to conceal their righteous deeds, unless, for some reason, there is more benefit in disclosing them.

At this point, some reassurance may be necessary; for there are things which one might imagine to be *shirk* but are not:

- Accepting thanks or praise for some good which one has done – The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*That is an immediate sign of good tidings for the believer.*"³¹ It is merely a preview of what awaits him in the Hereafter, but on the condition that it subsequently does not go to his head. There is no harm in fame gained by a person who does not seek it, but he must take care that it does not corrupt his soul.
- Accepting payment for a job done initially seeking reward from Allah – Such is the case of one who chooses a certain vocation for which there is a need in the community while he could just as well earn his living in some other way.
- Wearing good clothes – This is not blameworthy unless it is done in conceit, for the purpose of showing off or involves extravagance and waste. As stated in a ḥadīth: "When Allah blesses His servant with a blessing, He likes to see it upon him."³²
- Setting a good example for others (as a means of teaching)

One should remember the following two points as well:

- Concealing one's sin is a duty. A Muslim should not speak of sins he has committed; rather, he should repent privately and correct his behavior. Then Allah will conceal that sin for him on the Day of Judgement and forgive him.
- Increasing the amount of worship when one is among a group of worshippers is not considered to be showing off. Because the normal wish of a believer is to worship Allah, being with a group helps him to overcome certain obstacles (such as his own forgetfulness or laziness) and to realize his original aim.

In an effort to re-institute the true worship of Allah, scholars have recommended treatments for "diseases of the heart." The foremost of these is the remembrance of Allah.

- Remember the greatness of Allah and then the insignificance of the world and its impermanent state. Remember that the ultimate source of all benefit and harm to

³¹ Muslim.

³² Aṭ-Ṭabarānī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

yourself and all beings is Allah. If you fear blame, fear the blame of Allah; and if you seek praise, hope for the praise of Allah. Remember that Allah looks into your heart. Imagine your state if you should die while committing a sin, either openly or secretly – just imagine the humiliation of exposure before all creation on the Day of Judgement. Remember the certainty of death and the shortness of life. Remember the punishment of the grave and that of the Hellfire. Hope for the blessings of Paradise and the pleasure of Allah.

- Once you are aware of your mistake, turn to Allah in earnest repentance, asking forgiveness and correcting yourself thereafter. Always be on guard and ask Allah to help you to avoid falling into such errors in the future. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught his companions this supplication.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِكَ شَيْئًا نَعْلَمُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا نَعْلَمُهُ

*"O Allah, we seek refuge in You from associating with You anything we know of, and we ask Your forgiveness for that which we do not know."*³³

- Make a conscious effort to do more righteous deeds secretly without mentioning them until it becomes a habit.
- Take as friends and companions those you consider to be sincere, righteous and God-fearing. Encourage them to point out your faults and help you to overcome them. Accept advice without anger and try to follow that which is conducive to improvement.
- Finally, do not let the Shayṭān prevent your good works by suggesting that you are showing off. If you find something of that within yourself, continue your work but correct your intention, seeking acceptance from Allah alone. For in Allah's acceptance is salvation and success...

رَبَّنَا لَا تُرْغِ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

*"Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us and grant us from Yourself mercy. Indeed, You are the Bestower."*³⁴

³³ Aḥmad.

³⁴ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:8.

Repentance (at-Tawbah)

Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā* orders all believers to repent:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

"And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed."³⁵

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا

"O you who have believed, repent to Allah with sincere repentance."³⁶

And He warns:

وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

"And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers."³⁷

And He affirms:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

"Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."³⁸

Repentance is required for all sins, great or small, apparent or hidden. It is for the benefit of man, since Allah Himself is free of need.

The word "*tawbah*" (repentance) literally means "turning back." Since sin puts distance between the soul and Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā*, during repentance the servant turns back to Allah, seeking refuge in His forgiveness. And when a soul repents and returns to Him, Allah turns back to His servant in acceptance and forgiveness. Thus Allah has named Himself "*at-Tawwāb*" (the Constant Acceptor of Repentance), sometimes translated as "the Oft-Returning."

Since man is created in weakness and imperfection, error is part of his nature. But all sinners are not the same. They generally fall into two categories: those who follow the path of Shayṭān (who refused obedience and repentance out of conceit) and are thus doomed to the Hellfire, and those who have been promised forgiveness and Paradise:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرَ
الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

"...And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sin. And who can forgive sins except Allah?"³⁹

³⁵ Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:31.

³⁶ Sūrah at-Taḥrīm, 66:8.

³⁷ Sūrah al-Hujrāt, 49:11.

³⁸ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:222.

³⁹ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:135.

A prerequisite to repentance is the knowledge and admission of sin, for ignorance and denial are barriers, preventing return. Knowledge of the consequences of sin, both in this world and in the next, will make one most anxious to escape the result of his carelessness. And where can he find refuge and protection from that except with Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā*? Therefore, one should consider the reason he fell into sin, which is that he, at least temporarily, forgot Allah. And when a servant forgets Him and drifts away, Allah removes His protection from that soul, leaving him to depend only upon himself. Thus he becomes prey to his own desires and to Shayṭān. If he had remembered his Lord at the time of temptation, he would have retained Allah's protection from sin. Indeed, every moment of his life, man is in one of two states: either that of remembrance, holding fast to Allah and thereby placing his soul under His custody, or that of forgetfulness, breaking away from the protective custody of Allah.

A temporary slip into some form of sin is usually checked by the believer before too long. No sooner has he committed the sin than he feels pain. Even the pleasure expected from that sin which initially tempted him eludes him, and he finds in his heart only sadness at the realization that Allah has left him to himself.

Certain souls, however, find pleasure in disobedience. They are like those people who, although harboring a fatal illness, refuse to admit it or to seek treatment. The amount of pleasure reflects: 1) the extent of one's desire for the unlawful, 2) his ignorance concerning Him whom he has disobeyed, and 3) his ignorance of the Hereafter. One's happiness with the unlawful is indeed more harmful to him than the sin itself, for it shows a conscience which is lifeless and devoid of function. When unawareness has reached such a degree that it finally becomes persistence in sin and insistence upon it, Allah's punishment is swift. He allows that soul to fall even deeper into sin until it reaches the state described in the Qur'ān:

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

"No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning."⁴⁰

Concerning this, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained, "When the servant commits a sin, a black mark is etched onto his heart, but if he ceases and asks Allah's forgiveness, then his heart is wiped clean. If, however, he repeats it, then it [i.e., the black stain] increases until it eventually envelops the heart. This is the stain which Allah has mentioned in His Book."⁴¹ Qur'ānic commentators describe the stain as sin upon sin, which finally blackens the heart until no light of truth can penetrate into it and until the soul subsequently rejects truth and guidance altogether. The greatest sins, however, are those done publicly. It is then that the offending soul is either in open rebellion against Allah or complete disbelief.

Yet, repentance is always possible. Allah *ta'ālā* provides us with hope:

قُلْ يٰعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.'"⁴²

⁴⁰ Sūrah al-Muṭaffifeen, 83:14.

⁴¹ Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhī and an-Nasā'ī – ḥasan.

⁴² Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:53.

Since repentance is accepted only from a Muslim submitting himself to Allah, the repentance of a nonbeliever or one who has committed *shirk* is accomplished by his entry or re-entry into Islam. Moreover, since it is, in fact, a return to Allah, repentance requires a knowledge of Him and the knowledge that the erring soul has been very distant from Him. Such a soul has been a prisoner of its enemy, Shayṭān, due to its unawareness of Allah and its own insolence. Thus, it requires an extensive search into how and why that came about and an acceptance of the knowledge that there can be no excuse for disobedience after an order or prohibition is known.⁴³ It also requires a realization that true repentance is a difficult task, demanding great effort and consciousness, and that the effort must be in direct proportion to the distance of one's deviation from the Straight Path.

Repentance is subject to certain conditions: regret, cessation, apology and rectification. When all of them are met, the servant is considered to have returned to Allah and to the state of worship for which he was created.⁴⁴ Each condition will be examined briefly:

1. Regret and remorse must replace the acceptance and satisfaction which allow the continuation of a sin. It is pain felt in the heart at a loss for which there is personal responsibility – a loss that could have been prevented. In this case, it refers to the loss of Allah's protection and the nearness to Him which gives peace of mind. In addition, there is fear following the realization of the seriousness of that offense that has damaged the soul and of the severe penalty of the Hereafter, which can only be avoided through Allah's mercy. As with the loss of a dear one or of a valuable friendship, pain is evident in prolonged sorrow and weeping. The offender wishes intensely that he had never committed such an error and desperately seeks some means to amend the situation.
2. Cessation is imperative. Repentance is not possible while one is still committing the sin. In fact, persistence in a small sin increases it until it carries the weight of a great sin. The offender must desist immediately, determining not to return to that offense ever again. If, however, through human weakness and in spite of earnest effort one should again fall into the same sin, he must repent again and renew his resolve to avoid that error, for Allah never refuses sincere repentance.
3. Apology to Allah is in order. Sin acts as a barrier between man and his Lord; therefore, one must seek forgiveness through repeated prayer and supplication, humbly admitting to Allah his weakness, his need for His mercy and protection, and the gravity of what he has done. Begging Allah to accept his repentance and to return him to His grace through His generosity, the servant is most acutely aware of his dependence and fallibility. After having been seduced into disobedience by Shayṭān, our father and prophet, Ādam, was taught words of repentance by Allah:

قَالَ رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers."⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibn al-Qayyim points out that one who neglects the right of his Lord, blaming his sin on divine decree to absolve himself of responsibility, has committed an additional offense. Would he himself accept this argument from a disobedient wife or from someone who had cheated him? On the contrary, his anger would be further increased by such an excuse so obviously out of place. Yet, he readily uses the same reasoning against Allah *ta'ālā*, who is far above any injustice. See *Tah-dheeb Madārij as-Sālikeen*, page 127.

⁴⁴ Allah says: "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (Adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56)

⁴⁵ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:23.

4. Rectification applies both to the relationship between oneself and Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*, which must be amended, and to the rights of one's fellow human beings. Certain acts (such as violations of *iḥrām*, breaking oaths and accidental killing) require a *kaffārah* (expiation); yet, in most cases involving obligations to Allah alone, the conditions of regret, cessation and apology are the only requirements for forgiveness. However, a person who is especially anxious to regain the pleasure of Allah (fearing a fault in his repentance) can undertake to do extra deeds of righteousness such as additional prayers, fasting or charity – in short, any lawful means of worship. And always, an excellent deed in the sight of Allah is one which benefits others in some way. Indeed, such acts are expiation for sins:

إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ

"Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds."⁴⁶

As for injury done to another party (which is disobedience to Allah as well), the damage must be restored or adequately compensated for whenever possible, or the forgiveness of the other party must be obtained.⁴⁷ For example, if property has been taken in an unlawful manner or damaged, it must be returned or replaced (even if this might involve a long search for someone wronged years ago, or if he has died, for his heirs). In the case of harm done by word of mouth (as through false witness or slander), one must make the utmost effort to right this wrong by confessing openly and asking forgiveness of the victim. If it is thought that (as in some cases of backbiting and gossip of which the victim is unaware) admission might lead to further problems, one should certainly take care to speak well of that person on future occasions and ask forgiveness from Allah. Sometimes it is not possible to restore a right completely, due to the enormity of the offense or the inaccessibility of the victim. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the offender to do good deeds which will benefit the injured party or his heirs. If that, too, is impossible, then he can at least continue to make supplication for the injured party, asking Allah to benefit him (or them) where he himself has failed.

Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* promises acceptance of true repentance:

كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ أَنَّهُ مَن عَمِلَ مِنكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهْلَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy: that any of you who does wrong out of ignorance⁴⁸ and then repents after that and corrects himself – indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful."⁴⁹

Yet how easy is repentance of the tongue alone! It would therefore be suspect if sadness is fleeting and quickly forgotten, if pleasure is felt upon remembering the sin, if determination to reform is weak, and if one is immediately satisfied that he has repented and does not increase in righteousness as a result. Repentance is unacceptable if done for

⁴⁶ Sūrah Hūd, 11:114.

⁴⁷ Legal punishments for certain crimes serve not only to benefit society but to completely purify a soul which has repented for that sin to Allah. But for an unrepentant soul (or one who regrets only from fear of worldly punishment), legal retribution will not lessen the extreme punishments of the Hereafter.

⁴⁸ A believer would not commit wrong deliberately – only through unawareness or forgetfulness.

⁴⁹ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:54.

any reason other than the fear of Allah, such as outward appearance, avoidance of blame by others, lack of means to continue the sin, or loss of desire due to contentment, illness or age. In truth, one should beware lest his repentance be defaulted.

Thus genuine repentance is recognized by certain particulars. Among them are the fear of a fault which might prevent its acceptance, extreme caution to avoid anything leading back to that sin or something similar, sadness which brings tears, and remorse which prevents pleasure in any of life's activities. Among them as well are the admission that Allah has every right to punish the offender severely, a heart gripped by fear and embarrassment before Allah, and a body burdened under the weight of guilt... And among the signs is the realization that the person is definitely better than he was before the sin was committed!

This is a state which is loved by Allah – the intense longing of His servant for Him and for His acceptance after he has experienced its loss, the need of the servant to return to Him. The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, *"Indeed Allah is happier with the repentance of His servant than one of you would be if he came across his camel after he had lost it in a wide, open land."*⁵⁰ And he (ﷺ) affirmed, *"Allah, the Exalted, extends His hand by night for the repentance of he who has sinned by day; and He extends His hand by day for the repentance of he who has sinned by night – until the sun rises from the west."*⁵¹

The immediate fruit of repentance is a lesson learned and a new awareness and sensitivity. The believer's soul is purified by Allah's forgiveness and acceptance, and his character is improved by the new traits which he has acquired through his experience. His own faults apparent to him, he is not occupied with the faults of others but lives with the words of Allah:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ مَا زَكَا مِنْكُمْ مِّنْ أَحَدٍ أَبَدًا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَاءُ

"And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have been pure, ever, but Allah purifies whom He wills."⁵²

Thus the believer is comforted and relieved by the knowledge that, in His mercy, Allah has made him aware of his sin so that he may repent; and after exerting sincere efforts in repentance and the performance of righteous deeds, he can trust that the past is no longer a barrier between himself and the pleasure of Allah, who says:

وَإِنِّي لَغَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدَىٰ

"But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents and believes and does righteousness and then continues in guidance."⁵³

His new relationship with Allah reflects upon and affects all aspects of his life, and his eagerness to preserve that close tie keeps him constantly on guard.

We must remember that the Shayṭān is persistent and slow to give up. If he cannot keep a servant in disbelief, he will make deviation and innovation in religion seem pleasing to him. If he fails in that, then he will try to lead him into a major or a minor sin. If this, too, is futile, then he will seek to occupy one with that which is lawful and permissible in order to keep him from that which is more pleasing to Allah. And finally, when all else fails, he will

⁵⁰ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others. Allah's happiness is because of His grace, as He is free of need.

⁵¹ Signaling the imminence of the Day of Judgement. Narrated by Muslim.

⁵² Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:21.

⁵³ Sūrah Ṭā Hā, 20:82.

content himself with leading the servant to the lesser of two good deeds. Yet, for one alert to them, Shayṭān's strategies can be easily recognized and defeated.

Repentance from sin is a steppingstone to continued righteousness – a return to inner harmony and to Allah.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

"Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."⁵⁴

Taking account of one's self is consistently required in all things, whether apparent or hidden. While ordinary people might regard certain sins as unimportant, the believer, when acknowledging the right of Allah over him and his indebtedness to Him, sees them as ugly and dangerous. As a result, he cannot but see his good deeds as insignificant in this light, and therefore, he strives continuously to increase them. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught the best supplication for forgiveness:

اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ رَبِّي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ. خَلَقْتَنِي وَأَنَا عَبْدُكَ وَأَنَا عَلَى عَهْدِكَ وَوَعْدِكَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ. أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا صَنَعْتُ. أُبُوءُ لَكَ بِنِعْمَتِكَ عَلَيَّ وَأُبُوءُ بِذَنْبِي فَاغْفِرْ لِي فَإِنَّهُ لَا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ.

*"O Allah, You are my Lord – there is no god but You. You created me, and I am Your servant; and I uphold Your covenant and [my] promise to You as much as I am able. I seek refuge in You from the evil I have done. I acknowledge before You Your favor upon me, and I acknowledge my sin, so forgive me. Indeed, there is none who can forgive sins except You."*⁵⁵

Repentance is a new beginning, as illustrated in the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ): "Islam destroys what came before it, and repentance destroys what came before it."⁵⁶ Therefore, no soul should ever despair – no matter how great its sin – for Allah is near, ever-ready to receive repentance, willing to forgive, inviting all to forgiveness with the words:

قُلْ يَاعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.'"⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:222.

⁵⁵ Al-Bukhārī.

⁵⁶ Al-Bukhārī.

⁵⁷ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:53.

Patience (aṣ-Ṣabr)

إِنَّمَا يُوفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

"Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without enumeration."⁵⁸

* * * * *

It has been pointed out that patience is a particular characteristic of human beings; it is not generally found in animals due to the dominance of their instincts, nor is it present in angels, who, by their nature, are free from desire. As for man, he is created in the early stage of life like the animal, with instincts dominant and little ability for patience. Then as his mind awakens and develops understanding, he is guided to the advantage gained by patience in many situations, although this is incomplete guidance and does not go beyond the benefits of worldly life. Then, if he should come to know the guidance of Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* and what relates to the Hereafter, his motivation for patience is strengthened further. However, his nature still inclines towards what he likes, causing that inner struggle in which patience is described as "the firmness of the religious incentive in the face of an onslaught of passions." This type of resistance is what is particular to believers and is a primary cause for entry into Paradise.

Patience or forbearance has been mentioned in some 90 places in the Qur'ān, and it is considered a duty upon every Muslim by the authority of the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the consensus of scholars. Yet it is one of the most difficult forms of worship for man if he has not already accustomed himself to it or practiced it regularly to gain competence. If his nature pulls him towards that which he likes, then patience requires that he experience and accept that which he dislikes. Thus, compensation in the Hereafter is promised to be far beyond what the servant deserves, continuing on and on with no account being taken of Allah's unlimited generosity.

The linguistic definition of *ṣabr* is "restraint and confinement" – restraining the soul from panic, anger or greed; restraining the tongue from complaint; and restraining the limbs from improper action. Islamic scholars have generally divided patience into three categories:

1. Patience to obey Allah in what He has ordered – Patience in obedience is required since the human soul seeks comfort and ease, is reluctant to give it up, and by nature, dislikes subjection. Laziness and love of possessions must be overcome by patience in such duties as prayer, *zakāh* and *jihād*. When performing any deed for the acceptance of Allah, one must be patient before beginning it by perfecting the intention and opposing the urge to show off. He must be patient during the deed itself not to forget Allah and to make the deed as good and complete as possible. And finally, he must be patient afterwards in avoiding pride or expecting gratitude from fellow men.

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ

"And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His face [i.e., acceptance]."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:10.

⁵⁹ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:28.

2. Patience to refrain from disobedience – The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, "*The world is the believer's prison and the non-believer's paradise.*"⁶⁰ For those who have been accustomed to living a lifestyle far from the Straight Path, patience is required after repentance in order to keep the Shayṭān at bay. Indeed, each new temptation must be resisted vigorously. The most difficult in this category is the avoidance of those sins – such as backbiting – which are committed easily and not always deplored by others, as well as those sins which are usually committed secretly.
3. Patience in the face of problems or afflictions – This category includes all that happens to one against his own will, such as the loss of property, the death of loved ones, illness, or harm done to him by others – the most difficult of all to bear gracefully! Allah *ta'ālā* tells us:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ. الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاغِبُونَ. أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

"And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided."⁶¹

Such trials from Allah – no matter how distasteful to the servant – are, in reality, opportunities for him. The Prophet (ﷺ) reported, "*There is no disaster which befalls the Muslim by which Allah does not remove sins from him – even [as little as] the thorn that pricks him.*"⁶²

Patience in the face of mishaps and difficulties and acceptance of Allah's will and wisdom in such matters are proof of faith. This does not mean that dislike of what has occurred is wrong, for feelings of loss, frustration and pain are a normal part of human life.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

"We have certainly created man into hardship."⁶³

It is imperative to remember that although feelings will not be judged, reactions will be. In the words of the Prophet (ﷺ): "Allah will not punish for tears in the eyes nor for sadness in the heart; but He will punish for this [and he pointed to his tongue] or grant mercy."⁶⁴ At the death of his son, Ibrāheem, he (ﷺ) said, "*The eye weeps and the heart is sad, but we will not say except what pleases our Lord.*"⁶⁵

Undoubtedly, those whose faith is weak will show it in times of severe trial. Protest against divine decree, anger against Allah, turning away from Him through neglect of prayer and other duties, or outright denial of Him are all signs of damage to one's soul.

⁶⁰ Muslim.

⁶¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:155-157.

⁶² Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁶³ Sūrah al-Balad, 90:4.

⁶⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁶⁵ Al-Bukhārī.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَى حَرْفٍ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ

"And of the people is he who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to unbelief]. He has lost [this] world and the Hereafter."⁶⁶

In contrast, when patience is practiced, seeking blessing and reward from Allah, and when the servant is certain of the positive results, it will turn into acceptance, which overcomes bitterness in the soul.

Obviously, it is not fitting that a servant complains to others about Allah; but, on the contrary, complaints directed to Allah about certain oppressors or difficult circumstances are an indication of trust in Him. Prophet Ya'qūb said:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَنِي وَحُرْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ

"I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah."⁶⁷

Supplications for help or relief do not indicate impatience, but rather, they are pleasing to Allah; and at such times response is very near. Additionally, the unlimited reward awaiting those who show forbearance, only seeking refuge in Allah, is such that it gives the greatest comfort to the believer. In the Qur'ān we are told:

قُلْ لَنْ يُصِيبَنَا إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَنَا

"Say, 'Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us.'"⁶⁸

Note that He *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* does not use the words "upon us" or "against us." Indeed, affliction is dreaded and disliked because it is most difficult to bear; yet He who loves His servants and cares for them absolutely has chosen to give them opportunities for eternal Paradise. In essence, He has decreed such trials *for us*, if only we would reflect.

Not only does a servant obtain additional reward through his afflictions, but upon being disabled either temporarily or permanently, one continues to gain that which he was accustomed to earning through his usual righteous deeds and actions previous to the disability. For the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that Allah commands the recording angels, "Register for My servant during every day and night whatever good he used to do for as long as he is confined in My restriction."⁶⁹

A question to be considered at this point is: "What is the manner in which a Muslim should face a situation requiring patience?"

When one acknowledges the right of Allah to manage His creation, perceiving the benefit of His divine decree, he will always be prepared for the possibility of a trial through distressing occurrences. In fact, this expectation helps him to retain control in the crucial period specified by the Prophet (ﷺ) in the ḥadīth: "Patience is [necessary] at the first shock."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥajj, 22:11.

⁶⁷ Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:86.

⁶⁸ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:51.

⁶⁹ Al-Ḥākim – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷⁰ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

In times of trial one should turn to Allah for consolation and compensation. Umm Salamah reported that she heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say, "No servant is struck by affliction and then says, 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return; O Allah, reward me in my affliction and follow it up with something better for me,' without Allah rewarding him in his affliction and following it with something better for him." She added, "So when Abu Salamah passed away, I said as the Messenger of Allah had ordered, and Allah followed that up with what was better for me than him – the Messenger of Allah [himself]."⁷¹

One of the Prophet's companions, Sa'd bin Abī Waqqāṣ, once asked, "O Messenger of Allah, which people are most severely tried?" The Prophet (ﷺ) answered, "The prophets, then the righteous, then those following them in degree. A man is tried according to his religion. So, if there is firmness in his religion, then his trial is increased; but if there is weakness in his religion, then it is lightened. Verily, tribulations remain with the servant until he walks upon the earth having no sin left upon him."⁷²

A point worth mentioning is that affliction is not always in the form of sudden disaster. It might be a prolonged state of difficulties such as illness, poverty or oppression by others. Again, believers find aid during such trials by doing the following:

1. Remembering the great reward awaiting those who practice patience and forbearance – Imagine yourself receiving a compensation of such magnitude as to overcome all that you have suffered.
2. Looking forward to relief from the difficulty as well as planning for that time, which lightens the burden of waiting – Trust that you are close to Allah during this period, that your supplication is being heard, and that He will certainly support you.

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا. إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease [i.e., relief]. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease."⁷³

3. Trusting that however distasteful certain experiences seem to be, there is good in them according to the perfect knowledge of Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā*.

وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

"But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not."⁷⁴

4. Counting the blessings which Allah has bestowed – great and small, obvious and subtle – When one finds himself unable to account for all of them, the difficulty is lightened in his eyes. Reward is gained by praising Allah in every circumstance, especially when realizing that the blessings retained after a loss are still far greater than those of which one was deprived. Indeed, one appreciates his own condition more when comparing it with others whose afflictions are greater than his own. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught that upon seeing the suffering of others, one should say to himself, "Praise be to Allah, who has exempted me from that by which He has tested you, and who has favored me with preference over many

⁷¹ Aḥmad and Muslim.

⁷² At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan-ṣaḥeḥ.

⁷³ Sūrah ash-Sharḥ, 94:5-6.

⁷⁴ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:216.

of those whom He has created."⁷⁵ He (ﷺ) further advised, "Look to those below you [i.e., those with less than you] and do not look to those above you [i.e., those with more than you], for this makes you less likely to underestimate Allah's blessings upon you."⁷⁶

As well as the aforementioned statements, it is necessary to remember that appreciation of blessings is complementary to patience. Many servants of Allah are tested through His favors upon them, and this might be, in fact, the most difficult of trials; for one who constantly turns to Allah while seeking relief in hardship might well forget Him once the crisis has passed and he is once again secure. Additionally, he might also forget that thankfulness is not merely "*al-ḥamdu lillāh*" pronounced by the tongue alone; but rather, it is proven by obedience to Allah and by sharing one's blessings with those in need. In reality:

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ

"And few of My servants are grateful."⁷⁷

One should be aware that in every case of poverty, illness, fear or loss there are points to remember which require gratitude to Allah:

1. That He prevented the ordeal from being greater than it was
2. That since it was decreed for the servant and therefore inevitable, it has now occurred and is no longer before him
3. That this trial was an expiation for sins, and as such, the penalty was not postponed until the Hereafter, where it would have been much more severe
4. That even in one's own lifetime, certain benefits may be gained from such an experience, for example, the strengthening of character or a lesson learned – In any case, the reward is always greater than the adversity.
5. That the casualty was not the servant's religion, i.e., he did not lose his faith or his resolve – Once when a man said to Sahl bin 'Abdullāh, "A thief entered my house and stole my property," Sahl replied, "If Shayṭān had entered your heart and spoiled your faith, then what would you have done? One who deserved to be beaten one hundred lashes and got off with only ten certainly ought to be thankful!"

There has been much speculation about which is best – patience or thankfulness – but, in reality, there are degrees of each. Patience begins with control, but acceptance is better; and gratitude for recognized blessings is good, but thankfulness during trials of hardship is better. Thus, patience and thankfulness merge at the highest level in the soul of the Muslim believer whose hope lies in Allah and the Last Day. And to Allah is due all praise and gratitude.

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

"If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

⁷⁶ Muslim and others.

⁷⁷ Sūrah Saba', 34:13.

⁷⁸ Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:7.

The Feeling of Alienation (al-Ghurbah)

فَلَا يَغُرُّكَ تَقَلُّبُهُمْ فِي الْبِلَادِ

"...so be not deceived by their [uninhibited] movement throughout the land."⁷⁹

* * * * *

Among the realities of faith and facts of life is this: the true adherents to the Straight Path of Allah (*aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqeem*) are a small minority, living as strangers in society. The reason is none other than the deviation of most of mankind from that Path and their excessive attachment to this world. The Qur'ān describes the majority of the earth's population:

وَلَيْكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"But most of the people do not know."⁸⁰

بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

"But most of them do not reason."⁸¹

أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

"But most of the people do not believe."⁸²

إِنَّهُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

"They are not except like livestock. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way."⁸³

The degree of alienation varies from time to time, place to place, people to people – for Muslims are a minority among the inhabitants of this earth, and believers are a minority among Muslims. Those of knowledge are few among believers, and those defending the Prophet's *sunnah* are even fewer. In respect to this, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Verily, my community among communities is like a white hair on a black bull."⁸⁴

Although they may find comfort in solitude and suffer isolation in the company of those who seek only to socialize, these servants cannot neglect their duties because the Prophet (ﷺ) declared, "The believer who mixes with people and is patient in the face of their offense is preferable to the believer who does not mix with people and is not patient with their offense."⁸⁵ And Allah reminds them:

⁷⁹ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:4. Activities not disciplined by fear of Allah may appear impressive but are, in fact, void of blessing in this life and the next.

⁸⁰ Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:21.

⁸¹ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:63.

⁸² Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:59.

⁸³ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:44.

⁸⁴ Al-Bukhārī.

⁸⁵ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

"The believers are but brothers."⁸⁶

So how can one avoid his brother for whom he cares and shares responsibility?

Always aware of Allah's presence, however, such souls seldom seek companionship elsewhere, knowing that He alone can comprehend their concerns, appreciate their efforts and relieve their sorrows. And knowing that whatever the people might think, Allah enumerates and rewards that which is unnoticed – sincerity of intention, conscientiousness in deed, and pain born patiently in the heart. So these servants of Allah are careful to avoid what is doubtful or might possibly lead to *ḥarām* (that which is unlawful) and are indifferent to that which is of no benefit in the Hereafter. They fear Allah when dealing with others and even more so when dealing with the subtle affairs of their own hearts. They refuse to compromise *tawḥeed*, and seek opportunities for *jihād*. They cling to the Sunnah when people have abandoned it and avoid innovation in religion while people find it good. They know the gravity of their sins and strive for forgiveness from their Lord. They are the ones whom the Prophet (ﷺ) praised when he said, "Certainly Islam began as [something] alien, and it will become alien once again as it began. So, blessed are the aliens."⁸⁷

Yet, human souls were created as social beings with a natural enjoyment of companionship and feelings of loneliness during periods of isolation. Therefore, Allah assures those who travel on His Path that, in spite of temporary alienation from contemporaries, they do belong to the best company of mankind – none other than the prophets, their truthful supporters, the martyrs and the righteous.⁸⁸ Such is the reason for the supplication: "O Allah, guide me among those You have guided."⁸⁹ Remembering one's companions removes sadness from the heart. Although they may be rare throughout the servant's lifetime, he can certainly look forward to a joyful reception in the Hereafter. Ibn al-Qayyim said, "Every time you feel the loneliness of isolation, remember your companions who have preceded you and be eager to join them; and do not be concerned with others, for they will not avail you at all before Allah. And if they call out to you during your journey, do not turn to them, for whenever you respond to them, they will take you and set you in another direction." Some early scholars used to advise, "Keep fast to the path of truth, and do not succumb to loneliness because of the few who tread it; and beware of the path of falsehood, and do not be deceived by the many headed on it to destruction." In the words of Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*:

قُلْ لَا يَسْتَوِي الْخَبِيثُ وَالطَّيِّبُ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ كَثْرَةُ الْخَبِيثِ

"Say, 'Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you.'"⁹⁰

وَإِنْ تُطِيعْ أَكْثَرُ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا تَخْرُصُونَ

"And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from

⁸⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:10.

⁸⁷ Muslim and Aḥmad.

⁸⁸ See Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:69.

⁸⁹ From *du'aa' ul-qunūt* taught by the Prophet (ﷺ). Related by an-Nasā'ī - ḥasan.

⁹⁰ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:100.

the way of Allah. They follow not except assumption, and they are not but misjudging."⁹¹

In another sense, however, the believer shares the company of all those creations that worship and praise Allah day and night throughout the universe, and thus, he is actually among the ranks of the majority of His creation.

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allah."⁹²

For in addition to that portion of jinn and mankind who worship Allah, the animals and plants are worshipping and praising Him. All the angels filling the heavens worship Allah. Seemingly inanimate bodies worship Allah. All forms of energy and matter worship Allah, submitting to the physical laws He has established for creation and praising Him in their own particular way.

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

"And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting."⁹³

Finally, and above all, Allah Himself is with the righteous servant,⁹⁴ supporting his efforts and reassuring him.⁹⁵ So while the Shayṭān will attempt to infect him with loneliness and despair, his plan is frustrated and defeated by the realization that the believer is in harmony with the entire universe in submission to the will of Allah, whereas those who vainly try to oppose Him are but a small minority that will surely be overcome.

If the adherent to the Straight Path feels himself to be a stranger in this world, all men, in fact, are such. They were not created for this life but are merely travelers along the road to the final destination. So, whoever travels light, sending provisions on before him, will ease his burden and find his home in order upon arrival.

⁹¹ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:116.

⁹² Sūrahs 59:1, 61:1, 62:1 and 64:1.

⁹³ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:44.

⁹⁴ See Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:128.

⁹⁵ "So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you will be superior." (Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:139) "If you should be suffering – so are they suffering as you are suffering, but you expect from Allah that which they expect not." (Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:104)

Worship (al-'ibādah)

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ أَعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

"O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous."⁹⁶

* * * * *

Whether he recognizes it or not, man is totally indebted to his Creator for his continuing existence hour by hour, not to mention such blessings as his many possessions and abilities. Knowing that Allah alone is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Provider, the Controller, the source of all benefit and harm in whose hands is the Judgement and the final destination of men *requires* through common sense and reason that He alone be worshipped.

Worship is the right of the Lord upon His servants and of the Creator upon His Creation. But many misunderstand the concept of worship, assuming that it is merely the practice of certain rituals. Confined within this limited view, they remain deficient in many of the obligations which are in reality part of the comprehensive sphere of worship ordained by Allah.

It is not within the capability of man to worship Allah in the manner of the angels. The Creator of every being ordained for each one its own mode of worship compatible with its nature and within the limits of its ability. Accordingly, He revealed to man through His Messenger (ﷺ) many ways of worship suitable to his physical and psychological nature, to his individual talents, and in harmony with his particular role upon the earth. In combination they will occupy every moment of his conscious existence and enable him to fulfill the purpose of his creation, as Allah mentioned in the Qur'ān:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

"I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me."⁹⁷

If worship was restricted to the religious rites which require a minimal portion of one's time, energy and wealth, the verse would not seem very rational. But in fact it refers to more than a few specific acts such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. Worship also consists of such duties as honesty and precision in one's work, fulfilling promises and contracts, opposing injustice, encouraging righteousness and preventing evil, teaching beneficial knowledge, guiding and counseling, preventing harm from any creature or bringing it benefit, kindness to parents, relatives, neighbors, orphans, servants and animals. It includes every deed that relieves pain or sadness, lightens an affliction, relieves a burden of debt or aids the needy and oppressed. Such acts are not merely encouraged in Islam; they are ordained as religious obligations.

All of them are forms of worship which are rewarded by Allah provided the intent is to obey and please Him. And with this conscious objective, even the ordinary tasks a believer does for himself and his family in the course of life become acts of worship in the comprehensive sense stated by the aforementioned verse.

⁹⁶ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:21.

⁹⁷ Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56.

The remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) for which a believer is rewarded is not simply the repetition of certain phrases and formulas but in the attitude that says, "What would Allah like me to do at this moment?" and "What would He expect from me at this moment." The appropriate answer in one instance might be prayer. Or it could be something else – honesty, courage, patience, kindness, refusal, action, restraint, assistance, avoidance, advice, silence, gratitude or jihād. Choosing the right response and acting upon it (perhaps in an ingenious manner) is a skill latent in every human being but perfected only by the sincere believer in Allah, who by doing so worships Him well.

But the practice of good deeds is not an end in itself. The primary objective of a true worshipper is to submit to the will of Allah, show servitude to Him, obey His command and earn His approval. Worshipping Allah means deference to His directives and adhering to the way of life ordained by Him. That is what makes one's work outstanding and motivates him toward greater perfection.

A true believer lives to obtain the approval of his Lord, to become close to Him and earn His reward. He is one who earnestly and actively enters diverse fields of life, excelling in production, precision and skill in order to obtain the multiple reward of assisting others. Thus, the Muslim becomes a source of benefit, blessing and mercy within his society. He practices good work, promotes it and directs others to it. His charitable deeds are not limited to humanity alone but include creation in general. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated, *"For every living creature is a reward."*⁹⁸ And he said, *"There is no Muslim who plants a sprout or a seed from which a person, animal or bird will eat but that it is registered for him as a charity."*⁹⁹

This comprehensive view is the correct basis for worship, and it molds the pattern of one's life. Within the vast range of possibilities one can find righteous deeds that are compatible with the needs of his society and with his own inclinations toward service. In this way the believer is bound throughout life to his Creator and longs for the meeting of the Hereafter, which in turn motivates him to strive constantly to improve his deeds, his character, his morals and his manners. But while self-improvement is among the fruits of worship and beneficial results of it, again, it cannot be the incentive for it.

Worship must be done sincerely for Allah alone. In addition, it must be done precisely according to the method ordained and within the limits set by Him.¹⁰⁰ There is a consensus of scholars based upon the texts of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, that an act of worship is not acceptable to Allah and will not be rewarded by Him unless these two conditions are met.

A Muslim's worship is of two levels, obligatory and voluntary. It is never permissible to neglect obligatory acts of worship, and any who do so are deserving of punishment in the Hereafter. The Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed¹⁰¹ that the best and most beloved deeds to Allah are the religious obligations ordained by Him, so they must always be given priority. Fulfillment of these obligations earns the greatest reward, and they can never be replaced by any quantity of other righteous deeds or voluntary worship. After their completion, however, one may go on to draw nearer to Allah and obtain further rewards through the supplementary worship of his choice.

⁹⁸ Al-Bukhārī.

⁹⁹ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁰⁰ This means the correct way prescribed by the Islamic Sharī'ah and not as formulated by people according to their own preferences.

¹⁰¹ In a *ḥadīth qudsī* narrated by al-Bukhārī.

Imām Ibn al-Qayyim was asked what kind of worship is best and most pleasing to Allah. He replied that there are four prevalent opinions regarding preference:

1. The best worship is the most difficult – Some presume that the most excellent types of worship are those which are most demanding and difficult for the person since they are the farthest away from his own desire and inclination, and that this is the essence of worship. They contend that the amount of reward is in proportion to the difficulty, based on a narration which has no basis in the Sunnah: "The best deeds are the most arduous."¹⁰² These people strive to subjugate their souls, saying, "It is the only way to make the soul upright since its nature is to be lazy, seek ease and become attached to the world. It must therefore be disciplined by fears and hardships."
2. The best worship is disengagement from the world – Others assert that the best kind of worship is self-sufficiency and indifference to the world, getting by on the least provision and being unconcerned about worldly pleasures. These are of two types:
 - ♦ The common people, who see it as an end in itself, working determinedly at it and calling others to practice it, claiming that it is preferable to scholarship and other acts of worship. In fact, they see it as the object of all worship.
 - ♦ The educated, who consider it a means of devoting oneself to Allah and making Him the only concern, of clearing the heart of everything but love for Him, turning back to Him, relying on Him and seeking His approval. They see the best deeds as attendance of assemblies for the mention of Allah, constantly remembering Him in the heart and with the tongue, being conscious of His perfect observation and awareness, and avoiding all that distracts the heart from that.
3. The best worship is that which benefits others – The advocates of this view declare that any form of worship that benefits another is superior to that which benefits the worshipper alone. They consider helping the poor, working for the interests of other people and fulfilling their needs, assisting them through their wealth, influence or other means is better than solitary worship, so they exert their efforts toward that.

They contend that while the benefit of private individual worship is limited to the worshipper alone, assisting someone for the acceptance of Allah benefits both the worshipper and his recipient. And that, they say, is why the scholar is considered superior to one who spends his time in prayer, fasting and remembrance of Allah.¹⁰³ They cite such statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) as: "*That Allah guides one man through you is better for you than having red camels.*"¹⁰⁴ "*Whoever invites to right guidance will have reward equal to the rewards of all those who follow it without it decreasing anything of their rewards.*"¹⁰⁵ "*Indeed, Allah and His angels, even the ant in its hole and the fish in the sea, bless those who teach good to the people.*"¹⁰⁶

They argue that when a private worshipper dies his deeds are ended, but the deeds of one who has benefited others do not end, for he will continue to reap their reward after his death for as long as the benefit remains. They further argue that the prophets were

¹⁰² However, in an authentic ḥadīth narrated by Aḥmad, the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "*Indeed, Allah likes that His concessions be utilized.*"

¹⁰³ There is a ḥadīth which states: "*The merit of a scholar over a ritual worshipper is like that of a full moon over other planets.*" (Narrated by Abū Nu'aym in *Al-Ḥilyah - ṣaḥeeḥ.*)

¹⁰⁴ Al-Bukhārī. Red camels were considered a particularly precious and valuable property at that time.

¹⁰⁵ Aḥmad and Muslim.

¹⁰⁶ At-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

sent in order to guide and benefit people in this life and the next, not to withdraw from society and become ascetics. Hence, their example should be followed.¹⁰⁷

4. The best worship is the priority of the moment – Still others maintain that the best worship is to please the Lord continuously by doing whatever is most essential at a particular time. For example, the best worship at the time of prayer is prayer; and at the time of jihād it is jihād, provided the duty is performed seeking the approval of Allah while exerting effort to do it in the best possible way. So the priority of the moment might be serving a guest or fulfilling the right of the spouse, parents or children. Before dawn it could be prayer, supplication and seeking Allah's forgiveness. During the day it could be guiding or teaching someone, assisting or aiding someone, comforting or encouraging someone, visiting a patient, accompanying a funeral and so on. Such matters should not be postponed and take precedent over one's usual voluntary prayers, fasts or recitation of the Qur'ān.

He went on to say: "Worshippers of the fourth category are total worshippers, whereas those of the other three are limited worshippers. Whenever one of them is prevented from the type of worship to which he has become attached, he considers it a deficiency because he worships Allah in only one way.

The total worshipper has no reason to restrict himself to a particular kind of worship or prefer it over others. His aim is to pursue the acceptance of Allah wherever it might be and he worships accordingly. So when you see scholars convened you find him with them, and when you see people in prayer you find him with them, and when you see those engaged in jihād you find him with them, and when you see social workers you find him with them, and when you see assemblies of devotees you find him with them. He is not subject to limits or restrictions; yet he does not follow personal preferences when choosing his method of worship, but seeks the preferences of his Lord, even though he might find other kinds of worship easier."¹⁰⁸

We are aware that the *kalimah* (word) of *tawḥeed*, "*Lā ilāha ill-Allah*" came to correct human belief and worship – not only that of the ancient polytheists, but of all men up until the end of time. It states that there is no divinity except Allah – none is similar to Him, none creates and sustains except Him, and none has the right to govern creation but Him. It necessarily overflows into all aspects of faith and all aspects of life.¹⁰⁹

إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Legislation is only for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know."¹¹⁰

The concept of *tawḥeed* encompasses all actions and intentions that are motivated by a recognition of the Lord's superiority and greatness – that combination of love and fear which produces efforts to please Him and to avoid His displeasure. Thus, worship can be defined as obedience – a fact that is evident in the Qur'ān, where Allah instructs repeatedly:

¹⁰⁷ And this is why Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) did not approve of those who wished to devote themselves to worship in seclusion rather than mixing with the people.

¹⁰⁸ *Tahdheeb Madārij as-SAalikeen*, pp. 70-72.

¹⁰⁹ *Shirk*, in contrast, is the opposite of *tawḥeed*. Refer to Footnote 11.

¹¹⁰ Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:40.

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ

"Obey Allah and the Messenger."¹¹¹

An object of worship is something which continually occupies the mind of the worshipper and consequently governs his behavior, both consciously and unconsciously. When applying this definition, it becomes clear that the object of one's worship can indeed be something other than his Creator, in spite of lip-service to "*lā ilāha ill-Allah*." The loss of *tawḥeed* has become evident today in the acceptance of foreign philosophies and lifestyles, political oppression, innovations in religion, and countless forms of disobedience. Allah *ta'ālā* has warned:

وَأِنْ تُطِيعْ أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

"And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah."¹¹²

وَأِنَّ كَثِيرًا لَيُضِلُّونَ بِأَهْوَاءِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ

"And indeed do many lead [others] astray through their [own] inclinations without knowledge."¹¹³

وَلَا تُطِيعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرْطًا

"And do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect."¹¹⁴

If some form of *shirk* has crept into one's religion it is imperative to correct it. Solutions begin with the individual... in the soul. The greater *jihād* against tyranny and oppression everywhere on earth will neither be accepted by Allah nor aided by Him until the participants are truly dedicated to His cause and free of all other motivations.

What distinguishes a Muslim believer from others is that he has shifted from the worship of himself and his own inclinations, from the worship of other human beings, objects and ideologies to the worship of his Creator and Sustainer; from obedience to his own preferences to the obedience of Allah. Believers are aware of their ultimate destination, knowing that they were created for an eternal life and that this world is but a temporary residence. Nevertheless, it provides all of their provisions for the journey to Allah, and the life of this world will indeed yield its harvest to those who plant. In the balance of natural laws established by Allah, nothing of value is obtained without effort. The more valuable it is, the more effort is required. So obviously, the everlasting life of the Hereafter and eternal approval of Allah will not be attained without sincere exertion.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good.

¹¹¹ Sūrah 3:32, 3:132, 4:59, 8:1, 8:20, 8:46, 24:54, 47:33, 58:13 and 64:12. Many other verses carry a similar meaning.

¹¹² Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:116.

¹¹³ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:119.

¹¹⁴ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:28.

Supplication (ad-Du'aa')

أَمَّنْ تَجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ

"Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil?"¹¹⁵

* * * * *

Supplication to Allah is ordered by Him, and He promises response:

أَدْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

"Call upon Me; I will respond to you."¹¹⁶

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ

"And when My servants ask you, concerning Me – indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me."¹¹⁷

Du'aa' is encouraged not only in formal prayer (*ṣalāh*) but at any other time one is inclined to it. It is an important form of worship and is evidence of one's belief in the power and ability of the Almighty. It is an open line of communication between the servant and his Lord; and by its constant practice, awareness of Him is sustained and one joins the ranks of:

وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ

"...the men and women who remember Allah often."¹¹⁸

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Whoever would be pleased to have Allah respond to him during hardship and disaster should make much *du'aa'* in times of ease."¹¹⁹ He also said, "Supplication is [true] worship."¹²⁰

How many servants miss out on great opportunities for benefit in this world and the next by their ignorance of this subject. Indeed, every tool, every treatment, every means to an end has a proper use. When used in the correct manner, the desired result will be obtained by Allah's permission, but improper use will accordingly lead to failure. In following the example of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his instructions, we can make the best use of *du'aa'*.

Facing the *qiblah* when possible, beginning with praise of Allah, raising the hands to the shoulder level and stretching them out when there is urgency are all part of the *sunnah* of *du'aa'*. One should try to take advantage of the times and conditions when response is most likely.¹²¹ Indeed, the best manner of making *du'aa'* is for the servant to concentrate

¹¹⁵ Sūrah an-Naml, 27:62.

¹¹⁶ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:60.

¹¹⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:186.

¹¹⁸ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:35.

¹¹⁹ At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

¹²⁰ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī and others – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹²¹ These include the following: the month of Ramaḍhān, the day of 'Arafah, Fridays, the last portion of the night (especially the last hour before dawn), between the adhān and the iqāmah, during prostration in prayer,

with all of his heart, show humility to Allah and pray in a lowered voice, as Allah orders:

أَدْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

"Call upon your Lord in humility and privately; indeed, He does not like transgressors."¹²²

Aggression in *du'aa'* was explained by scholars as shouting or showing off one's skill in the use of words.¹²³ Upon hearing people raising their voices in *du'aa'*, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "O people, return to yourselves. You do not call upon someone who is deaf or absent but rather, One who is Hearing and Seeing. The One you call upon is nearer to one of you than the neck of the beast he rides."¹²⁴

Be certain that Allah responds willingly, and ask Him accordingly, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Let not one of you say, 'O Allah, forgive me, if You will' because there is no unwillingness."¹²⁵ Additionally, he instructed, "When you ask Allah, ask Him being certain of response."¹²⁶ He also informed us that there are three supplications which are not refused: that of the parent (for his child), that of the traveler, and that of the oppressed (against his oppressor).¹²⁷ Another ḥadīth affirms that the *du'aa'* of a person for his brother Muslim who is absent from him is also answered.¹²⁸ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) directed that when supplicating for another, one should begin with himself,¹²⁹ saying, for example, "O Allah, guide me and guide him," or "O Allah, forgive me and forgive him."

There are certain things to be avoided in relation to *du'aa'* as they prevent response from Allah *ta'ālā*. *Du'aa'* must not be made for anything sinful or for cutting off relations. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "No Muslim prays to Allah with a *du'aa'* free from sin and from that which cuts ties between relatives without Allah giving him one of three things: the answer to his prayer during his lifetime, the accumulation of its reward for him until the next life, or the prevention of some evil from striking him which is equal to it [i.e., his effort in *du'aa'*]."¹³⁰ Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* is well aware of which one of the three responses is most beneficial to the servant. One should not demand an immediate response, as he who says, "I prayed but was not answered" and then gives up.¹³¹ The Prophet (ﷺ) also forbade making *du'aa'* against oneself, one's family, property or servants.¹³² Moreover, the supplicant must not be a consumer of *ḥarām* (that which is unlawful). The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) mentioned a man on a long journey – all dirty and dusty – raising his hands to the heaven,

immediately after obligatory prayers, when the armies meet during jihād, and at any times of fear or sensitivity of the heart.

¹²² Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:55.

¹²³ Group supplication led by one person while others repeat after him is an innovation and was not practiced by the Prophet (ﷺ) or his companions. Individual *du'aa'* is preferable, or one may join the *du'aa'* of another by saying "āmeen" at the end.

¹²⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹²⁵ Al-Bukhārī and Abū Dāwūd.

¹²⁶ Aḥmad, Muslim and al-Bukhārī.

¹²⁷ Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

¹²⁸ Muslim.

¹²⁹ At-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹³⁰ Aḥmad – ḥasan.

¹³¹ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd.

¹³² Muslim.

saying, "O Lord, O Lord" while his food was from *ḥarām*, his clothing from *ḥarām*, and his having been sustained by *ḥarām*. He (ﷺ) concluded, "How then could he have been answered?"¹³³

A consideration of *du'aa'* inevitably leads to the question of fate (*qadar*) and the relationship between the two. Among the best discussions of this subject is one presented by Imām Ibn al-Qayyim in *Al-Jawāb ul-Kāfi*.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah was asked, "What do the scholars say about a man who has been tried with affliction – knowing that if it continues it will ruin him in this life and in the next – and has tried everything in his ability to get rid of it, but it only increases in severity? What is the method of warding it off? May Allah have mercy upon him who helps an afflicted one; and Allah is in assistance of the servant as long as the servant is in assistance of his brother..."

The shaykh answered:¹³⁴ *Al-ḥamdu-lillāh*. It has been confirmed in *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī* that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Allah has sent down no disease for which He has not sent down a cure." And it is documented in *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim* that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "For every disease there is a medicine; and when the medicine contacts the disease, it cures with the permission of Allah." This includes the diseases of the heart and soul, as well as the body, and their treatments. The Prophet (ﷺ) considered ignorance a disease and consulting the learned as its treatment. And Allah informs us that the Qur'ān is a cure:

قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هُدًى وَشِفَاءٌ

"Say, 'It is, for those who believe, a guidance and cure.'"¹³⁵

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"And We send down of the Qur'ān that which is healing and mercy for the believers."¹³⁶

In fact, the Qur'ān is a cure for hearts from the diseases of ignorance and doubt.

And such also is *du'aa'*, for it is one of the most powerful causes of warding off anything disliked or of obtaining that which is desired. It is possible, however, that the desired effect might not follow, due either to a weakness in the *du'aa'* itself – such as one not liked by Allah because it contains aggression – or to half-heartedness in the supplicant. The failure could be due as well to a factor which prevents response such as the supplicant's consumption of *ḥarām* or the control of his heart by earthly lusts or distractions.

Indeed, *du'aa'* is one of the most beneficial medicines. It is the enemy of disaster – defending against it and fighting it, preventing its descent and pushing it back, and weakening it if it should descend. It is the weapon of the believer.

When *du'aa'* meets disaster, there are three possibilities:

1. The *du'aa'* is stronger than the disaster and thus drives it away.
2. The *du'aa'* is weaker than the disaster, so the disaster overcomes and the servant is struck (although it may be lessened in degree by even a weak *du'aa'*).

¹³³ Muslim and al-Bukhārī.

¹³⁴ What remains of this chapter is a summary of Ibn al-Qayyim's words.

¹³⁵ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:44.

¹³⁶ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:82.

3. The *du`aa'* and the disaster oppose each other, and each one prevents the other from victory. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Nothing repels fate except du`aa'."*¹³⁷ And among the best of treatments is persistence in *du`aa'*. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Do not weaken in du`aa', for no one will be destroyed as long as he is making du`aa'."*¹³⁸

Among the weaknesses which prevent the effect of *du`aa'* is haste or impatience. According to the Prophet (ﷺ), *"Any one of you will be answered as long as he is not hasty, saying, 'I made du`aa', but it was not answered."*¹³⁹ When the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"The servant continues to be answered as long as he does not ask for something sinful or for that which cuts ties between relatives, and as long as he is not impatient,"* he was asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what is impatience?" He replied, *"Impatience is when one says, 'I prayed and prayed, but I do not see that I am being answered,' and so becoming tired, he abandons du`aa'."*<sup>140</sup> So the servant should not give up *du`aa'* prematurely, thinking the answer to be slow in coming; for then he becomes like one who plants a seed or a twig and begins to care for it and water it, but when he finds it to be slow in growing, leaves it and neglects it.

Therefore, if *du`aa'* is combined with presence of heart and complete concentration on what is desired, and it corresponds with one of the times when response is expected, and it is accompanied by fear of Allah, humbleness and humility to Him, in earnest and in gentleness, and then the supplicant faces the *qiblah*, and is in a state of purity (*ṭahārah*), and then raises his hands to Allah, beginning with praise of Him and blessings upon the Prophet (ﷺ), and asks forgiveness and repents, then supplicates, begging Allah and persisting in his request in fear and hope, using the best names of Allah and words recited by the Prophet – all this after having offered some charity (*ṣadaqah*) – such a *du`aa'* could hardly be refused at all; and this is the kind most pleasing to Allah.

Often it becomes known that people have used a certain *du`aa'* and were answered. But it must also be realized that accompanying that *du`aa'* was urgent need and sincere turning to Allah. Or perhaps there was some good that one had done previously, or the *du`aa'* was made at one of the hours of response, or there was some other reason for which it was answered. Therefore, one might think that the secret was in the wording of the *du`aa'* and subsequently use it without the other factors being present. Such is the case in which a man uses a good medicine at the proper time and in the proper way and thus benefits from it. Others might think that simply using that medicine is sufficient to cure under any circumstance, but they are mistaken. Similarly, if a supplication happens to be near a grave, an ignorant person might assume that the secret is in the grave, unaware that it is actually in the supplicant's urgency and sincerity when turning to Allah. But when *du`aa'* is made in a mosque (*masjid*), it is better and more pleasing to Allah.

Prayer is like a sword; and the effectiveness of a sword is in its use by the swordsman. So, when the sword is perfect, without fault, when the swordsman's arm is strong and skillful, and when no preventing factor is present, then the enemy is defeated. But if one of these three conditions is weak, then the effect is weakened accordingly. Thus if one's *du`aa'* is not a proper one or one's heart is not combined with his tongue therein or a prohibiting factor (such as disobedience) is present, then the effect will not be obtained.

¹³⁷ At-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim – ḥasan.

¹³⁸ Al-Ḥākim, who graded it ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹³⁹ Al-Bukhārī.

¹⁴⁰ Muslim.

There is a well-known argument that states: "If the effect of *du'aa'* has been decreed, then it must happen whether the servant asks for it or not; and if it was not decreed, then it will not happen in any case." A certain group, believing this opinion to be correct, stopped making *du'aa'*, saying that there is no use in it; but they, in their excessive ignorance and deviation, contradict themselves. For if this school of thought was to be followed, it would necessitate the annulment of all causes. Thus, if relief from hunger and thirst was decreed for one, it would happen whether or not he ate or drank; and if a child was decreed for one, there would be no need for him to approach his wife; and so on. Would any sane person say such a thing? Even dumb animals instinctively apply themselves to the causes of their life and subsistence, so they are certainly smarter than those who make such unsubstantiated assertions.

Some, pretending intellect, have said, "Keeping busy with *du'aa'* is a form of worship rewarded by Allah, but it has nothing to do with what is gained." So, to such people, the worldly result is the same whether one prays for something or remains silent. And others even more "intellectual" have said, "*Du'aa'* is not a cause but simply a sign that the servant's request is being granted." This is like saying that a black cloud is a sign of rain but not a cause of rain – the two only being present simultaneously!

The truth is actually in a third explanation – whatever is decreed is decreed by reason of causes. Nothing is decreed without a cause, and *du'aa'* is among the principal causes. So, whenever a servant applies the cause, then that which is decreed happens; and whenever he does not apply the cause, then it does not happen. Just as relief from hunger and thirst is decreed by reason of eating and drinking, and the birth of a child by reason of marital relations, and the growth of plants by sowing seeds, and the death of an animal by slaughter, and the entrance into Paradise by deeds, and into Hellfire by deeds... This is the true answer.

Du'aa' [combined with other efforts] is among the strongest of causes, and nothing is more beneficial or more far-reaching in obtaining the need. Just as the Prophet's companions (may Allah be pleased with them) were the most knowledgeable of the community in respect to the religion, so were they more steadfast than others in applying this cause with its conditions and proper manners. 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb used it against his enemies, and he was the greatest of soldiers. He used to tell his companions, "You will not be helped by [great] numbers, but you will be helped from Heaven."

We have been led by the mind and the instinct and then by history to recognize that righteousness is among the greatest causes for obtaining good upon this earth, and its opposite is among the greatest causes for obtaining evil. Allah *ta'ālā* has made the reward or punishment of the Hereafter depend upon deeds which are conditions, the effect depending upon the cause. In over 1,000 places throughout the Qur'ān an event or result is tied to its cause in descriptions of both this life and the next.

Anyone who understands this fact will benefit greatly. He will not sit passively waiting for fate to overtake him. One with understanding will answer fate with fate and will oppose fate with fate. For indeed, hunger is fate and thirst is fate and cold is fate and fear is fate; yet all creatures exert themselves to change that fate. And that is what Allah has willed.

In order for one to take full advantage of this knowledge, two things are necessary:

1. The servant must learn the causes of good and evil, developing such an understanding from all that he observes around him, from what he has experienced, from what others have experienced, and from what he has heard about other peoples, both ancient and modern. For this purpose, nothing is better than the study of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth,

since they picture good and evil and their causes to the reader almost as though he were an eyewitness. Then a look into history will provide the details within the general outlines given by Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ).

2. The servant must beware of himself being a preventing factor, blocking the desired result. Knowing that disobedience and ignorance are definite causes of harm to him in this life and the next, he should seek to remedy this in himself, not only to escape penalty in the Hereafter but also to obtain the maximum result when he turns to Allah in *du'aa'* throughout his life on earth.

Death (al-Mawt)

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ

"Every soul will taste death."¹⁴¹

* * * * *

Almost every day we see or hear of a death, often that of someone we know; yet how often do we consider our own time and what will follow? While a funeral procession passes before us, we admit that, true, death has come to others; but we are still here and feel that we will continue to be for a long time. Once when a funeral procession passed near the Prophet (ﷺ), he remarked, *"Relieved or relieved of him."* Some inquired, "What is the meaning of 'relieved' and 'relieved of him'?" He answered, *"The believing servant is relieved of the fatigue and afflictions of this world, [entering] into the mercy of Allah; and people, countries, plants and animals are relieved of the transgressing servant."*¹⁴²

Consider a person who expects to travel and how he thinks of nothing but his journey – what to take along and how best to prepare himself. The believer prepares in the same way for his final and most important journey. This temporary station (i.e., life) in which he waits is not his primary concern. 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar reported that once the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) took hold of his shoulders and said, *"Be in this world as a stranger or a traveler."*¹⁴³

The One who has given life will surely take it back at the time determined by Him. There is no destination but the return to Allah, and there is no hope but in the acceptance of Allah. It is death which exposes the truth about this life – everything material will be left behind. For those who love the comforts of worldly life, it is good to remember the harshness and solitude of the grave and that one will be removed irrevocably from all that to which he had been so closely attached. The Prophet (ﷺ) advised, *"Remember often the destroyer of pleasures – death."*¹⁴⁴

Death is an awesome reality facing every living being. It is, in itself, a severe trial. Even Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), the most beloved of Allah's creatures, was not spared its pain. For the believer, affliction at death (as at any time) is a means of expiating sins or gaining a higher position in Paradise. Those attending a dying person should make every effort to have him remember Allah and give him hope and reassurance, not allowing him to submit to the Shayṭān out of pain or fear. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Help your dying ones to say, 'Lā ilāha ill-Allah.'"*¹⁴⁵ And he also stated, *"When death draws near to the believer, he receives glad tidings of Allah's pleasure with him and His generosity, so nothing is more loved by him than what is before him. As for the companion of the Fire, whose deeds were sealed with evil, he is given the news of it [i.e., Hellfire] during this terror [of death]."*¹⁴⁶

In the Qur'ān, Allah *ta'ālā* gives a clear description of what happens at that time:

¹⁴¹ Sūrah 3:185, 21:35 and 29:57.

¹⁴² Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁴³ Al-Bukhārī.

¹⁴⁴ At-Tirmidhī, an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹⁴⁵ Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhī. Scholars have added that this should be a gentle encouragement without insistence if it is feared that the person might become upset. It could be said by someone else within hearing distance to serve as an indirect reminder to the dying.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Bukhārī.

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ .
ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْت أَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ

***"And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who denied...¹⁴⁷
They are striking their faces and their backs and [saying], 'Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire. That is for what your hands have put forth [of evil] and because Allah is not ever unjust to [His] servants.'"¹⁴⁸***

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَمُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

"Indeed, those who have said, 'Our Lord is Allah' and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], 'Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.'"¹⁴⁹

Death is an awakening after a dream – lucidity after confusion. It is a second birth into a greater life. If the life of this world was created for work and trial, then the life of the next world was created for judgement and lasting compensation.

At death the soul leaves the body. All things are now absolutely clear to that soul – the realities concerning all of which one was unaware during his lifetime or chose to ignore.¹⁵⁰ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) reported, "When one of you dies, he is shown his place [in the Hereafter] morning and evening. If he is from the people of Paradise, then among the people of Paradise. And if he is from the people of Hell, then among the people of Hell. And it will be said to him, 'This is your place until Allah resurrects you on the Day of Judgement.'"¹⁵¹ Thus each soul remains until the Day of Judgement (according to its preview of the Hereafter), feeling sadness and regret or happiness and reassurance.

"The grave is the first station among the stations of the Hereafter."¹⁵² In a long and detailed ḥadīth the Prophet (ﷺ) described how two angels come to the believer in beautiful form, taking his sweet-smelling soul gently up to the seventh heaven where Allah registers him and the angels question him about his Lord, his religion and his prophet. After he has answered correctly, "My Lord is Allah; my religion is Islam; and my prophet is Muḥammad (ﷺ)," his soul is returned to its body in the grave, which is expanded for him for as far as he can see. Then his good deeds come to keep him company in the form of a beautiful man telling him to look forward to all that will please him. As for the nonbeliever, two angels come to him in ugly form, tearing his foul-smelling soul violently from its body; and when they ascend to the lowest of the heavens, the door does not open, and Allah registers him in the book of Hell. His soul is then thrown back to its body in the grave, and the angels come to question him about his Lord, his religion and his prophet. But he can only answer, "Uh... uh... I don't know." (And in another narration: "I only said as the people said.") So the door of Hell is opened before him, and his grave contracts, compressing him until his ribs are crushed against each other. Then his bad deeds come to him in the form of a repulsive man telling

¹⁴⁷ This sentence is left incomplete for additional effect. Its conclusion is left to the imagination of the reader or listener and estimated as "...you would see a dreadful sight."

¹⁴⁸ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:50-51.

¹⁴⁹ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:30.

¹⁵⁰ See Sūrah Qāf, 50:20.

¹⁵¹ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁵² At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

him to look forward to all that he despises – humiliation and eternal punishment – and he is struck a blow which causes his scream to be heard by everything except men and jinn.¹⁵³ The Prophet (ﷺ) advised us to seek from Allah protection from the punishment of the grave and the punishment of the Fire.¹⁵⁴

All this, and the Day of Judgement has not yet arrived! In truth, one's reward or punishment begins from the instant of death, when he leaves the familiar confines of time and space.

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا. وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

"Indeed, they see it [as] distant, but We see it [as] near."¹⁵⁵

The reality of death is that it is simply a stage in man's development, as birth was – a transition from one world to another. Knowledge of this fact given to the Muslim is another example of Allah's endless mercy upon him, for with this knowledge he can prepare himself for success.

The Qur'ān is explicit in its statement that no one but Allah knows when the appointed Hour will be:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا يُجَلِّيهَا لِوَقْتِهَا إِلَّا هُوَ

"Say, 'Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him.'"¹⁵⁶

Certain signs or warnings have been mentioned in both the Qur'ān and the prophetic statements – events that will take place before that Last Hour; but these signs are for the living to observe. The souls of the dead are no longer subject to time as we know it. The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, *"The Hour will not come until 'Allah, Allah' is no longer uttered upon the earth,"* (i.e., when Allah has been completely forgotten by the earth's inhabitants.)¹⁵⁷

Just as the death of every individual is the first stage in his new life, the death of the universe and its recreation in a different form signals the beginning of the true existence promised by Allah:¹⁵⁸

كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ وَعَدًا عَلَيْنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ

"As We began the first creation, We will repeat it. [That is] a promise binding upon Us. Indeed, We will do it."¹⁵⁹

يَوْمَ تُبَدَّلُ الْأَرْضُ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَوَاتُ

"On the Day the earth will be replaced by another earth, and the heavens [as well]..."¹⁶⁰

When the appointed Hour has arrived, the whole universe will undergo such drastic changes as no man can imagine. In early Makkan sūrah's, Allah *ta'ālā* gives terrifying descriptions of some of

¹⁵³ Aḥmad – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁵⁵ Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:6-7.

¹⁵⁶ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:187.

¹⁵⁷ Muslim. At that point there will no longer be any reason for continuation of the present creation. It must make way for the new order.

¹⁵⁸ "And indeed, the home of the Hereafter – that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew." (29:64)

¹⁵⁹ Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:104.

¹⁶⁰ Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:48.

these events in order to awaken man and shake him into the realization that Allah, his Creator, will manifest His absolute power and control that Day over all things, that He will restore life to the dead, and that all beings will be then totally helpless and answerable to Him...

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ أَنْفَطَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ أُنْتَثَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ. عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا
قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ

"When the sky breaks apart and when the stars fall, scattering, and when the seas are erupted and when the [contents of] graves are scattered [i.e., exposed], a soul will [then] know what it has put forth and kept back."¹⁶¹

The Hour will be heralded by a trumpet blast which will strike everyone in the heavens and upon the earth dead from terror, except whom Allah wills. Then upon the second blast, life will be restored to all of the dead.¹⁶² Each will feel as one who has slept but a short while, having been awakened when the soul returned to the body.

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ

"And the Day the Hour appears the criminals will swear they had remained but an hour."¹⁶³

Thus will every soul be returned to life in the same psychological condition it was at the time of death – in belief or denial, in good or evil. In support of this statement are the Prophet's words: "Every servant will be brought back to life in accordance with the state in which he died."¹⁶⁴

The second creation of man will occur in a way similar to the growth of plants upon the earth. Allah points to this fact in the Qur'ān. In authentic ḥadīths the Prophet (ﷺ) explained, "...then water will descend from the heavens, and they [i.e., people] will grow as vegetation grows. There is no part of man which will not have decayed except for one bone, which is the base of the tail, from which creation will be developed on the Day of Judgement." And he (ﷺ) said, "Every part of a son of Ādam is consumed by the earth except for the base of the tail. He was created from it, and he will be reassembled from it."

All creatures will then be gathered together for the Judgement – men, jinn, even animals – each one alone, stripped of friends and family ties.

فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ

"No relationship will there be among them that Day."¹⁶⁵

The following information about the Gathering comes from *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim*: People will be gathered on a land that is white, untrodden, pure and unowned by anyone. They will be gathered as they were at birth – barefoot, naked and uncircumcised – but they will be too preoccupied to notice each other. This Day every person will be concerned only with the judgement that awaits him, no longer thinking of those he loved in his earthly life – even being willing to sacrifice them to save himself, if only that was possible.¹⁶⁶ On that Day Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* will fold up the

¹⁶¹ Sūrah al-Infīṭār, 82:1-5.

¹⁶² See Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:68.

¹⁶³ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:55.

¹⁶⁴ Muslim.

¹⁶⁵ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:101.

¹⁶⁶ See Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:11-14.

heavens, taking them in His right hand; and He will fold up the earth, taking it in His left hand, saying, "I am the Sovereign. Where are the tyrants? Where are the arrogant?"

Then there will be the taking of account and the judgement. The justice that man instinctively longs for but never realizes in this earthly life will be established. And the justice of Allah is complete, taking into account all deeds, intentions and conditions. Not one particle of good or evil will be ignored in His register.

لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا

"It leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it."¹⁶⁷

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ. وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

"So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it."¹⁶⁸

Everyone will be perfectly convinced of the justice of his judgement, and the balance will prove to him without a doubt what he deserves. Indeed, nothing will benefit him this Day except the good which he had put forth in his former life and the mercy and forgiveness of Allah, which he hopes for now. For even the intercession of the Prophet will be only by Allah's permission.

Every servant will be given his record, published openly before all creation, and he will be told:

أَقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا

"Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant."¹⁶⁹

The successful person on that Day will feel proud and happy before his Lord and before all of creation, but the one who is exposed and scandalized will have no escape from humiliation. He will try to defend himself through lying as he did in his earthly life.

فَيَحْلِفُونَ لَهُ، كَمَا تَحْلِفُونَ لَكُمْ

"And they will swear to Him as they swear to you."¹⁷⁰

And they will say:

وَاللَّهِ رَبَّنَا مَا كُنَّا مُشْرِكِينَ

"By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who associated."¹⁷¹

But Allah will silence their tongues, and as it is reported in the Qur'ān, their hands and feet – even their skins – will testify to the truth, leaving them with no further argument. Left with only sorrow, regret and self-hatred, they will be addressed:

لَمَقَتْهُ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ مَّقْتِكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ

"The hatred of Allah for you was [even] greater than your hatred of yourselves."¹⁷²

Surely He has prepared for them a just and fitting punishment for their crimes.

¹⁶⁷ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:49.

¹⁶⁸ Sūrah az-Zalzalah, 99:7-8.

¹⁶⁹ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:14.

¹⁷⁰ Sūrah al-Mujādilah, 58:18.

¹⁷¹ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:23.

¹⁷² Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:10.

Concerning the believer who had sinned at times, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) related that he will be confronted privately by his Lord, who will say, "Do you know that you have committed such and such a sin," mentioning each sin one by one until the servant has admitted all of them and sees that he can only be doomed to destruction. But then Allah will say, "I had concealed it for you in the world, and I forgive you for it today," and he will be given his record containing only the good that he did. As for the rejecters and hypocrites, the witnesses will say:

هَٰؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ أَلَا لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

"These are the ones who lied against their Lord. Unquestionably, the curse of Allah is upon the wrongdoers."¹⁷³

Such will be their reckoning. Everyone, believers and nonbelievers alike, will be exposed to Hell, approaching it and observing it at close range.

وَإِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا

"And there is none of you except he will come to it."¹⁷⁴

Hadīths from *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim* and *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī* explain that a narrow bridge will be erected over Hell, and everyone will be made to pass over it. The best of the people will cross it at the speed of lightening, others at the speed of the wind, others at the speed of galloping horses, and others will cross it more slowly, some crawling on their hands and knees. The wrongdoers and unjust will not succeed in crossing it but will be seized by claws like giant thorns along the path, pulling them off of it into the Fire. Some of the believers will escape untouched, others narrowly escaping after having been scratched. Then those successful in crossing will proceed on to Paradise.

يَوْمَ نَقُولُ لِجَهَنَّمَ هَلِ امْتَلَأَتْ وَتَقُولُ هَلْ مِنْ مَزِيدٍ. وَأُزْلِفَتِ الْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ. هَذَا مَا تُوعَدُونَ لِكُلِّ أَوَّابٍ حَفِيفٍ. مَنْ خَشِيَ الرَّحْمَنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَجَاءَ بِقَلْبٍ مُنِيبٍ

"On the Day We will say to Hell, 'Have you been filled?' and it will say, 'Are there some more,' and Paradise will be brought near to the righteous, not far, [it will be said], 'This is what you were promised – for every returner [to Allah] and keeper [of His covenant] who feared the Most Merciful in the unseen and came with a heart returning [in repentance].'"¹⁷⁵

There are detailed accounts of Hellfire and of Paradise in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, informing us that the consequences of our actions and intentions will be both physical and emotional. These descriptions serve to bring the concept closer to man's understanding, yet it is perceived that the realities of the next life are greater than the human mind can now comprehend. The eternal yet unbearable tortures of the Hellfire await those who have arrogantly denied their Lord. Their efforts to escape will be futile, and their pleas for relief will be ignored. The punishment they will have earned for themselves by their rebellion and tyranny upon the earth will be the ultimate justice. The righteous believers who have worked hard, seeking the acceptance of Allah, will be rewarded accordingly by forgiveness for their minor sins and entrance into Paradise, where they will have all that their souls desire, and more – the presence of the Lord Himself, who will be eternally pleased with them.

¹⁷³ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The Qur'ānic reference is Sūrah Hūd, 11:18.

¹⁷⁴ Sūrah Maryam, 19:71.

¹⁷⁵ Sūrah Qāf, 50:30-33.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) once recited from the Qur'ān: ***"For those who have done good is the best [reward] – and extra..."***¹⁷⁶ and then said, "When the people of Paradise have entered Paradise and the people of Hell have entered Hell, a crier will call out, 'O people of Paradise, you have a promise from Allah, and He wishes to fulfill it for you.' So they will say, 'What could it be? Has He not made our scales heavy [with good deeds], whitened our faces [i.e., shown us in the best light], and caused us to enter Paradise and avoid Hellfire?' Then the screen will be removed, and they will look at Allah. He will not have given them anything that they love more than looking at Him, and that is the 'extra.'"¹⁷⁷

Allah Himself confirms:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ. إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

"[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord."¹⁷⁸

It is mentioned in the prophetic narratives that there are those among the believers who will enter the Fire for a time due to the gravity of their sins. It is possible that one might not be forgiven if he did not repent before his death. It is true, as well, that every soul will be compensated in full at the time of judgement, and that even animals will obtain their rights. So if one has been unjust to others, then he has, in reality, been unjust to himself since he will have to pay the price. The Prophet (ﷺ) referred to such a person as "bankrupt" because he will come forward on the Day of Judgement with some good deeds, such as prayer, fasting and *zākah*, but if he had wronged others during his lifetime, those people will all take their compensation from his good deeds until, when there are no good deeds left, they will unload their bad deeds upon him, one by one, until justice is restored. Thus he will be thrown into the Fire.¹⁷⁹ The Prophet (ﷺ) added, *"As for the true people of the Fire, they will not die therein nor will they live. But others of you afflicted by the Fire by reason of sins will be caused by Allah to die therein a death"*¹⁸⁰ until, after their having become charcoal, permission will be given for intercession. *They will then be gathered, brought forth and scattered in the rivers of Paradise. Then it will be said, 'O people of Paradise, pour upon them,' and they will grow like seeds that have been carried by a flood."*¹⁸¹

Those who loved the Messenger of Allah, following his teachings and obeying him, can hope for his intercession in the life to come, for he said, *"For every prophet there is a supplication which is answered. Every other prophet asked for something immediate, but I have saved this prayer for my community until the Day of Judgement. And it will be obtained, Allah willing, by whoever dies from my community not associating anything with Allah."*¹⁸²

But lest a servant fall into false security, it must be emphasized that no one enters Paradise sooner or later without true belief and the proof of that belief, which is obedience to Allah and His final Messenger (ﷺ).¹⁸³ For it is stated in authentic ḥadīths that some Muslims will seek to join the

¹⁷⁶ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:26.

¹⁷⁷ Muslim.

¹⁷⁸ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:22-23.

¹⁷⁹ Muslim.

¹⁸⁰ The word "*imātah*" (death) is used here in the sense of a temporary death or a sleep. It has been related in Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim that on the Day of Judgement a plump ram will be brought forth, which will be recognized as death by the inhabitants of Paradise and the Hellfire alike. The ram will be slaughtered before them, and they will be told, "O people of Paradise, [there is now] eternity and no death. O people of Hell, [there is now] eternity and no death." Thus their respective conditions of bliss or misery will be rendered complete.

¹⁸¹ Muslim.

¹⁸² Muslim. The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasized here that *tawḥeed* is a condition for his intercession.

¹⁸³ See Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:31-32.

Prophet at his pool but will be prevented, and Allah will tell him, "Verily, you do not know what they did after you."¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Allah *ta'ālā* warns about complacency in religion like that of the Jews and Christians who claim that He has favored them over others. Concerning entry into Paradise, the Qur'ān states:

لَيْسَ بِأَمَانِيكُمْ وَلَا أَمَانِي أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا يُجْزَ بِهِ وَلَا تَجِدْ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا

"It is not [obtained] by your wishful thinking nor by that of the People of the Scripture. Whoever does a wrong will be recompensed for it, and he will not find besides Allah a protector or a helper."¹⁸⁵

In the Qur'ān, Allah gives a picture of both sides of the Hereafter in order that the believer may attain a healthy balance between fear and hope; for certainly, an excess of either, in the form of despair or excessive optimism, is a deterrent to effort. Every Muslim must be aware that his fate is in his own hands by the will of Allah and that what awaits him in the life to come depends completely upon himself in this time of examination.

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُؤَفَّوْنَ أَجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فَمَنْ زُحِرَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتْنَعُ الْغُرُورِ

"Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [success]. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Muslim.

¹⁸⁵ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:123.

¹⁸⁶ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:185.

REALITIES OF LIFE

Know that Allah, *subhānahu wa ta'ālā*, created the universe and everything in it according to precise laws and an established order. Everything moves and progresses according to this order and will continue so until the Final Hour is established.

Similarly, Allah created mankind and ordained for people a system by which to live, providing instruction through a series of prophets and messengers, the last of whom was Muhammad (ﷺ). When human beings adhere to this system and obey the laws of Allah they live and move about in peace and order, not unlike the heavenly bodies moving in their orbits. But when they disrupt the system and disobey the laws of Allah, conflicts and wars appear among them, calamities and disasters, resentment, envy and all the diseases that can afflict a human heart.

At present, the entire world has been overwhelmed by the commercial, technological and political dominance of Western society. On the other hand, Muslims are divided into countless economically impoverished, politically and socially alienated factions, and are under attack from enemies on all fronts. But in reality, the rest of the world is also undergoing a process of fragmentation and high-speed erosion of morality and human values.

Despite the most recent negative portrayals and assaults by its detractors, Islam is still the fastest growing religion in the world today. To live by Islam is to be connected to Allah at all times and conscious of the meeting with Him in the life to come. The Creator has given humanity the unique capacity for thought and perception and then supplemented it with His guidance. Muslim believers, both individually and collectively, must seek those assets which can benefit them in this life and the next, adhering to a path that leads to success in both worlds. The foundation for moral and just societies can be laid only when an adequate number of Muslims actually attain this state.

The following pages offer some reflections on creation, on life and the Muslim *ummah*, with aspirations toward recovery and advancement. The application of sound Islamic values is essential to all efforts, as the Qur'ān has stated:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

“Indeed Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:11.

The Angels Were Amazed

'Abdullāh bin Mas'ūd reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "No person is killed unjustly but that the elder son of Ādam bears the burden of that blood because he was the first to begin the practice of murder."¹⁸⁸ That wretched soul was Qābeel (Cain), who was led by arrogance and envy to do away with his younger brother, Hābeel (Abel). The story is related in Sūrah al-Mā'idah,¹⁸⁹ beginning directly with the incident which provoked the resentful brother to obey his evil inclination:

وَاتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتُقُبِّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ الْآخَرِ

"And recite to them the story of Ādam's two sons in truth, when they presented an offering and it was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other."

At the outset, one might wonder why. It appears that both brothers had performed a righteous deed seeking the approval of Allah. A few of the Prophet's companions and their students gave an answer to this question in the form of background material (apparently borrowed from Old Testament legends) to the effect that Qābeel had already rebelled and angered his Lord. He refused to marry his twin sister to Hābeel as their father, Ādam, had ordered because he desired her for himself. Then Hābeel, who was a shepherd, sacrificed the best of his flock to Allah while Qābeel, who was a cultivator of crops, offered only that which was spoiled and unfit to eat. So Allah sent a flame from the heaven which consumed the offering of Hābeel, showing His acceptance of it, while that of Qābeel remained untouched. However, there is no hadith from the Prophet (ﷺ) confirming any of those details, and Allah knows best.

Enraged at the rejection of his offering, Qābeel threatened his brother.

"He said, 'I will surely kill you!'" قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ

The sudden outburst is shocking, given that the brothers had just completed an act of worship, and in so doing, should have been in a state of grace.

Quoting Hābeel's reply, Allah *ta'ālā* makes speculation about details of the past irrelevant.

"He said, 'Allah only accepts from the righteous.'" قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

The answer is plain and simple – Allah considers the intent and general attitude of someone who offers anything to Him. And another fact becomes clear from these words: that Qābeel was *not* of the righteous. Whether it was disobedience to his father, coveting the sister who was unlawful to him, jealousy, tyranny or heedlessness toward the right of his Creator, he was a person who had earned for himself the displeasure of Allah. There was no need to mention the nature of his transgressions.

Through these few words, Hābeel was also offering his brother sound advice: "If you expect to be favored by Allah, you must make efforts to please Him. If you are obedient to Him, considerate of His creation, humble, honest and sincere in your service, your noble Lord will surely accept whatever you do for Him." Then he continued:

لَئِنْ بَسَطْتَ إِلَيَّ يَدَكَ لِتَقْتُلَنِي مَا أَنَا بِبَاسٍ بِكَ يَدَيَّ إِلَيْكَ لِأَقْتُلَنَّكَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ

"If you should raise your hand against me to kill me, I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds."

¹⁸⁸ Narrated by al-Bukhāri, Muslim and others.

¹⁸⁹ Āyahs 27-31.

Perhaps this example of forbearance would have moved a more attentive soul to reconsider or to reduce his resentment and rage, but Qābeel was not affected. Hence, Hābeel could only warn him of the consequence of his crime, explaining why he would not fight him and risk becoming a killer himself:

إِنِّي أُرِيدُ أَنْ تَبُوءَ بِإِثْمِي وَإِثْمِكَ فَتَكُونَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الظَّالِمِينَ

"Indeed, I intend for you to obtain my sin and your sin so you will be among the companions of the Fire. And that is the recompense of the unjust."

By "my sin" he meant, "the sin you will commit by killing me."

Could he have known then, that in addition to his own crime, he would share in the sin of every murder committed up until the Day of Resurrection – countless human souls slaughtered mercilessly by beasts in the form of men, driven by malice or greed, by anger or lust, by love of power or merely love of killing? That he would share the burden of every murder by stone, knife, rope or poison, by sword, axe, arrow or spear, by bullet, missile, bomb or chemical, by every method devised for that purpose until Allah inherits the earth? Millions of victims to be avenged one by one, throughout eternity. What torment could possibly suffice for the miserable Qābeel? But at that moment, he did not care, or worse, he did not believe.

The Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) disclosed, "Whoever initiated a good tradition which is practiced by others after him will have the reward of it and the same as their rewards, although their rewards will not be decreased at all; and whoever initiated a bad tradition which is practiced by others after him will have the sin of it and the same as their sins, although their sins will not be decreased at all."¹⁹⁰ This is so because the first time something is undertaken, it will require more thought and effort, whereas to imitate it is inevitably easier. And the one who acts initially is either directly or indirectly showing others how to do the same.

Commentators mention in passing that Hābeel's serene conduct was out of personal choice, preferring the justice of the Hereafter to that of this world. However, a Muslim is certainly allowed to fight back in defense of his person and property. As narrated in the "*Ṣaḥeeḥs*" of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: A man asked the Prophet (ﷺ), "What if someone is forcing me to give him my property?" He replied, "*Prevent him.*" He asked, "What if he assaults me?" He said, "*Fight him.*" "And if he kills me?" He answered, "*You are a martyr.*" "And if I kill him?" He said, "*Then he is in the Hellfire.*" Most jurists consider that defending oneself is obligatory and that passivity is permissible only at times when greater *fitnah*¹⁹¹ is feared, as during the insurrection when the caliph 'Uthmān was killed while refusing to resist.

Ibn Katheer relates that after Qābeel threatened Hābeel, the younger brother, who was the stronger of the two, took his flocks up into the mountains to avoid confrontation. However, Qābeel was still intent upon eliminating the brother he saw as a rival who had been preferred by Allah. But he knew not how to accomplish it. Upon finding Hābeel asleep in the pasture, Qābeel stood there, wondering what he should do to be rid of him. Iblees (the Shayṭān) lost no time in aiding the wicked man who had so willingly become his ally. He taught him how to kill – not in fair combat but treacherously, while the victim slept; to sever forever his ties of blood and of religion.

Qābeel threw away any last reservation he may have had in order to fulfill his evil desire.

فَطَوَّعَتْ لَهُ نَفْسُهُ قَتْلَ أَخِيهِ فَقَتَلَهُ فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

"And he permitted himself the murder of his brother, so he killed him and became among the losers."

¹⁹⁰ Narrated by Muslim.

¹⁹¹ Among the meanings of *fitnah* are persecution, oppression, injustice, terrorism, civil strife, discord, trial and torment.

He had never wished to resist his malicious impulse, so the Shayṭān assisted him in the accomplishment of his aim. But, as he will admit to his followers at the time of Judgement:

وَمَا كَانَ لِي عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا أَنْ دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِي. فَلَا تَلُمُونِي وَلَوْ مَوْا أَنْفُسَكُمْ.

***"I had no authority over you except that I invited you and you responded to me. So do not blame me but blame yourselves."*¹⁹²**

Had Qābeel feared Allah in the slightest or remembered Him, he would have saved himself a miserable destiny. He supposed that he could gain satisfaction by removing the one whose presence constantly reminded him of what he should be – the brother who could have been his best and closest benefactor. Instead, he lost everything when, by his own will, he lost the mercy of Allah.

He lost the brother who tried to save him from himself. He lost the forgiveness of his Lord and eternal Paradise. And he even lost the peace of mind he thought he could obtain in this world, for his crime began to haunt him from the moment it was completed. There lay the corpse of his brother on the ground as clear evidence of his shameful deed. Moreover, it was beginning to undergo disturbing changes that revolted and terrified him. Again, he wondered what to do. This time there was no more evil to be accomplished and Iblees had abandoned him.

But Allah, who had taken the pure soul of Hābeel, showed mercy to his body as well. He taught the criminal, and through him all mankind, the proper way to dispose of a body after death:

فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ غُرَابًا يَبْحَثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُرِيَهُ كَيْفَ يُورِي سَوَاءَ أَخِيهِ

"Then Allah sent a crow searching [i.e., scratching] in the ground to show him how to hide the disgrace of his brother."

The word "disgrace" or "shame" is normally used in Arabic to refer to the private parts of a male or a female, something which is concealed by every dignified person. The word suggests that in the same way, the body of the deceased should be covered by burial so as not to be observed by the living. Indeed, the grave is among the greatest blessings of this world, for it conceals the body when it is in a state that no one would like others to observe.

Qābeel had never seen death before; perhaps it was the first occurrence among the children of Ādam. The crow sent by Allah alighted nearby. It began to scratch the ground until a hollow appeared, and Qābeel perceived that this was the way to conceal his brother's body.

قَالَ يَا وَيْلَتَا أَعْجَزْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِثْلَ هَذَا الْغُرَابِ فَأُورِيَ سَوَاءَ أَخِي

"He said, 'O woe to me! Have I failed [even] to be like this crow and hide the disgrace of my brother?'"

How helpless is man without the knowledge and guidance provided by Allah. This affair had turned into a disaster for the killer – a nightmare of anxiety, fear and distress.

"So he became of the regretful." فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ النَّادِمِينَ

How deeply he regretted this affliction he had caused himself – yet he did not regret his evil deed nor did he repent from it. Had he done so, Allah would have forgiven him as He forgave his parents after they forgot the command of their Lord and then repented. The mention of his regret implies also that Qābeel was punished by Allah in this world even before the next. We are not told what happened to him, but commentators cite the Old Testament narration which relates that he was cursed upon the face of the earth, to wander about hungry and lost. And the Messenger of

¹⁹² Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:22.

Allah (ﷻ) confirmed, "There is no sin more worthy of Allah's hastening the penalty for its perpetrator in this world along with what He has stored for him in the Hereafter than committing an outrage and severing ties of relationship."¹⁹³ Qābeel had done both.

Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, concludes the narration by disclosing the enormity of such a crime, and thus prepares the Muslim *ummah* for the legislation which is to follow. It shows the divine concept of human life, its value in the sight of Allah, and the great distinction one earns by preserving a life. And He confirms as valid for all humanity until the Day of Resurrection the ruling that had been given to the Children of Israel as a result of this first vindictive violation:

مَنْ أَجَلَ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

"Because of that We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul, unless [legally] for another soul or for corruption done in the land, it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever keeps one alive, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely."¹⁹⁴

Yet, the Prophet (ﷺ) foretold that before the Final Hour there would be widespread massacres and bloodshed – to the point that men would not know why they killed or why they were being killed.¹⁹⁵ He advised people at that time to take refuge from general chaos and civil strife, avoiding it as much as possible.¹⁹⁶

When our Lord first announced that He was going to create the father of mankind whose progeny would inhabit the earth in spite of their clear tendencies toward corruption and bloodshed,¹⁹⁷ the angels were amazed. But they could not be blamed for their wonder, so their Lord merely reminded them of His perfect and absolute knowledge with a sufficient reply:

قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ.

"He said, 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.'"

For Allah knew:

...that there would be much good in humanity in spite of the deviant individuals who would be a source of trial for others.

...that men could be guided to right conduct, and that prophets and messengers would be sent for that purpose.

...that those passionate creatures would be honored with knowledge and a free will to choose and act. They would be given the power to control that will and to make it subservient to their Creator when they chose to do so, and to struggle and strive for His acceptance and approval.

Among them would be martyrs, upholders of truth, worshippers, pious scholars and righteous workers, loving and fearing Allah, seeking His acceptance and competing for His approval, following the path of His messengers in order to become close to Him. They would have the capability to consciously and patiently exert themselves and even suffer great hardships to earn His reward, making them superior to the angels, who know not desire and are unable to disobey.

¹⁹³ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

¹⁹⁴ This does not include legal retribution or jihād, which are different matters altogether.

¹⁹⁵ Muslim.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Bukhārī.

¹⁹⁷ Refer to Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:30.

Yes, many would choose the path of Iblees, as did Qābeel, but many others would prove worthy of the responsibility entrusted to mankind, of the honor bestowed upon Ādam when Allah ordered the angels to prostrate before him, and of the Paradise prepared for the righteous by their Lord.

This is what the angels in their purity and goodness could not have known. But it has been proven true throughout human history, and it will continue to be so until that Day when each individual is returned to his Creator to face the precise and just account of all his deeds and intentions. The choice is man's to make or to amend, and the door of repentance is always open.

Everyone can prove something to the angels.

Time and Direction

Time is a creation of Allah, the Mighty and Majestic,¹⁹⁸ which, among other possible functions, serves as a standard of measurement for the living creatures of this universe. It is a dimension once believed to be eternal, absolute and uniform. Only in the last century was it shown to be neither uniform nor independent of space dimension but a concept relative to its observer, varying according to his position and speed of movement through space. No wonder, then, that our Creator has described days of varying lengths in the Qur'ān, and that clearly, the Day of Resurrection (*Qiyāmah*), with all it contains of enormous events – destruction, re-creation, and the establishment of a totally new order, could not have previously been imagined by man without the assistance of divine revelation. In the words of Allah, the Exalted:

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا. وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

"Indeed, they see it as distant, but We see it as near."¹⁹⁹

The recently discovered curvature of the space-time dimension means that laws of science do not distinguish between past and future. However, there is a sense of direction instilled in the psychological makeup of man, as he remembers and records what is past, experiences what is present, and feels an uncertainty about the future. We notice progressive changes in ourselves and in those around us, as well as the tendency of everything material to eventually come undone. We are swept along the path of life willingly or unwillingly by the pull of earthly time, escaping it only at death to enter another realm of existence.²⁰⁰

Mankind has always been concerned with time, its passage and measurement. The Qur'ān speaks generally about two categories of time: that of earthly duration as experienced by man and that whose nature is known only to Allah. A few examples of earthly times are:

وَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَأَهْلِكُوهَا بِرِيحٍ صَرْصَرٍ عَاتِيَةٍ. سَخَّرَهَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَبْعَ لَيَالٍ وَتَمَازِيَةَ أَيَّامٍ حُسُومًا

"But as for 'Aad, they were destroyed by a screaming, violent wind imposed on them for seven nights and eight days in succession."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ There has occasionally been some misunderstanding concerning the statement by Allah's Messenger (ﷺ): "Do not revile time [*ad-dahr*], for Allah is time." (Narrated by Muslim.) It does not imply that Allah and time are one in the same, for He is absolutely unique, far exalted above all creation and in no way a part of any of it. The meaning understood from the Arabic wording is merely that He is the source and Creator of time, who controls and regulates it as He wills. This point is clarified in similar ḥadīths from al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁹⁹ Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:6-7.

²⁰⁰ Our sense of time and direction is almost certainly related to the expansion of the universe. Although Allah stated categorically that ***"We have constructed the heaven with strength, and We are [its] expander"*** (Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:47), most western scientists resisted the concept as long as possible, for an expanding universe would imply that there must have been a starting point, which could not be accounted for unless there was a Creator. They preferred to search out whatever might support the theory of a stable universe, which, along with the previous concept of time, had always existed with no beginning and no end. But the fact of expansion was confirmed in 1929 through actual observation and subsequent calculations. It was shown that other galaxies are moving away from ours at speeds proportionate to their distance – the farther the galaxy, the faster it is moving away. By the second half of the twentieth century, more and more scientists were subscribing to the theory which asserts that the presently expanding universe began with a singularity, a point at which the space-time curvature is infinite. From that point (infinitely small, dense and hot, and at which the laws of science break down) developed all the forces, dimensions and particles comprising the vast creation we observe today. As Allah *ta'ālā* said, ***"Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them?"*** (Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:30)

²⁰¹ Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah, 69:6-7.

وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ

"And these days [of varying conditions] We alternate among the people." ²⁰²

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ خِلْفَةً لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يَذَّكَّرَ أَوْ أَرَادَ شُكُورًا

"And it is He who made the night and day in succession for whoever desires to remember or desires gratitude." ²⁰³

يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى

"[Allah] causes the night to enter the day and causes the day to enter the night and has subjected the sun and the moon – each running [its course] for a specified term." ²⁰⁴

يَسْتَأْذِنُكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِ فَلَهُنَّ مَوَاقِبُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ

"They ask you about the new moons. Say, 'They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj.' " ²⁰⁵

وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ وَازْدَادُوا تِسْعًا

"And they remained in their cave for three hundred years and exceeded by nine." ²⁰⁶

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا

"We sent Nūh to his people, and he remained among them a thousand minus fifty years." ²⁰⁷

As for time in the estimation of Allah:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَمَا مَسَّنَا مِنْ لُغُوبٍ

"And We did surely create the heavens and earth and what is between them in six days, and there touched Us no weariness." ²⁰⁸

قُلْ أَتُنتَكُم لَتَكْفُرُونَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَتَجْعَلُونَ لَهُ أَندَادًا

"Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals?" ²⁰⁹

إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ

"When He decrees a matter He but says to it 'Be,' and it is." ²¹⁰

²⁰² Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:140.

²⁰³ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:62.

²⁰⁴ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:13.

²⁰⁵ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:189.

²⁰⁶ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:25. The increase of nine years reflects a difference between the solar and lunar calendars.

²⁰⁷ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:14.

²⁰⁸ Sūrah Qāf, 50:38.

²⁰⁹ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:9.

²¹⁰ Sūrah Maryam, 19:35.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ

"Indeed, Allah has knowledge of the [final] Hour."²¹¹

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ تَكُونُ قَرِيبًا

"And what will make you perceive? Perhaps the Hour is near."²¹²

وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ

"And indeed, a day with your Lord is like a thousand years of those that you count."²¹³

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ

"The angels and the Spirit [i.e., Jibreel] will ascend to Him in a Day the extent of which is fifty thousand years."²¹⁴

Another aspect of time mentioned in the Qur'ān is how it is seen from a distance (i.e., the farther one is from a point in time, the more fleeting it seems). Allah *ta'ālā* said:

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُهُمْ كَأَن لَّمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا سَاعَةً مِنَ النَّهَارِ

"On the Day He will gather them, it will be as if they had not remained [in the world] but an hour of the day."²¹⁵

يَوْمَ يَدْعُوكُمْ فَتَسْتَجِيبُونَ بِحَمْدِهِ وَتَظُنُّونَ إِن لَّبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

"On the Day He will call you and you will respond with praise of Him and think you had not remained except for a little."²¹⁶

قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ عَدَدَ سِنِينَ. قَالُوا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ

"He will say, 'How long did you remain on earth in number of years?' They will say, 'We remained a day or part of a day.'"²¹⁷

كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَاهَا

"It will be, the Day they see it, as though they had not remained except for an afternoon or a morning."²¹⁸

And the Creator informed us that the present creation is limited to a decreed term:

²¹¹ Sūrah Luqmān, 31:34.

²¹² Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:63.

²¹³ Sūrah al-Ḥajj, 22:47.

²¹⁴ Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:4. When asked about the days mentioned in the last two verses (22:47 and 70:4), Ibn 'Abbās refused to speculate, saying only, "They are two days which Allah mentioned in His Book, and Allah knows best about them."

²¹⁵ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:45.

²¹⁶ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:52.

²¹⁷ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:112-113.

²¹⁸ Sūrah an-Nāzi'āt, 79:46.

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ

"For every nation is a term."²¹⁹

وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا

"And the sun runs [on course] to its destination."²²⁰

مَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى

"We did not create the heavens and earth and what is between them except in truth and for a specified term."²²¹

وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى

"And He subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term."²²²

It follows that life, fragile as it is, would be no exception. As the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"There is no [true] life except the life of the Hereafter."*²²³ The term of a human life span in this world is of concern to Muslims because how it is used has a direct bearing upon one's eternal life to come. The time about which people will be questioned at Judgement is the term granted precisely according to the Creator's perfect knowledge of what is adequate for every soul to establish proof to itself of the destiny it deserves. That period extends from the time a person attains the age of reason until his death (the only future certainty), about which Allah said:

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كِتَابًا مُّؤَجَّلًا

"And it is not [possible] for one to die except by permission of Allah at a decree determined."²²⁴

وَلَنْ يُؤَخَّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجَلُهَا

"But never will Allah delay a soul when its time has come."²²⁵

And to clarify further:

قُلِ اللَّهُ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُكُمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لِأَرْبَابٍ فِيهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Say, 'Allah causes you to live, then He causes you to die; then He will gather you for the Day of Resurrection, about which there is no doubt.' However, most of the people do not know."²²⁶

As creatures of a particular environment, our immediate concern is with the familiar time frame imposed by our Creator on the inhabitants of this planet. Allah *ta'ālā* has set up for residents of the earth a convenient system of measurement.

²¹⁹ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:34 and Sūrah Yīnus, 10:49.

²²⁰ Sūrah Yā Seen, 36:38.

²²¹ Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, 46:3. See also Sūrah ar-Rīm, 30:8.

²²² Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:2, Sūrah Luqmān, 31:29, Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:13 and Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:5.

²²³ Narrated by al-Bukhārī. The same meaning is expressed in the Qur'ān, Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:64.

²²⁴ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:145.

²²⁵ Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn, 63:11.

²²⁶ Sūrah al-Jāthiyah, 45:26.

فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ وَجَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ سَكَنًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ حُسْبَانًا

"[He is] the cleaver of daybreak, and has made the night for rest and the sun and moon for calculation."²²⁷

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَاتٍ لِّمَنْ أَحْسَنَ الْبَصِيرَةِ لِنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ فَضْلًا مِن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا

"And We have made the night and day two signs, and We erased the sign of the night and made the sign of the day visible – that you may seek bounty from your Lord and may know the number of years and account [of time]. And everything We have set out in detail."²²⁸

The unit of measurement most obvious to man from his earliest existence was the twenty-four hour period of day and night determined by the earth's rotation. Through observation of the heavenly bodies and mathematical calculations he could also count months and years. In modern times men have developed instruments that measure not only hours, minutes and seconds, but minute fractions thereof for the benefit of specialists in various fields. Similarly, the defining of longer periods, eras or eons is useful to historians and scientists, and only Allah knows what will be in the future.

The Quran teaches us a particular way to look at time. While it is the substance of present reality, it is not restricted by earthbound chronology. Its value in relation to the life of a believer is certain - never to be misused or wasted, for indeed, whatever remains of it for him is a primary commodity provided by the Creator, to be used in preparation for eternity.

²²⁷ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:96.

²²⁸ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:12.

Dealing With Qadar

Not a single thing takes place except that Allah knows it beforehand, and nothing occurs except by His will and His decree. Allah *ta'ālā* predetermined everything that has happened from the beginning of creation and everything that will ever happen until its end. All of it is registered in the eternally preserved tablet, *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūth*. Whatever is decreed by Allah must occur, and what was not decreed by Him can never occur. Nothing happens in this universe, good or bad, except by His will, and none of His creation can change anything that Allah has decreed. The Qur'ān states:

وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَرًا مَّقْدُورًا.

"And the command of Allah was a destiny determined."²²⁹

Qadar is Allah's plan for His creation. Even though it may not be understood, one cannot question Allah about what He does because human comprehension is severely limited. Instead, we believe in Allah's complete justice and wisdom and that He does not decree except what is good. Difficulties and disasters become easier to bear with the knowledge that trials are decreed for us as opportunities to earn His great reward. Allah instructed His Messenger (ﷺ):

قُلْ لَنْ يُصِيبَنَا إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَنَا...

"Say, 'Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us.'"²³⁰

He decreed these trials *for* us, not "upon us" or "against us."

Everything exists and occurs by Allah's will. He who created people also created the means by which they act: their own wills and abilities. They do good or evil deeds through the will and ability which Allah has given them.

But human wills and abilities do not operate outside the will of Allah, who created them. Although one's deeds, destiny and fate is willed by Allah and known to Him, it does not mean that He compels anyone to do good or evil, because He has willed to give each individual a choice about what he does. Therefore, all human decisions are within the framework of His will. Allah knows what every person will choose to do and then allows him to do it. And while He does not call us to account for anything beyond our control or ability, we are responsible for every free choice we make, and will find the consequences of that choice both in this life and the next.

When Allah gave these options, He also provided the guidance by which to make smart choices. He informed us of what pleases Him and what angers Him; what earns reward and what earns punishment. He mapped out the path to Paradise and warned everyone to avoid the path of Hell. Then He honored mankind with trust and responsibility to obey Him willingly, and not merely automatically as other creations do. This is how His approval and reward are earned – through willing obedience to Him and sincere worship.

When people are lazy and careless, neglecting their duties and causing serious problems they often blame the negative results on destiny or fate. Some even claim that if Allah had willed, they would not have sinned or committed crimes. But Allah taught man how he should live and ordered him to do what is right. How unjust it is to blame someone else for one's own mistakes; but it is far worse to blame Allah, the Exalted, whose justice is complete and perfect. Every individual is held responsible within the limits of his ability but not beyond it. Whatever choices one makes and acts

²²⁹ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:38.

²³⁰ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:51.

upon freely can never be excused by blaming fate. Only those misfortunes which are outside one's control may be attributed to *qadar* without accountability.

Qadar is not something to wait for passively; it is something to achieve with Allah's help. Everything that Allah has decreed is the result of a cause. "Cause and effect" is the natural law by which *qadar* is determined, so when a person uses a means to achieve something, Allah has decreed the outcome accordingly. Just as hard work and careful planning generally lead to success while laziness or carelessness undoubtedly lead to failure, righteous deeds will lead to Paradise and evil ones will lead to the Hellfire.

Everyone's destiny in this life and in the Hereafter is indeed predetermined by Allah, yet it is also the direct result of human choices and efforts, and this is what Allah has willed and decreed.

Now or Never

For man time is life itself. It is a valuable commodity on lease from Allah, who observes how it is used by each of His servants. Indeed, it was Islam which awakened mankind to the importance of time, encouraging good use of it and instilling in the conscience a sense of responsibility concerning it. A true Muslim is acutely aware of the passing of time due to the fact that his Creator has associated the obligatory acts of worship (and many voluntary ones) with specific periods of the day, week, month and year. One is not permitted to forget the time of day and thus neglect prayer. He must fit in his other activities around the prayer schedule so that his life becomes orderly and not haphazard. He must account for yearly obligations as well: fasting the month of Ramadhān and giving his zakāh annually when it is due. Hajj is to be performed during certain days of the year with its rites at specific times. The proper time is an essential requirement for each of these pillars of Islam.

For a believer, time is opportunity and time wasted is opportunity lost. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Take advantage of five things before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your busy time, and your life before your death."²³¹ The Prophet also warned that everyone will be called to account in the Hereafter concerning the blessings he was given in this world, among them the time he passed on earth. "The feet of a servant [of Allah] will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is questioned about four: about his life, how he spent it; his knowledge, what he did with it; his wealth, from where he obtained it and how he spent it; and his body, how he used it."²³² And he said, "Allah is justified concerning a person whose time He has extended until he reaches sixty years,"²³³ meaning that Allah has given such a one ample time to repent and amend himself, and thereafter will not accept his excuse for failure to do so.

Every moment is an opportunity. Allah addressed His Prophet (ﷺ), saying:

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ. وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

"And when you have finished [your duties], get up. And to your Lord direct desire."²³⁴

In other words, do not be satisfied with completing your work and fulfilling your obligations to Allah and to His creation, but fill your remaining hours or minutes with additional worship and remembrance of your Creator and Sustainer.

Using time well requires knowledge of what deeds are appropriate at each interval and the priorities of every circumstance. It is reported that Abū Bakr advised 'Umar, saying, "Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, has a right at night which He will not accept during the day; and He has a right by day which He will not accept at night. And Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, does not accept supplementary worship until the obligation has been fulfilled." Life should be organized according to this important principle, and "obligation" comprises all that Allah has commanded and the cessation of all He has prohibited.

And good use of time includes turning ordinary daily activities into worship through intention. Mu'ādh bin Jabal confided to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'ari, "I sleep the first part of the night and arise for prayer in the last part, so I seek reward in both my sleep and my prayer." In the same way all kinds of work done with precision and honesty in obedience to Allah are rewarded by Him. Praising Allah

²³¹ Narrated by al-Hākim - ṣaḥeeḥ.

²³² Narrated by at-Tirmidhī - ṣaḥeeḥ.

²³³ Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

²³⁴ Sūrah ash-Sharḥ, 94:7-8.

and asking His forgiveness while performing routine tasks enables one to double the benefit of his time and obtain therein a greater share of reward.

Aḥmad bin ‘Aṭā’ was questioned about the Prophet's saying, *"Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim."*²³⁵ He said, "It is knowledge of the [present] condition, of time, and of evil, for one who is ignorant about his time does not have the knowledge he was ordered to obtain." And the Umayyad caliph, Sulaymān bin ‘Abdul-Malik, once asked the *tābi’ee* scholar Ibn Ḥāzim, "Why is it that we dislike death?" With his usual frankness, Ibn Ḥāzim answered, "Because you have ruined your afterlife and cultivated your worldly life, so you do not like to shift from affluence to ruin. And what a ruin it is!"

Visiting a graveyard serves as a powerful reminder that one does not have "all the time in the world." Our time is now. The world will exist after us for as long as Allah wills, but we will spend that period under the ground without ability to measure or to use it, except in regret for deeds undone, hours misused, and moments of carelessness. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) encouraged the visiting of graves in order to remind the living of death and what accompanies it of lost opportunity.

Ibn al-Jawzī quoted a man as telling his family after such a visit, "I was with people who have been deprived of what we have." And he reported that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī asked someone with him at a burial, "Do you think that the deceased now wishes he could return to the world to do good deeds and seek forgiveness of his Lord?" "Yes," replied the man. He said, "Then why should we not be like him?" meaning, before it is too late for us as well. And how true are the words of Allah *ta’ālā*:

وَالْعَصْرِ. إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالحَقِّ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالصَّبْرِ

"By time, indeed mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised one another to truth and advised one another to patience."²³⁶

Consciousness that one's term on earth could very well end before the reoccurrence of any given occasion or season moves a believer to seek Allah's acceptance through constant repentance and remembrance. He will thus be likely to die in a state pleasing to Allah and be resurrected in that condition.²³⁷

It is unfortunate that the majority of mankind prefers to put aside the thought of death and instead concentrate on the present temporary existence. Allah *ta’ālā* affirmed:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ. وَتَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ

"No, but you love the immediate and neglect the Hereafter."²³⁸

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

"But you prefer the worldly life, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting."²³⁹

²³⁵ Narrated by aṭ-Ṭabarānī and al-Bayhaqī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

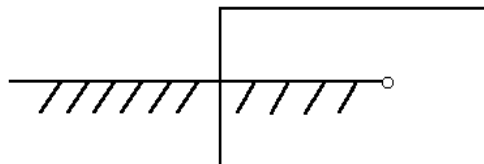
²³⁶ Sūrah al-‘Aṣr, 103:1-3.

²³⁷ The Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that every person will be returned to the next life in the condition in which he died. (Narrated by Muslim.)

²³⁸ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:20-21.

²³⁹ Sūrah al-A‘lā, 87:16-17.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) observed that the heart of an aged person remains young in two respects: love of the world and excessive expectation.²⁴⁰ And he illustrated that man's worldly ambitions usually exceed the time allotted to him. The Prophet (ﷺ) drew a square and a line in the center extending outside of it and some small lines attached to the one in the center on his side of the line in the center.



He said, "This [point] is man, and this is his term surrounding him, and this extending one is his hope, and these small lines are calamities to which he is exposed. If this misses him, this will strike him; and if this misses him, this will strike him."²⁴¹ Ibn Hajar added, "So whoever does not die from one of these afflictions will die [anyway] due to his term having ended." Another narration ends, "And while he is thus [planning his future], the nearer line [i.e., death] comes upon him."²⁴²

At the conclusion of his book *Talbees Iblees*, Ibn al-Jawzī described how Iblees (the Shayṭān) misleads people through their expectations of a long life. He wrote:

"How many times has a person felt in his heart the love of Islam, but Iblees kept putting him off, saying, 'Do not be hasty and proceed slowly,' delaying him until he died as a disbeliever. In the same way he delays the repentance of a sinner by showing him an objective in his desires and in postponement of a return to Allah. Perhaps a scholar intends to prepare his lesson, so he [Iblees] says, 'Rest awhile,' or a worshipper awakens to pray at night but he tells him, 'You have plenty of time,' and continues to encourage laziness and discourage action under the pretext of extended hope. So a prudent one will determine to be resolute in making use of time and not postponing the cessation of evil and the undertaking of good."

The Islamic concept of time is reflected in quotations by and about some of the early scholars. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, "You are but numbered days. For each day that has gone, a part of you has gone. Not a day passes but that it says, 'O son of Ādam, I am a new day who will witness your deeds; and when I leave you, I will not return.' Your day is a guest, so treat it well. If you do so, it will go on its way praising you; but if you do not, it will go on its way blaming you." And he said, "The world is but three days: yesterday, which has gone with all it contained; tomorrow, in which you may not be present; and today, which is yours, so use it well." 'Umar bin 'Abdul-'Azeez remarked, "The night and day are working within you, so work within them." The Prophet's companion, 'Abdullāh bin Mas'ūd, confided, "There is nothing I regret more than a day whose sun has set, decreasing my time, in which my [good] deeds did not increase." Ibrāheem al-Jarrāh related, "Imām Abū Yūsuf al-Qādhī became ill, so I went to visit him. I found him unconscious, but when he awoke he said to me, 'O Ibrāheem, what do you say about such-and-such problem?' I said to him, 'While you are in this condition?!' He said, 'Never mind, let us study – perhaps someone will be saved thereby.' When I arose to leave, I had not reached the gate of his house when I heard them cry out. He had passed away, may Allah have mercy upon him."

Such servants as these are motivated to make the best use of their limited time on earth by the realization that it is one's only chance for procuring a good status in the permanent life to come. Allah, the Mighty and Majestic said:

²⁴⁰ Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

²⁴¹ Narrated by al-Bukhārī. Diagram as shown in *Fath al-Bārī*.

²⁴² Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

***"But what is the enjoyment of the worldly life compared to the Hereafter except a [very] little."*²⁴³**

The worldly life, brief in itself, may come to an end unexpectedly – although in truth, death cannot be unexpected. The wise believer will therefore not postpone any obligation or good deed. When noticing in himself the signs that his days are rapidly lessening, he perceives them as provocation, impelling him to a race with time in which he strives to make use of every moment before it escapes. As expressed by Ibn al-Qayyim, "Whenever something is taken from his body, something is added to his faith. As his physical strength wanes, his certainty is strengthened, as well as his longing for Allah and the home of the Hereafter. Whatever is lost to him of this world is converted by him into an acquisition in the next. And he turns his anxiety, distress and sadness into security, peace and happiness for the Hereafter." By continually seeking Allah's acceptance with patience, gratitude, supplication and righteous deeds, the believer succeeds in manipulating every circumstance to his advantage²⁴⁴ and in focusing his mind on earning the good that will accompany him to the next life. While being prepared for his term's end, he will be blessed in each additional day granted him by Allah, for his righteous deeds will increase.

The Messenger (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "The best of you is one whose life is long and deeds are good, while the worst of you is one whose life is long and deeds are foul."²⁴⁵ So it is obvious that unless utilized for repentance and righteousness, a long life on earth is not in itself a blessing and might be quite the contrary. In the words of Allah, the Exalted:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُطِيلُهُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُطِيلُهُمْ لِيَازِدُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

***"And let not those who disbelieve think that because We extend their time it is better for them. We only extend it for them that they increase in sin, and for them is a painful punishment."*²⁴⁶**

The Muslim believer, however, seldom sees his time as excessive because his duties often exceed the time allotted to him. Hence, he seeks ways to save time and eliminate unnecessary activities, and in spite of such efforts, he may find the hours of a day insufficient to accomplish all that he wishes. One example was Humām bin al-Ḥārith, who used to supplicate, "O Allah, restore me with a brief sleep and provide me with wakefulness spent in obedience to You."

And Allah, the Exalted, warns those who wasted the time He has granted them – warns them of the regret they will feel at death, when they plead:

رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

***"My Lord, if only You would delay me for a brief term so I could give charity and be among the righteous."*²⁴⁷**

But, no; the time for good work has passed, never to return. And soon they will stand for the Account, lamenting their disregard for the precious days they had on earth, crying out in grief and remorse:

²⁴³ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:38.

²⁴⁴ In accordance with the ḥadīth narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim: "Amazing is the affair of the believer; all of it for him is good, and that is not except for the believer. If ease comes to him, he is thankful and it is good for him; and if hardship comes to him, he is patient and it is good for him."

²⁴⁵ Narrated by at-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

²⁴⁶ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:178.

²⁴⁷ Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn, 63:10.

***"How I wish I had advanced [some good] for my Life."*²⁴⁸**

Ibn al-Qayyim wrote: "Time passes and elapses by essence of its nature, so one who is unaware will find his time gone, his loss great, and his regret intense [at the time of death]. Then how will his condition be when he learns for certain the extent of what he has lost... A person's time is, in reality, his life, and it is the raw material of his eternal life – either lasting blessing or painful penalty. And it passes like the passing of clouds."

So as much as one might ignore the progression of time – indifferent to the potential it carries and the consequences it imposes – there will surely come another time in which he must finally acknowledge its value, but alas, it will be too late for amends. His record will have been folded up and stored away to remain unaltered until the Resurrection, when his excuses will be refuted by the reproach of his Creator:

أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَن تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ

***"Did We not grant you life enough for one to remember therein...?"*²⁴⁹**

Scholars have pointed out that due to the prevalence of confusion, discord and disbelief toward the end of mankind's term on the earth, one should not, at that time, hasten to action before being certain of two things: that his intention is sincerely directed to Allah alone and that his deed is correct according to the stipulations of the Islamic Shari'ah. For these two are conditions mentioned both directly and indirectly throughout the Qur'ān and prophetic ḥadīths, without which there can be no reward from Allah in the Hereafter.

The companion, Ibn Mas'ūd, advocated caution during such periods when ignorance is widespread and beliefs are various and often corrupted. He said, "Right guidance during the last age of time will be better than an abundance of work." Thus, the believer is advised to pause before embarking on what he considers a good deed and confirm its acceptability to Allah so as not to waste his precious hours on something without benefit, particularly innovations in religious practice. For Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) warned, *"Whoever brings into this practice of ours that which is not a part of it – it is rejected,"*²⁵⁰ i.e., it will not be rewarded by Allah. Muslim individuals, communities and nations are once again required to awaken to the value of time, putting it to use in the most correct, appropriate and productive methods, in devotion and obedience to Allah.

²⁴⁸ Sūrah al-Fajr, 89:24. i.e., the permanent life in the Hereafter.

²⁴⁹ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:37.

²⁵⁰ Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.

Illness and Disability

Sickness and death are the most powerful reminders that man's stay in the present world is temporary and that he was not created to settle here into a life of pleasure and ease. If this world, with its many adventures and various stopovers, is but a journey toward the permanent and everlasting home, the traveler has been provided with certain materials and resources to use along the way as well as capital with which to purchase all his heart desires in the eternal home. Among these assets, though often disguised, is illness, an honest advisor. It says, "You were created weak and are not immortal, so prepare for what is to come. Your body, your energy and abilities are not yours; they are on lease to you only as long as their Owner permits, so use them well while you can."

The capital provided by Allah for one's journey is time, and it steadily decreases, whether spent wisely or carelessly. Trials of illness and injury serve to slow its departure and multiply its benefit. Just as time passed in pleasure is perceived by human consciousness as brief and fleeting, pain and discomfort retard its passing, enabling one to profit through reflection, additional worship and fervent supplication which is pleasing to Allah. Illness or disability can be seen as opportunity – first, to purify the patient of sins which would otherwise cause far greater distress in the Hereafter, and second, to elevate the soul through pure worship free of hypocrisy: constant remembrance of Allah, supplication, sincere repentance and honest intentions for the future.

There are two kinds of affliction, actual and imagined. For true illness one should seek treatment. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"For every disease there is a treatment, and when it contacts the disease it cures by permission of Allah."*²⁵¹ Supplication (*du'aa'*) is part of that treatment since it is Allah who permits the cure or withholds it according to His wisdom. But for imagined illness, one should seek refuge in Allah from the Shayṭān who suggests it, and then ignore it. Hypochondria increases when dwelled upon, and can eventually become reality, draining health, wealth and sanity.

The required effort toward prevention and cure does not mean, however, that maladies should always be seen in a negative light. On the contrary, when they occur or persist despite all lawful measures taken against them, one can conclude that Allah meant it to be, and knowledge that His decree cannot be anything but good alleviates much anxiety and stress and enables the Muslim to submit to the will of his Lord and even understand that he has been chosen for this particular test.

If not for infirmity and pain, no one could appreciate the blessing of good health. Indeed, life would seem monotonous and without value. The illusion of permanence and strength can lead a person to heedlessness and neglect, and if the appointed moment of death should come without warning one might well be caught in such a state. The Prophet (ﷺ) informed us, *"Every person will be brought back to life in accordance with the state in which he died."*²⁵² Hence, it is most worthwhile to improve that state as far as possible. Severe illness compels one to think of the grave and what lies beyond, presenting the chance to ready oneself and amend his relationship with Allah. And if he should recover, the believer will surely make good use of any extra opportunity granted him.

The Creator grants a precise measure of life, health, energy and ability according to His perfect wisdom, and when He withholds something of these it reminds the servant that his body and soul belong to Allah and will ultimately return to Him. He has decreed such misfortunes as

²⁵¹ Muslim.

²⁵² Muslim.

illness, injury and disability as a means to prevent more serious diseases of the heart which lead to destruction in the Hereafter, such as pride, arrogance, heedlessness and self-satisfaction.

Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned several treatments for afflictions and illnesses. Among them is to remember that the comforts of this life hold little benefit while the rewards for patience which one's Lord has stored up for him are infinitely better than relief from the ailment, and that losing the reward which Allah has promised for patience is a greater misfortune than the ailment itself. What's more, discontent does not alleviate the problem; in fact, it only intensifies it, pleasing one's enemy, grieving his friend and angering his Lord.

Anxiety, worry and complaint add illness of the heart to that of the body and thus increase it. On the other hand, trusting in Allah and in the benefit of whatever He decrees brings relief to the soul and reduction of bodily discomfort. One can soothe his heart by seeking compensation for it from Allah. Patient endurance will raise the rank of a believer, and for him death holds out the promise of mercy, of relief from the trials of this world and of compensation for every instant of striving and suffering – in fact, a reward of such magnitude as to expose the great blessing in those difficult experiences and obliterate all memory of affliction.

A Muslim need not feel grief and deprivation at inability to do all his usual deeds of worship and charity. Obligatory prayers will always be required on time as long as mental faculties are intact, but are performed according to ability, possibly while sitting, reclining or even by merely signaling with the eyes. When purification is no longer possible one must pray without it; and in cases of extreme difficulty ṭhuhr and 'aṣr prayers may be joined, as can maghrib and 'ishā'. Fasting Ramadhān can be postponed, and when recovery is not expected, will be compensated by feeding the poor. As for supplementary worship, the Prophet (ﷺ) informed his ummah that when a Muslim sustains a temporary or permanent disability Allah commands His recording angels, saying, "*Register for My servant during every day and night whatever good he used to do for as long as he is confined in My restriction.*"²⁵³ Thus, his usual reward is not at all diminished, and in fact, is increased by the additional reward he earns for patience during illness or disability.

Suffering and distress awaken in the soul compassion for others. One remembers those in worse condition than himself and supplicates for their relief. And when he recovers, the memory of his own affliction is a continuing source of mercy toward them. Heightened sensitivity during illness and disability allows one to appreciate those who serve him sincerely, to feel pleasure at the concern of his visitors and to love them in return. Their supplications for him are felt with immediate effect, and bonds of brotherhood are strengthened through Allah's blessing. How often has love and admiration concealed in the heart been disclosed and treasured at such times.

And when a believer experiences the compassion of his family and his fellow Muslims he is reminded of his generous Creator who provided all that for him, whose care for him is absolute, and whose mercy toward him will be manifested in full at the Final Hour when he is most in need. He will long for that meeting and strive to prepare for it, thus insuring, by Allah's will, that his end – whether near at hand or in the more distant future – will be a righteous one. Thereupon he will be told:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

"O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing Him. And enter among My [righteous] servants and enter My Paradise."²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Al-Ḥākim - ṣaḥeeḥ.

²⁵⁴ Sūrah al-Fajr, 89:27-30.

Beyond Our Time

مَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ لَآتٍ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

"Whoever should hope for the meeting with Allah – indeed, the time of Allah is coming. And He is the Hearing, the Knowing."²⁵⁵

* * * * *

In the early days of Islam scornful nonbelievers confronted Allah's Messenger (ﷺ), inquiring when the Hour of Resurrection would be. It was not that they were really eager to know about it. Rather, their question was one of mockery, reflecting denial and challenge to the Prophet (ﷺ). Since Allah has kept knowledge of its time to Himself, He responded to their sarcasm only by mentioning some of its terrors and by informing the arrogant rejecters of faith about the condition in which they would then find themselves unless they changed their course. If they thought they could sidestep the whole issue of preparation for it, Allah simply alluded to its urgency by saying:

لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ تَكُونُ قَرِيبًا

"Perhaps the Hour is near."²⁵⁶

Scholars emphasize that in reality, the Hereafter is as close as one's death, when the soul is liberated from the confines of earthly time and space. 'Ā'ishah reported that some of the desert Arabs would come to the Prophet (ﷺ) and ask him, "When is the Hour?" He would look toward the youngest of them and say, "If this one lives, he will not reach old age before your Hour has come," meaning their death.²⁵⁷

The Prophet (ﷺ) stated in several ḥadīths that among the signs before the final Hour will be the instability and variability of time, the rising of the sun from the west, and thereafter the whole visible universe would undergo great turmoil and destruction to make way for the new creation. Allah *ta'ālā* describes manifestations of this event in the Qur'ān:

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ

"When the sun is wrapped [in darkness] and when the stars are dispersed and when the mountains are removed..."²⁵⁸

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَنَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ

"When the sky is broken and when the stars are scattered and when the seas are erupted and when the graves are scattered..."²⁵⁹

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ. وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ. وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ. وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ. وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ

"When the sky has split and listened to its Lord and is compelled, and when the earth is stretched and has cast out that within it and relinquished [it] and listened to its Lord and is compelled..."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:5.

²⁵⁶ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:63.

²⁵⁷ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

²⁵⁸ Sūrah at-Takweer, 81:1-3.

²⁵⁹ Sūrah al-Infiṭār, 82:1-4.

²⁶⁰ Sūrah al-Inshiqāq, 84:1-5.

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا. وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا

"When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake and the earth discharges its burdens..."²⁶¹

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ.

"They have not appraised Allah with true appraisal, while the earth entirely will be [within] His grip on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him."²⁶²

Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) have referred to the period of resurrection (*qiyāmah*) as both "the Hour" and "the Day." Each expresses something obviously different from the periods we know. That life in the Hereafter is on an entirely different plane from the present worldly life cannot be doubted by anyone. It is described in religious texts as being permanent in contrast to this temporary existence. Paradise and Hellfire are lasting abodes, and their inhabitants will be "dwelling therein eternally."²⁶³ Hence, there is no need for the mention of any specific periods of time during it. In fact, the intervals of days and years mentioned by Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) are merely used to suggest great distances, much as scientists have taken to measuring cosmic distances in light years to simplify calculation and make the concept more perceptible to ordinary human minds.

Many evidences have been taken by scholars from the Qur'ān and Sunnah to confirm that Paradise and Hell have already been created. The gates of Hell will open at the arrival of its inmates, while the gates of Paradise will have opened prior to the approach of its inhabitants, eagerly awaiting them.²⁶⁴ The finality of each destination is emphasized through authentic narrations²⁶⁵ in which the Prophet (ﷺ) stated that death in the form of a spotted ram will be slaughtered between Paradise and Hell for all to see, with the announcement, "There is [now] eternity and no death." And he said, "*Whoever enters Paradise will feel pleasure and will never be miserable, his clothing will not wear out, nor will his youth pass away.*"²⁶⁶

Whatever lies beyond the information revealed through the Qur'ān and authentic ḥadīth is knowledge which the Creator has reserved for Himself. And what He chooses to impart to us in the Hereafter will be experienced in a way that we cannot now perceive. Therefore, speculation about such matters has no practical benefit and is discouraged from a religious point of view.

Nevertheless, a few scholars of the past suggested that since Allah has described Himself as **الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ** "*the First and the Last*,"²⁶⁷ it means all creation will eventually end, while only the Creator will remain. But Allah has stated categorically throughout His Book that Paradise and Hell are permanent abodes of everlasting nature. There is nothing to prevent Him from making them so. In addition, it is evident from the context of every verse confirming the destruction or termination of creation that only the present creation is intended since each of them is accompanied by mention of return and judgement.

²⁶¹ Sūrah az-Zalzalah, 99:1-2.

²⁶² Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:67.

²⁶³ Those Muslims eventually removed from Hell due to the Prophet's intercession are no exception. Once purified of their sins, they will enter Paradise as a final destination.

²⁶⁴ See 39:71 and 39:73.

²⁶⁵ By al-Bukhārī, Muslim and at-Tirmidhī.

²⁶⁶ Refer also to Footnote 184.

²⁶⁷ Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, 57:3.

There is no doubt that Allah is "*al-Bāqī*" (the Remaining), which means that He is without beginning or end. It has been stated that since He is absolute and not subject to the passing of time (or to any aspect of His creation for that matter), His name "*al-Aakhir*" (the Last) refers to an attribute having no relation to time sequence. Instead, it includes such meanings as: beyond all creation, unlimited, indestructible, imposer of consequences, ruler of eternity, etc. This attribute applies to Allah alone (لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ) **"There is nothing like unto Him."**²⁶⁸ and cannot be compared to anything of His creation, including the eternity that He has decreed for some of His creatures.

In recent years astronomers have put forth several theories based upon the fact of an expanding universe which attempt to predict the future of creation. While each new discovery with the possibilities it offers is being studied enthusiastically on a physical level, particularly in the West, there is still very little, if any, consideration of the one factor which renders every expectation uncertain: divine will and the command, "Be."²⁶⁹

While no amount of human research can uncover what Allah has willed to conceal, scientific discoveries are of great interest and worthy of contemplation by Muslims in that they point to the awesome ability of the Creator and Sustainer, increasing the faith of a believer and reminding him of his humble place before the all-powerful Lord of the Worlds. Yet, such findings are irrelevant in relation to the Hereafter since they cannot penetrate the physical barriers of time and space into worlds of the unseen.

وَلِلّٰهِ غَيْبُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ فَاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ

"And to Allah belongs the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and earth, and to Him will be returned the matter, all of it, so worship Him and depend upon Him."²⁷⁰

Man's concept of time has undergone a revolution within the last century, while new discoveries have given him insights that were previously unimaginable. And in spite of this, Qur'ānic descriptions of the physical universe are as true and valid today as they were over 1400 years ago. Moreover, they are being understood in ways which were not possible at the time of their revelation nor during the centuries that followed.

The Qur'ān remains a timeless miracle, a statement from Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* to mankind from beyond the limits of creation. In it are the answers to questions which continue to agitate the hearts of nonbelievers despite their advances in science and technology – such questions as: "Where did we come from, and where are we going?" "Why do we exist?" "Are we created by chance and left to chance?" "If there should be a purpose to creation, then what is it?" Without answers to these questions which are inherent in human nature, the mind will either remain restless and disturbed, or it will seek refuge from subconscious anxiety by drowning itself in worldly affairs – particularly those pursuits that afford a false sense of purpose and accomplishment.

In His mercy, the Mighty and Majestic has sent down a cure for ailments of the soul, offering guidance and direction for any who will accept it – a reassuring constant in an ever changing world. And in His mercy He has provided evidence to satisfy the inquiring mind and uneasy heart.

²⁶⁸ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:11.

²⁶⁹ Some western scientists have boasted that once they have answered basic questions about the present universe and its future course, they will have "understood the mind of God," as if He was somehow limited to the same physical laws He ordained for His creation!

²⁷⁰ Sūrah Hūd, 11:123.

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth."²⁷¹

أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا

"Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān? Had it been from other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction."²⁷²

And in His mercy He invites His servants to believe in Him and consequently to the way of life resulting from that belief. And He has given them time upon the earth during which they may earn an honored position near Him in the Eternal Home.

²⁷¹ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:53.

²⁷² Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:82.

Tests From Allah

This world is a place of striving and struggle, stress and exhaustion, while the Hereafter was created for justice and compensation. Allah informed us the Qur'ān that we will be tested in this life. And because life on earth is a test for every human being, we must expect to have a certain amount of problems, difficulties and hard times. He said:

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

"Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe' and they will not be tried?"²⁷³

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاغِبُونَ. أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ.

"We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits [of labor], but give glad tidings to the patient who, when disaster strikes them, say: 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and those are the rightly guided."²⁷⁴

And the Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed, "When Allah intends good for someone, He tries him with hardships."²⁷⁵

Everyone alive today is in the process of being tested by Allah, and He tests each individual in different ways. One might be tested by illness, financial difficulty, loss of a loved one, disobedient children – the afflictions that may torment a person are innumerable. But all these afflictions, when endured patiently by the believer, are a means of attaining Allah's forgiveness and His reward. They are like bitter medicine; you offer it, despite its bitterness, in order to benefit the one under your care. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "The greatest reward comes from the greatest trial. When Allah loves people He tests them, and whoever accepts it gains approval [from Allah], and whoever becomes angry earns His anger."²⁷⁶

People are tested by the blessings they enjoy just as they are by the misfortunes that befall them. We are tried with wealth as well as poverty. Will we hoard it or be generous? Will we use it for lawful purposes or waste it in sin? We are tested with health as well as sickness. How will we use our minds and bodies? We are tested with the guidance Allah has given us. Will we follow it or ignore it and follow the path of the Shayṭān instead?

We may also be tested through others who experience suffering. Their plight is a test for those whom their lives affect, even for those who know about them. How will they be treated? Will they be helped, cared for, respected and given their rights? Allah has said:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوَكُمْ بِالْشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ.

"Every soul shall taste of death. And We will test you with evil and with good by way of trial. And to Us is your return."²⁷⁷

²⁷³ Sūrah al- 'Ankabūt, 29:2.

²⁷⁴ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:155-157.

²⁷⁵ Al-Bukhāri.

²⁷⁶ At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah – ṣaḥeeḥ.

²⁷⁷ Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:35.

And we may be tested through the disappointments of life – hypocrisy from those we considered pious and betrayal by those we trusted.

The scholars have laid out some guidelines to assist those experiencing the difficulties of tests and trials:

1. Accept Allah's decree

Trials are decrees of Allah that have already come to pass. Nothing takes place except that Allah knew and decreed it beforehand. So we must recognize that whatever befalls us is not something random; it was predetermined for us before the creation of the heavens and the earth. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"For everything there is a reality, and a servant does not attain the reality of faith until he knows that whatever struck him could not have missed him and whatever missed him could not have struck him."*²⁷⁸ Similarly, Allah has said:

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ .

"No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves but that it is in a register before We bring it into being. Indeed, that is easy for Allah."²⁷⁹

And we are reminded of this for a reason:

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ

"In order that you not despair over what eluded you and not exult over what He gave you."²⁸⁰

Those facing difficulties in life should not assume they are punishments or signs that Allah is angry with them. Nor should they interpret the success and pleasure that some enjoy on earth as a sign Allah is pleased with them, for possibly the opposite could be true. For a believer, distress in this life is better than a punishment stored for the Hereafter, which would be far more severe; and many of his sins are being erased thereby.

If suffering had no benefit, Allah would have spared those He loves most, but His Messenger (ﷺ) disclosed that people are tested according to firmness in their religion – the prophets [most], then the righteous end those following them in degree.²⁸¹ As he (ﷺ) disclosed, *"No fatigue, illness, anxiety, sorrow, harm or sadness afflicts any Muslim, even to the extent of a thorn pricking him, without Allah wiping out his sins by it."*²⁸² And he said, *"When Allah intends good for a servant, He hastens punishment for him in this world, but when He wills ill for a servant, he lets his sins accumulate and will punish him fully on the Day of Resurrection."*²⁸³

2. Acknowledge Allah's right of ownership

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ.

"Know that your properties and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward."²⁸⁴

²⁷⁸ Aḥmad - ṣaḥeeḥ.

²⁷⁹ Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, 57:22.

²⁸⁰ Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, 57:23.

²⁸¹ Refer to ḥadīth on p. 33.

²⁸² Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

²⁸³ At-Tirmidhi - ṣaḥeeḥ.

²⁸⁴ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:28.

When one admits the unconditional right of Allah to do as He pleases with His creation, trusting in the ultimate good of His decrees, he will continually be prepared for the possibility of examination through painful experiences. After all, it is He who has given us everything we possess, and He is the true owner of it all. So all that we have – our wealth and property, our homes, our families, our bodies and minds, our abilities, our time, our own souls – all belong to Allah.

And since He is the true owner of everything, and all of it is His property, He makes it available to whom He wills for a specific period according to His wisdom. So He may give something to test you and then take it back to test you. All of our blessings are on loan from Allah and He has the right to take them back; in fact, He has the right to take any of us at any time without notice, so we should not object. In the words of the Qur'ān:

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ.

***"He cannot be questioned for what He does but they will be questioned."*²⁸⁵**

But the believer who submits to the will and decree of Allah and thinks positively of Him takes comfort in the knowledge that through death one is returning to a generous and merciful Lord who will reward him for any good he did many times over and overlook his errors out of His mercy and forgiveness.

Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, tests believers to make clear to them whether their professed faith is strong and sincere or weak and corruptible. Complaining against divine decree, resentment against Allah or outright denial of Him are signs of failure in one's test.

Al-Hasan al-Basri advised, "Do not dislike the trials that afflict you or the calamities that strike you, for there may be something you hate but it leads to your salvation, and there may be something you like, but it leads to your destruction." And as Allah revealed:

وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ.

***Perhaps you hate a thing while it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing while it is bad for you. And Allah knows while you know not.*²⁸⁶**

3. Acknowledge Allah's absolute wisdom, justice and mercy

When one acknowledges that Allah is wiser than himself, more just, and more merciful towards His creation, he can submit to Him and accept His will, knowing that the Creator, Lord and Sovereign of the universe is perfect in every way. We must appreciate that Allah does everything in accordance with His absolute knowledge and wisdom even when we do not understand it. Ibn Taymiyyah said, "The fact that we may not understand the wisdom behind certain decrees and issues should not undermine the basic principle of what we do know about His wisdom. And we should not deny what we know of His wisdom just because we do not know all the details of His wisdom."

Man has been created with limitations and imperfections. One aspect of his shortsightedness is that he focuses on adversities without considering the benefits they may bring or remembering the countless blessings he still enjoys and observes around him. Indeed, one appreciates his own condition more when comparing it with others whose afflictions are worse than his own and when realizing that the blessings retained after a loss are still far greater than those of which one was deprived. For Allah has blessed man in immeasurable ways that cannot compare to the limited misfortunes that befall him.

²⁸⁵ Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:23.

²⁸⁶ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:216.

When a certain human being is known for much good work but fails occasionally, then forgetting the good he has done would be regarded as ingratitude. So what should be thought of Allah, the Exalted, who never fails and whose dealings with His creation are *always* good and beneficial?

4. Think about how to cope with the situation in which Allah has placed you

To begin with, do not despair. We have the ability to endure because, as the Qur'ān has told us:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا.

"Allah charges no soul except [with that] within its capacity."²⁸⁷

This is knowledge which will save the believer from panic, hopelessness and depression.

There are generally two kinds of trials:

- First, those where the misfortune is not seen to be anyone's fault, but merely something decreed by Allah, such as natural disasters, illnesses and accidents. These may cause prolonged sorrow and grief but are readily accepted by a believer as being the will of Allah. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught us to say in such situations, "*Mā qaddar Allāhu wa mā shā fa'al*" (What Allah decreed and willed He has done). And when circumstances are not as one would like, he should say, "*Al-ḥamdu lillāhi 'alā kulli ḥāl*" (Praise is due to Allah in every condition).²⁸⁸
- And second, those occurrences also decreed by Allah, but where human beings are seen to be the immediate cause. While ordinary people tend to hold others responsible for their misfortunes, sensitive believers sometimes go to extremes in blaming themselves. But the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*When something befalls you, do not say, 'If only I had done so and so, then such and such would have happened,' but say, 'What Allah decreed and willed He has done.' For 'if only' (أو) opens the door for the Shayṭān.*"²⁸⁹

5. Consider possible action

Accepting a misfortune does not mean that nothing can be done. Islam expects action and effort to change every undesirable situation and repel harm whenever possible, and this is a requirement of the faith.

All lawful efforts to improve a situation are rewarded by Allah whether they succeed or not. They are judged by the effort applied and not the result, for that is in His hand. For example, a prophet will not be held accountable for those of his people who rejected his message. And one who did his best to save a life will not be blamed by Allah if he failed; rather he will be appreciated for attempting. So if you could not prevent the disaster from happening, perhaps you can lessen its bad effects, help someone, comfort someone, control your own reaction – and earn the reward. Nothing is overlooked by Allah.

However, a word of caution. When faced with harm, people often have a natural impulse to repel it any way possible, possibly leading to transgression against others. The Shayṭān is always prepared to take advantage of a person's weakness during times of anger or despair to incite him into committing sin and losing his reward. That is why stressful circumstances require much self-control, balanced thinking and the recognition that it is not possible to rid the world of all its evil

²⁸⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:286.

²⁸⁸ Ibn Mājah - ḥasan.

²⁸⁹ Muslim.

and injustice. Trials decreed by Allah must be confronted only in ways that are sanctioned by the Shari'ah. Allah has said:

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا. اَعْدِلُوا هُوَ اَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ.

***“And let not the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; it is nearer to taqwā. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Aware of what you do.”*²⁹⁰**

During those seemingly unsolvable problems and crises the afflicted one will instinctively turn to Allah. And He has instructed believers that when some matter worries them or a calamity befalls them to seek help from Him through patience and prayer.²⁹¹ Then, at a time determined by Him, He will relieve distress, provide a solution and give compensation and unlimited reward in the Hereafter for whatever was endured.

6. Repent and return to Allah

The calamities and disasters of this world offer a reminder to repent before the greater punishment of the Last Day. Allah advises people to turn back to Him, saying:

وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ.

***“And We will surely let them taste the nearer punishment less than the greater punishment that perhaps they will return.”*²⁹²**

Many people have been slaves to their own desires rather than to Allah. They thought they were servants of Allah, but when they were tested they failed the test. The Qur'ān describes them thus:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرْفٍ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ.

***“And of the people is one who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to the other direction].”*²⁹³**

Turning away from Allah and anger with His decree are signs of failure. Yet this worldly life continuously presents new opportunities. If you have failed before, you can still repent at any time, turn back to your Lord sincerely and pass this test with His help. In a practical sense, adversities and calamities will show you your true nature. You will realize that you are weak and have no power and no ability except through your Lord. Then you will know you are in need of Him, give up your pride, turn back to Him and seek His help.

7. Be constant in du'aa'

Combined with other efforts, du'aa' is one of the most beneficial means by which relief can be attained. It can lessen calamities, ward them off or prevent greater ones. When the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *“Nothing can avert divine decree except du'aa'”*,²⁹⁴ he meant that when a person avails himself of the prescribed means and calls upon Allah in supplication, this is also part of the divine decree, so one decree is repelled by another when Allah wills it. The same applies to everything that is decreed to happen through a means or cause. Allah has made that particular tool or method the

²⁹⁰ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:8.

²⁹¹ Refer to Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:45 and 2:153.

²⁹² Sūrah as-Sajdah, 32:21.

²⁹³ Sūrah al-Ḥajj, 22:11.

²⁹⁴ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi - ḥasan.

cause for a thing to happen, and it was decreed from eternity, before it happened. The du'aa' itself was decreed by Allah and the result granted by Him was decreed by means of that du'aa'.

Allah is merciful and generous, so one should never assume that he is not righteous enough to earn a response from Him. If we are not so righteous, it is sufficient that we are helpless, distressed and fearful, knowing that no one can help us at such a time except our Creator and Sustainer. It is then that we will become close to Him, because at such moments we are most sincere and humble.

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ

"Is [it not He] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth?"²⁹⁵

For du'aa' to be most effective, it should be done with presence of heart and concentration, along with admission of one's sins and sincere repentance. During times of anxiety, grief or deep distress one should beg Allah repeatedly, particularly when alone in the last portion of the night and during sujūd in prayer. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "One of you will be answered as long as he is not impatient, saying, 'I supplicated but was not answered.'"²⁹⁶ So continue persistently and patiently in du'aa' and don't give up.

Ibn al-Jawzi said, "Part of his trial is when a believer supplicates and repeats his du'aa' for a long time and sees no sign of response. He should realize that this, too, is a test which requires patience. I experienced this myself. My soul (*nafs*) said to me, 'How can you explain Allah withholding His response to your prayers for relief from this calamity?'

I said [answering myself as if addressing a student], 'It is evident that Allah, Most High, is the Sovereign, and the Sovereign may withhold or grant as He wills, so there is no point in objecting. I may think that something is good, but wisdom does not prescribe it, and the reason for that may be hidden; just as a doctor may do things that appear to be harmful, intending something beneficial thereby. Or there might be some advantage in the delay, and haste could be harmful. Or the response could be withheld because of some fault in you. So look for some of these causes.

And perhaps losing what you wanted will cause you to turn to Allah while getting it would distract you from Him. This is obvious, because if not for this calamity you would not have turned to Him. The real calamity is what distracts you from Allah; but what makes you turn to Him is good for you and in your best interest. And if you considered these things you would focus on what is more beneficial for you, such as correcting a mistake or seeking forgiveness or turning to Allah and invoking Him, instead of on what you have suffered."²⁹⁷

8. Practice patience

And when you can't change the situation or do anything more, get out of the driver's seat and leave the matter to your Lord. Trust Him. You are close to Allah during this period and your du'aa' is being heard; and He is supporting you. Trust that there is benefit in the matter according to His perfect knowledge.

When Allah leaves you no option except patience, more options will arise as a result of that patience. However grave the situation is now, it must eventually change. Perhaps the trial is an expiation for sins, and it could have been worse. And there may even be some less obvious benefits, such as the strengthening of character or wisdom gained. Problems are part of life, but the lessons learned from them will last a lifetime. Remember Allah's words:

²⁹⁵ Sūrah an-Naml, 27:62.

²⁹⁶ Muslim.

²⁹⁷ *Sayd al-Khātir*, p. 59-60.

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ.

***No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah – He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things.*"²⁹⁸**

Afflictions are easier to bear with the knowledge that no matter how difficult, they are decreed to enable believers to develop reliance on Allah and earn His approval, as well as a compensation infinitely greater than the adversity. Think of yourself in the Hereafter receiving so great a reward as to make you forget everything you have suffered and endured.

The Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned that one who had suffered most in the world among the people destined for Paradise will be brought and dipped just once into Paradise. He will then be asked, "O son of Ādam, did you ever experience any misery or any hardship in the world?" He will say, "No, by Allah, my Lord, I never experienced any misery or hardship at all."²⁹⁹

It is *makrūh* (disliked) to wish for death because of harm that one has suffered or the adversities of this life. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "None of you should wish for death because of some harm that has befallen him; but if he must, then let him say, 'O Allah, keep me alive so long as life is best for me and cause me to die when death is best for me.'"³⁰⁰ Despite suffering in this world, a believer must patiently continue to fulfill his duties to Allah and do as much good as possible in obedience to His words:

وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ.

"And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty [i.e. death]"³⁰¹

Patience is undoubtedly difficult, but that is why it earns unlimited reward in the eternal life to come. Remember that Allah *ta'ālā* has declared:

نَنَّمَا يُوفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ.

***"Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account."*³⁰²**

It is especially trying when the cause of one's suffering is a human being. Dealing with wrongdoers is a challenge to be met with strength of character and good morals. Expect that there will always be people who will disappoint you, hurt you and sin against you – even among those you love. Try to be tolerant and forgive their mistakes, or at least avoid injustice. And when you cannot prevent them from major sins, continue to pray for their guidance and leave them to their Lord; for He stated in the Qur'ān:

وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرًا.

***"And We have made some of you as trial for others – will you be patient? And your Lord is ever Seeing."*³⁰³**

9. Remember

There are always countless reasons to be grateful to Allah, and there are many people whose hardships are greater. Try to keep in mind and value the many blessings you still have in spite of

²⁹⁸ Sūrah at-Taghābun, 64:11.

²⁹⁹ Muslim.

³⁰⁰ Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

³⁰¹ Sūrah al-Ḥijr, 15:99.

³⁰² Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:10.

³⁰³ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:20.

your affliction. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Look at those with less than you and do not look at those with more than you, for this makes you less likely to underestimate Allah's blessings upon you."³⁰⁴ And as he (ﷺ) advised, "No servant is struck by affliction and then says, 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, reward me in my affliction and follow it up with something better for me' without Allah rewarding him in his affliction and following it with something better for him."³⁰⁵

The life of this world fluctuates between periods of relative ease and difficulty. We must constantly deal with trials and misfortunes throughout life by practicing patience, determination, courage, exertion, proper behavior and reliance upon Allah. So you must never forget that you have been chosen by Allah for this particular test because He knows you have the ability to pass it.

How can we long for Paradise unless we have tasted the bitterness of this life and hardships of this world? It is only there that believers will find relief from harm, pain, hostility and discomfort and enjoy an eternal life of ease and pleasure.

وَفِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ الْأَعْيُنُ وَأَنْتُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ.

"And therein is whatever the souls desire and [what] delights the eyes."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Muslim.

³⁰⁵ Aḥmad and Muslim. The Arabic words are: *Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn. Allāhumma'jurnī fī musībatī wakhluḥ lī khayran minhā.*

³⁰⁶ Sūrah az-Zukhruf, 43:71.

Muslim Spouses Between Rights and Duties

The family has always been the foundation of human life and society. But unfortunately in the present day, family commitments are lessening and gender issues can be found in the home between husbands and wives. Women are asserting themselves to obtain rights, not only in Western societies, but among Muslim families as well. And there are those ignorant of Islam who imagine that that Islam oppresses women and is an obstacle to their freedom and wellbeing.

But knowledgeable Muslims are well aware that Islam expects its adherents to uphold the rights of all people, women included - to safeguard their social status and protect them from every kind of exploitation. When women are mistreated in Muslim homes or societies, it is but a reflection of certain customs and habits that are inconsistent with and completely contrary to Islamic teachings. These issues need to be addressed and eliminated, not by the international community, but by Muslims themselves within the framework of Islam.

We have finally become aware that the process of globalization can bring no real reform to the Muslim ummah, and that in reality, it promotes a western model of secularization that deprives others of their religious and cultural heritage, giving them nothing in return. In particular, it claims to improve the condition of women by freeing them from religious and social restrictions, and endeavors ultimately to "liberate" them from modesty, chastity and family commitment in the name of "self-fulfillment" and "empowerment."

There is no need to mention the status of women in earlier civilizations, which was so low that they were denied basic human dignity. This has been recognized as the reason behind women's movements worldwide. But what is still unknown and denied by many is the fact that over 1400 years ago Islam secured for the woman her intellectual, religious, social, economic and political rights, including the right to an education, the right to own property and use it at her own discretion, and the right to work or *not* to work.

Islam presents its family rulings within the context of spouses as partners and allies. In the words of the Qur'ān:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another.³⁰⁷

They strive individually and jointly to uphold justice, which is the minimal obligation in any relationship, as well as an individual obligation for which every male and female will be answerable on the Day of Account. Believers are commanded to establish justice and maintain it in every situation:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ

O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives.³⁰⁸

As men and women are two equally important component parts of humanity, the rights and responsibilities of both genders in Islam are equitable and balanced in their totality. Allah, Most High has addressed husbands, saying:

وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ

And due to them [i.e., wives] is similar to what is expected of them bil-ma'rūf,

³⁰⁷ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:71. And from there it is encouraged to move on to the practice of *ihsān* (additional kindness and generosity).

³⁰⁸ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:135.

and the men have a degree over them.³⁰⁹

Bil-ma'rūf means according to what is reasonable, right and good, consistent with the Qur'ān and Sunnah, approved socially by custom, compatible with physical natures and suitable to particular situations. But although the Creator has given the husband a "degree" of authority over his wife, it is in no way a license to practice tyranny within the household. Rather, for him it means responsibility, guardianship and accountability – the burden of obligation to care completely and conscientiously for his wife and children.

Indeed, Islam is a fair and balanced system of life. While it specifies rights for each of the partners it also specifies obligations. But Islam is not just about rights and duties. It is about care, concern, trust, and consideration of the needs and mental conditions of others. The system designed by the all-wise Creator enables people, in spite of their human imperfections, to achieve a measure of peace and harmony in mutual relationships while fulfilling their obligations to society and to their Lord. It is actually about conscience and the relationship with Allah.

In Islam, men and women are equal before their Creator and both are accountable to Him. Women, like men, are commanded to worship and obey Allah. They are equal regarding the general aspects of the law and in the scale of justice governed by Allah. Both are promised the same rewards and the same punishments according to their intentions and conduct. The Qur'ān confirms:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا.

Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.³¹⁰

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا.

It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter, that they should [thereafter] have any choice about their affair. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into clear error.³¹¹

So it is imperative for all Muslims to know exactly what their Lord expects of them concerning every aspect of life in order to earn His approval and avoid punishment. In the Qur'ān Allah has promised:

أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَى بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ...

Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:228.

³¹⁰ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:35.

³¹¹ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:36.

³¹² Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:195.

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْتَى وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا.

And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer – those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.³¹³

Although the obligations of women differ from those of men in certain areas according to basic physical and psychological differences, each gender is equally accountable for his or her particular responsibilities in dealing with the concerns of life. For Muslims, any relationship must include the essential aspect of *taqwā* (righteousness and consciousness of Allah) as well as *adab* (good manners and gracious conduct), with patience, gratitude, communication, sincere advice and at times, observance of silence and reflection.

There is a universal consensus among Muslim scholars regarding the basic rights of husbands and wives which are derived from the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah, and these are part of the main body of the Shari'ah. But a marriage based solely upon rights and duties will be a tense and restricted one. In effect, it is intended to be as stated in the Qur'ān:

مِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

And of His signs is that He created for you from among yourselves mates that you may find tranquility with them, and He placed between you affection and mercy.³¹⁴

Among the mutual obligations for both husband and wife are to provide emotional support, to offer good advice concerning obedience to Allah and to forgive one another's mistakes. And while both spouses have the right to good and fair treatment, there are some specific rights pertaining to women as well; for example:

It is unlawful for a woman to be married off without her consent or to be forced into a marriage.³¹⁵ She also has the right to initiate a separation from marriage if her rights are not being granted or if she cannot bear the husband. Women as well as men have the right to be educated, to think independently and to express themselves. A wife is entitled to be given a suitable gift at the time of marriage, which is her property exclusively; her father and husband have no claim to any part of it unless she permits it willingly.³¹⁶ She is entitled to full maintenance after marriage, even if she should be wealthy, and is not required to contribute to household expenses. She is entitled to inherit in her position as a mother, a wife and a daughter.³¹⁷ She is entitled to respect within the home and to protection of her person and reputation from every kind of harm.³¹⁸

The Muslim woman has a distinct and separate identity and personality. From the early days of Islam, women engaged in such occupations as commerce, agriculture and manufacturing. They could save, invest or use their earnings and property as they wished, and there is consensus among

³¹³ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:124.

³¹⁴ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:21.

³¹⁵ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "The previously married woman is not to be married until she is consulted, nor the virgin until her permission is sought." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

³¹⁶ See Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:4.

³¹⁷ The difference in shares of male and female children is based on a financial burden that Islamic law imposes on the male heir towards other family members, but it should also be mentioned that there are more than 30 cases in Islamic legislation where the female inherits a share equal to or larger than that of the male, outweighing the four cases in which the female inherits half the share of the male. (Refer to *The Inheritance of Women and Equality* by Dr. Salahuddin Sultan.)

³¹⁸ As Allah said: الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ **Men are maintainers and protectors of women.** (An-Nisaa', 4:34)

Muslim scholars that all of a woman's economic activities, like buying, selling, leasing, giving gifts and collateral are legally valid, and that she has a completely independent economic existence.

None of these basic principles have changed, but the fact remains that many Muslims are unmindful of the teachings of their religion, due either to a lack of knowledge or to various worldly inducements and attractions. So knowledge of Islamic rights and responsibilities is an essential issue for men as well as for women in order to attain harmony within homes and family settings. These rights and responsibilities encompass emotional, psychological, spiritual and social realms as well as the physical, material and financial ones. The Muslim spouse observes the other's rights, aside from personal feelings and emotions, out of devotion to Allah and seeking His approval; and for this he or she will be rewarded.

Just as a husband is obligated to provide all needs and comforts for his family, there is a certain kind of respect and care to which he is entitled. The wife looks after her husband's interests, guarding his properties and her chastity because Allah, not her husband, has ordered them to be protected. However, obedience is always limited to what is fair, reasonable and lawful in Islam. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*There is no obedience to a created being in disobedience to the Creator.*"³¹⁹ And, "*There is no obedience to anyone in the disobedience of Allah. Obedience is only in what is right.*"³²⁰

Both husbands and wives are required to observe the general duties of any Muslim toward another, such as being kind and friendly, speaking in a good manner,³²¹ overlooking and concealing faults, accepting excuses, being grateful for favors, listening to advice, directing the other toward good deeds, dissuading each other from bad deeds and liking for the other what one would like for oneself.³²² And parents must bring up their children to be righteous, practicing and productive Muslims, teaching them what is required for proper worship and appropriate dealings with people.

A believer ought not to be dependent on another human being for happiness and contentment, but rather, should place his hope in the justice and mercy of Allah, the Exalted. When one sincerely loves Allah, he will seek to avoid His displeasure when dealing with all people, and particularly those who have rights over him. So let Muslim spouses endeavor to focus on fulfilling their obligations first, because this is the *amānah* that all people will be asked about before their Creator at the time of Judgement.

And if one's rights cannot be fully obtained in this life, the compensation of the Hereafter will surely bring complete and perfect contentment. Let us concentrate more on the Hereafter and be thankful to Allah for whatever He has given us, without holding expectations for this world that are too high or unrealistic. For the present life was created for work and effort, and only in the eternal life to come will there be justice and recompense.

³¹⁹ Narrated by Aḥmad.

³²⁰ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

³²¹ A person under the authority of another (such as a wife or a child) has to use consideration and good manners when there are disagreements, and explain the evidences.

³²² The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.*" (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

Disdain and Disregard

When the Prophet (ﷺ) warned that no one who had in his heart an atom's weight of pride would enter Paradise, he qualified it by saying, *"Pride is the prevention of right and looking down upon people."*³²³

Disdain of someone means looking down on him and seeing him as unworthy of respect. It implies that he is deserving of neglect or even humiliation. When such a thing happens between Muslims, it is a serious breach of conduct, endangering not only a relationship but also the people involved. It is neither proper nor permissible for a Muslim to view his brother in Islam as inferior to himself, no matter what his nationality or social status.

And it is unlawful to hold another Muslim in contempt because of a sin he or she may have committed. For perhaps that person has repented, or will repent and be forgiven by Allah, while the one who looks down on him will not be forgiven for his conceit. A believer is justified in feeling anger when Allah is disobeyed, and might need to admonish an offender or even boycott him for a time, but he must beware of any sense of superiority, which is a blameworthy vanity.

Allah, the Exalted has commanded:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ

"O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule another people; perhaps they may be better than them. Nor let women ridicule other women; perhaps they may be better than them."³²⁴

And His Messenger (ﷺ) added, *"It is sufficient evil for a person to look down on his brother Muslim."*³²⁵ He meant that the evil of this sin is sufficient to earn for someone a reputation for bad character as well as punishment in the Hereafter.

As for those who make negative assumptions about people in high positions or those of wealth, they should understand that one's worth in the sight of Allah is solely according to his deeds and intentions, most of which are unknown to the general population.

People often pass judgements on others according to what is apparent to them, and criticism can turn into scorn or ridicule. Many with insufficient understanding of Islam fall into the error of imitating others in this respect and thus expose themselves to their Lord's anger. Unfortunately, this is the case with many who take pride in their knowledge, their work or their position of leadership.

Shaykh Ḥasan Ayyūb wrote: "How often we have seen Muslim groups that consider their own views sound to the exclusion of all others. The belief that their methods are the only correct ones leads them to belittle other kinds of effort toward the same goal, often to the point of arrogance, bragging about their own great accomplishments and sacrifices as if to prove a point. Gradually, followers deviate from the original plan of their leader and become preoccupied with establishing their own superiority at the expense of the ummah's strength and unity. Those who claim that they alone carry the banner of true Islam may be sincere, but they are mistaken and unaware of the harm they cause by their claims and accusations. The most ignorant of people are those who want to do good but know not how to go about it, and worse, do not try to learn how to go about it."³²⁶

³²³ Muslim and at-Tirmidhi.

³²⁴ Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:11.

³²⁵ Muslim.

³²⁶ *As-Sulūk al-Ijtīmāʿī fil-Islām*, p. 96.

Unfortunately, many Muslims shun those who do not measure up to their opinions and views, and are even more critical of those who actually disagree with them. They do this on the pretense of defending established Islamic principles – like that of adhering to the Qur'ān and Sunnah or the ways of the pious predecessors. They fail to make a distinction between the principles themselves and their own understanding of them. Therefore they accuse one another of violating the principles of Islam without realizing that their disagreement has little to do with those principles, but more with their own interpretations of them.

From here it becomes obvious that a basic requirement for everyone is to obtain real knowledge based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah from the recognized and trustworthy scholars who can guide, direct and enlighten people about issues that are somewhat unclear to them. Adequate knowledge is essential in order to serve Allah well and to cooperate with other Muslims in drawing up successful plans.

Undoubtedly, the worst consequence of disdain for others is indifference to their rights. One afflicted with this disease bears an irresponsible attitude toward others; he sees them as undeserving of his attention, of simple kindness, or even some of their basic human rights. Among those he disdains he cannot bring himself to visit one who is ill, comfort one who is troubled or congratulate one who has been blessed with a favor – except out of hypocrisy. He will not concern himself with their needs, oppose injustice to them or give them their rights; in fact, he does not even perceive that they have those rights.

This is the perspective for which people once criticized the colonial powers. But when the foreign oppressors left and those who professed Islam came to power, the same attitude was found and the same conduct: exploitation, deprivation and discrimination practiced by some against others as if they had been given the privilege of distributing or withholding the mercy of their Lord. The disease was not limited to the powerful and influential but filtered down through every institution and organization, even the family structure, to affect society as a whole.

It might sound simplistic to say that the cure lies in faith and knowledge, but with greater implementation of Islam our communities and societies can and must recover. That is because anyone who understands and believes what Allah has disclosed on the subject of pride and arrogance in the Qur'ān and through the teachings of His Messenger (ﷺ) cannot possibly continue in behaviors and attitudes that are certain to provoke His wrath. For a believer feels humble before his Lord and acknowledges that whatever he has of possessions, intelligence, abilities and opportunities are provided on lease to him from Allah, to be used in ways approved by Him. He also perceives that the gratitude due to Allah is best shown by sharing one's blessings with those less fortunate. Indeed, the test of those whom Allah has favored in this world is bound with responsibility, and at times it can be more difficult than the test of ordinary people who have little. The Mighty and Majestic warned in the Qur'ān:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ.

“And let not those who withhold what Allah has given them of His bounty ever think that it is better for them; rather, it is worse for them.”³²⁷

Muslims must be retaught the concept of brotherhood that has been obscured in recent times by the dominance of materialist culture. The atmosphere of compassion which binds the Muslim to his brothers everywhere requires that they share each other's hopes and afflictions and that they hasten to protect one another from all kinds of harm and evil, including that which emanates from themselves. Among the many ḥadiths describing the believer, one is sufficient: *“The Muslim is the*

³²⁷ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:180.

brother of the Muslim. He neither wrongs him nor gives him up. Whoever is concerned with the need of his brother, Allah is concerned with his need. And whoever relieves a Muslim from distress, Allah will relieve him of a distress on the Day of Resurrection. And whoever covers the fault of a Muslim, Allah will cover his fault on the Day of Resurrection."³²⁸

Social obligations were part of the message of every prophet. They were accorded much attention in the Qur'ān as a part of Islamic *'aqeedah*. A believer will not only be bound to his fellow Muslims in every part of the globe, but will feel sympathy for all of Allah's creation. A true believer will oppose injustice and oppression no matter who the victim happens to be. Should he not, then, be especially concerned with the plight of his brothers and sisters in Islam?

It is recognized that the highest form of justice and the most difficult to practice is the acknowledgement of one's own errors and shortcomings and the exertion of sincere effort to rectify any wrong done to others. It is, however, the greatest proof of true faith to support the right of a brother against oneself, not the least of which is his right to respect and honor. This may be a subtle matter pertaining to the heart, but it is one of which Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* is completely aware.

³²⁸ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

Speak No Evil

لَا يُحِبُّ اللَّهُ الْجَهْرَ بِالسُّوءِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ إِلَّا مَنْ ظَلِمَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعًا عَلِيمًا

Allah does not like the public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged. And ever is Allah Hearing and Knowing.³²⁹

* * * * *

Muslims are expected to be examples of good conduct, prudent not to harm anyone and supportive of one another in times of ease and difficulty. This contributes to the stability of society and wellbeing of its members. Thus, Allah has forbidden evil speech of all kinds: cursing, obscenity, insult, backbiting, lying and false accusation. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"The two who insult each other will have [the sin of] what they say, but it will be [completely] upon the one who began it as long as the one wronged does not transgress."*³³⁰

Allah has prohibited the mention of evil deeds and evil speech because it inevitably produces harmful effects within any society. It can injure feelings, harm reputations, cause mistrust and hostility among people and give rise to injustice. In addition, much discussion of sinful behavior conveys an impression that it has become commonplace, encouraging those with corrupt tendencies to bring them out into the open without fear of being criticized or blamed. The Prophet (ﷺ) declared, *"All of my ummah can be forgiven except those who sin openly."*³³¹ People will not express distaste at hearing evil words or seeing evil acts once they become used to it, nor will they try to change a wrong once it has become widespread. In due course, familiarity generally leads to acceptance.

Sūrah an-Nūr states that *qadhf* (an accusation of zinā without adequate proof) will earn the accuser 80 lashes,³³² a punishment nearly as severe as that for fornication itself. This ruling is intended to eliminate the mention of immoral behavior within the community, and obviously the repetition and spread of such reports. In Sūrah al-Hujurat³³³ backbiting in general is deplored and prohibited.

Numerous ḥadīths clearly condemn slander, spreading rumors, gossip and exposing sins. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) warned, "Do not backbite Muslims or pursue their faults. For he who pursues the fault of his brother Muslim – Allah will pursue his fault, and when Allah pursues his fault, He will expose him even if he should be inside his own house."³³⁴ And he said, "Sufficient it is as a sin for a person to speak about everything he has heard."³³⁵ He meant it is a sin sufficient to land that person in the Hellfire. And he added, "He who believes in Allah and the Last Day should say what is good or keep quiet."³³⁶

And he (ﷺ) praised those Muslims who avoid this kind of behavior, saying, *"From the excellence of a person's Islam is his leaving alone what does not concern him."*³³⁷ He also

³²⁹ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:148.

³³⁰ Muslim.

³³¹ Muslim.

³³² Refer to Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:4.

³³³ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:12.

³³⁴ Aḥmad and Abu Dāwūd - ḥasan.

³³⁵ Abu Dāwūd - ṣaḥeeḥ..

³³⁶ Al-Bukhārī.

³³⁷ At-Tirmidhi - ḥasan.

encouraged keeping secrets and trying to help people reform privately, saying, "*Whoever covers the fault of a Muslim – Allah will cover his faults in this world and the Hereafter.*"³³⁸

In the aforementioned verse, Allah gives the ruling about complaining against wrongs and injustices. As a general rule, a Muslim should not discuss the sins of people, even his own, before others. It is often wiser to bear a wrong patiently whenever speaking out about it would lead to even worse consequences, but such considerations may differ from one situation to another. For example, when speaking out publicly will lead to consequences that are worse than the original problem, either for the wronged individual or society at large, then it is best to refrain from doing so. This could be the case when an oppressive ruler would cause great harm to one who speaks against him or when speaking out could lead to civil strife and bloodshed.

And if a good and respectable person did something wrong unintentionally without bad intent he should not be publicly condemned. Sa'eed bin al-Musayyib said, "There is no noble or scholar or esteemed person who does not have a fault; but among the people there are those who should not mention his faults. One whose merit is greater than his shortcomings eliminates his shortcomings with his merit."

Most people do not like their faults mentioned in front of others. Even those who seek advice prefer that it be given behind closed doors. In those cases where one is compelled to mention another person's faults, it is best to mention that person's good points as well. It is wrong to exaggerate the importance of the person's error or emphasize the fault too much, especially when it might have been an honest mistake or a matter where the truth is not entirely clear.

But there are indeed times when it is best for the aggrieved party to speak out against the one who wronged him. This is when it could prevent others from being harmed or put an end to the wrongdoing. It is also best when it is hoped that the wrongdoer might change his ways and act properly in the future, or when speaking out will actually stop the offender from causing harm. One who does an evil action openly should be denounced publicly, but if he does it secretly, it is not permissible to rebuke him publicly. But it is imperative that utmost perception and diplomacy be used on such occasions to avoid angry reactions and obstinacy from the ones being warned. Al-Imam ash-Shāfi'ī said, "He who admonishes his brother privately has advised him and honored him, but he who admonishes him publicly has exposed him and shamed him."

Allah has allowed exceptions within the limits of necessity when someone has been harmed or treated unjustly. It is permissible for that person to speak against the offender to the extent of his wrongdoing. Ibn 'Abbās explained, "This verse [4.148] was revealed when one man oppressed another. Hence, it is permissible for one who has been wronged to mention the other person regarding the wrong he has committed without adding anything more. And Allah permits one to supplicate to Him [openly] against whoever wronged him."

The purpose behind the exception is to restore justice. But the wronged party cannot exaggerate his grievance or add anything irrelevant against the offender. He will be accountable for anything mentioned beyond his legitimate grievance.

The scholars have cited the following as acceptable justification for mentioning wrongdoing:

- ♦ When complaint to an authority is necessary in order to restore justice
- ♦ When complaint to an authority is necessary in order to prevent or put a stop to crime or unlawful activity
- ♦ When remaining silent would enable the wrongdoer to continue injustices against others.
- ♦ When seeking a *fatwā* about a matter from a religious scholar

³³⁸ Muslim.

- ♦ In order to warn someone of harm that could befall him through association with certain parties
- ♦ When someone commits the sin openly or boasts about it – by so doing he has removed from himself his right to Allah's protection.

Except for these valid reasons, Allah is greatly angered by those who publicize the faults and failures of others, and will punish them for it. Hence, He concluded the verse with a warning that He is Hearing and Knowing. Nothing escapes Him of His servants' deeds and or their motivations, and they will be judged for each of them.

The verse that follows is addressed to all people. It suggests an alternative to retaliation, stating that when they acknowledge a favor, conceal a fault or forgive a wrong done to them, it will bring them closer to Allah and result in His forgiveness of them. Almighty Allah, who pardons so many sins despite being able to punish for them, directs believers to something better than exposing the faults of others:

إِنْ تُبْدُوا خَيْرًا أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ أَوْ تَعْفُوا عَنْ سُوءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُورًا قَدِيرًا

If [instead] you show some good, or conceal it or pardon an offense – then indeed, Allah is ever Pardoning and Able.³³⁹

Showing good implies spreading it within the society. But whether or not to publicize good deeds is left for the individual conscience to decide which is best in each situation – whether it would serve as a good example for others or lead to blameworthy pride.

Speaking of wrongdoing is permissible to restore justice or protect others from harm. But Allah also encourages the positive aspect of doing good generally and pardoning others for their errors. The one who has been wronged is encouraged to forgive, even though he legitimately has the right to retaliate in order to remove the injustice. It was reported by historians that al-Ḥajjāj bin Yūsuf killed more than one hundred thousand men, many of whom had been cruelly tortured beforehand. When the tābi'ī scholar, Sa'eed bin Jubayr was about to be slain he invoked Allah, only saying, "O Allah, do not enable him to kill anyone after me." After Sa'eed was put to death al-Ḥajjāj lived for fifteen more days, during which he became paralyzed and suffered an illness attributed to worms entering his body. In severe pain, he would call out "What happened between me and Sa'eed bin Jubayr?" Sa'eed had not retaliated but merely asked Allah to spare others the same fate.

When 'Abdullāh bin Mas'ūd wanted to pay for something he had bought in the marketplace, he reached for some coins in the folds of his turban and found they were gone. He said, "They were with me when I sat down." The people began to supplicate against whoever who had taken them, but 'Abdullāh said, "O Allah, if he took them out of need, then bless them for him; and if he took them out of boldness in sin, then make it the last of his sins."

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī learned that a man was backbiting him, so he sent him a plate of dates with a message saying, "I heard that you have gifted me some of your ḥasanāt (good deeds) and I wanted to reimburse you, but I regret that I could not repay you in full."

Allah encourages forgiveness in the verse's conclusion by reminding that He is lenient and forgiving in spite of His ability to deal severely with offenders. Among His attributes is that He is 'Afū, overlooking and pardoning the sins of His servants, although He is Qadeer, entirely able to avenge and punish them. In the same way, forgiveness should be granted by believers when there is capability to retaliate and not out of weakness or helplessness; otherwise it will not be sincere. It was from a position of strength that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to pardon people and prefer clemency.

³³⁹ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:149.

Looking Toward Transition

The Islamic way is one of means and measures; it directs hearts and minds to deal with facts and reality and to interact with the natural laws that Allah has established in His creation. Ways and means are related to the goals and objectives for which they are undertaken. Thus, we need to understand the general guidelines that must be observed so as not to fall into error while developing and employing the various methods for attaining an objective. The two most important ground rules for determining these methods are:

1. That they must be permitted by Islamic Law. This permission may be given explicitly by the Qur'ān or authentic Sunnah, or it may fall under the general juristic principle that all things are permissible unless stated otherwise in those texts.
2. That they must be acted upon in view of the expected benefit. This means they should be appropriate to the circumstances at hand. The good that will come out of a method must far outweigh any negative consequences that might possibly result from it. Such considerations require wisdom and perception as well as sincere intent.

The physical means to obtain an objective include searching, exerting effort, striving and not giving up. The success of the Prophet (ﷺ) was based on dealing with the most difficult realities through means and measures. His life was full of sacrifices, enduring hardship and practicing patience while waiting to see the results of his efforts; and this is what Allah willed to be the example for mankind to follow after him.

As well as material and physical means and methods, there are spiritual means prescribed in the Sharī'ah, such as *taqwā*, *istighfār* and *du'aa*. This indicates that there is also a need for true, sincere faith in Allah, for strengthening the relationship with Him and renouncing all that is worshipped besides Him in the full sense of worship, which means devotion, obedience and perseverance. It includes the need to follow explicitly what the Lord has ordained, seek His approval in every procedure and His acceptance of every action. Failure in this aspect will inhibit success in all that we might seek to accomplish.

So there must be constant review, self-criticism and effort toward improvement along with the dedication of every action and expenditure to Allah, the Exalted. It is then that the physical means will benefit, not only in obtaining the acceptance of our Lord but in reaching our objectives, realizing our aims and setting aright our present world and that of the Hereafter. Additionally, means and measures include putting one's trust in Allah (*tawakkul*) and relying in the heart upon Him to enable the achievement of intended goals.

Cooperative human interactions are among the means toward accomplishment, and in spite of the present downward trend, we need to realize that our societies still have within them much good and that they can be further reformed and improved. We need to address all Muslims, irrespective of their nationalities, customs and cultures, and restore confidence in the concept of one people as Allah has described it:

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

***Indeed this, your ummah is one ummah and I am your Lord, so worship Me.*³⁴⁰**

Undoubtedly, social harmony is an indispensable requirement for the success of any community or nation. Although the religion confirms this principle and gives it prominence, various occurrences and circumstances can unsettle people and cause them to exaggerate their differences

³⁴⁰ Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:92.

to an objectionable degree. Every era has its unique problems and challenges but it also offers new opportunities.

In spite of the obvious difficulties which appear to us today, there are several factors that can influence the future course of the Muslim world. To begin with, there is now a greater awareness among Muslims in every part of the globe. In spite of state controls and political barriers, people are realizing that they must put a stop to the erosion that has beset their material and moral heritage and break away from tribal, cultural and nationalistic confinements.

While social harmony has always been essential, the current Islamic awakening is more in need of it than ever before. As it still lacks in influence and with limited capabilities at present, divisions and conflicts will only mean much wasted effort and misuse of energy. And while the ummah endures intrigues and plots by its enemies, the spread of dissent and schism within its ranks only serves corrupt elements and harms the righteous servants of Allah.

Islam emphasizes the development of strong moral character and aims to develop in its followers a balanced and harmonious emotional makeup that helps them avoid such negative manners as anger, pride, conceit, stinginess, envy, and malice, which inevitably produce anxiety and emotional instability. This applies to individuals, societies and nations.

Some activists, however, motivated by zeal and erroneous judgment, argue that there can only be one correct answer to every issue and seek reform by attacking what they believe are errors and sins committed by others. But they have forgotten the benefits of being a united community as compared with the evils of separation and dissent. They could better agree to disagree graciously.

Others tend to see error and sin as similar, with little distinction between them. Among the greatest of failings is occupation with the faults of others, and even more so when those others happen to be people of righteousness and knowledge, known for their good work. It would be more worthy of the ones whose only writings are refutations and criticisms to examine themselves and contemplate their own condition, for a matter might begin with earnest concern but end up as personal bias.

The text of the Qur'ān and Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) advocate cooperation and alliance among believers, and this was practiced conscientiously by the Ṣaḥābah. Differences of opinion could not affect their relationships of respect and affection, and their disagreements did not prevent them from being just or cause them to pursue the errors and failures of others.

The early scholars concurred that many issues are open to multiple perspectives and therefore would not think of denouncing one another. As Yaḥyā bin Sa'eed al-Anṣārī observed, "People of knowledge are flexible. Jurists will always disagree; one will permit something that another considers prohibited. However, neither will censure the other for it."

The basic principles of 'aqeedah and fiqh agreed upon by the four imāms and others were undoubtedly points of convergence. But their differences over certain secondary matters established for those who came after them the legitimacy of disagreeing as long as the conclusion is drawn directly from the text of the Qur'ān or verified ḥadīth, or deduced according to sound methodological principles. Their example showed that the ummah could accommodate disagreements and deal easily with more than one opinion.

When the caliph al-Manṣūr intended to make the Māliki madh·hab the official one for the state, Imām Mālik himself objected and said, "Do not do it, for the people have already heard other opinions and narrations and acted on them as religious practice. Differences of opinion go back to the Ṣaḥābah and it is very difficult to dissuade people from what they believe. So leave them with what they know and let the people of each province decide what is best for them."

So not everything that is known should be stated to everyone. For there are some people who do not have the knowledge, insight or mental capacity to understand all of what is intended

and will take what they have heard as a cause for contention. In *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhāri*, 'Ali is reported to have said, "Speak to people about what they know; would you like that Allah and His Messenger be denied?" And Ibn Mas'ūd is quoted in the introduction to *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim* as saying, "You will not talk to a people about something their minds cannot grasp except that it becomes *fitnah* for some of them."

Legitimacy of disagreement means that each scholar who made a sincere effort to arrive at the truth will be rewarded for his *ijtihād* and may not be accused of religious deviation. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "When a judge rules, having made every effort [to reach the truth] and is correct, he will have two rewards; and when he rules, having made the effort and is mistaken, he will have one reward."³⁴¹ As Ibn Taymiyyah explained, "When an imam, a ruler, a scholar, an administrator, a mufti or other authority arrives at a deduction to the best of his ability, having feared Allah, he has fulfilled that with which Allah entrusted him, has obeyed Allah and is deserving of His reward."

Shaykh Salman al-Oadah wrote: "Divisions may be caused either by a scholar's ruling on a matter wherein there is room for other opinions or by a conditional ruling that was issued for a particular situation. Some of those keen to preserve unity aspire to put an end to disagreement and division by rejecting difference of opinion and endeavor to obtain agreement on issues upon which it is not possible or even desirable to reach agreement. When aspiring to achieve a united front, Muslims must learn to acknowledge a multiplicity of valid viewpoints and interpretations."³⁴² Instead of trying to end differences, the focus should be upon clarifying the constants, presenting evidence and avoiding an escalation of conflict."

Ibn Taymiyyah pointed out, "Someone who cannot properly evaluate what to do or to avoid in matters of religion can end up discontinuing his obligations and falling into sin. And he might think himself virtuous for doing so. An example is one who abandons the congregational prayer because the imām is guilty of an innovation or sin. Another is one who rejects the testimony of an honest person or refuses to accept truth from a scholar because he indulges in some minor innovation. He considers his refusal to be an act of piety, despite the fact that it is obligatory to accept the truth."

And he said, "The divisions occurring within the ummah among its scholars, leaders and influential people are what have necessitated the dominance of our enemies over us. When people abandon some of Allah's ordinances animosity and hate comes between them; and when they separate they become corrupted and are destroyed. But when they come together, they thrive and prosper by permission of Allah."

Often there is a need to weigh options and priorities, and this too can lead to misunderstandings. Confusion over the intent in some of these cases tends to generate disputes. But it has always been a matter of consensus among jurists that human welfare should be promoted and harm prevented as much as possible. Hence, if not the better of two options, then the least harmful of them should be chosen, weighing the extent of the harm to be avoided against the benefit to be secured.

There is nothing in Islam preventing an agreement that would enable various parties, in spite of differences, to work together to realize their mutual interests and avoid conflict as much as possible. In fact, this is what the Prophet (ﷺ) sought to do throughout his mission. Allah, Most High has stated in the Qur'ān that men would undoubtedly differ,³⁴³ and this presents them with certain tests and trials, particularly in regard to their conduct. Although differences are inevitable, it is

³⁴¹ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

³⁴² The Shaykh was referring here to what occurs among the qualified scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah, not those of the deviant sects which have departed from Islam.

³⁴³ Refer to Sūrah Hūd, 11:118.

required whenever disputes arise and splits begin to appear that Muslims exert efforts to amend the situation before it develops into prolonged hostilities.

And there is always a prospect of turning setbacks and crises into opportunities. It has been said that planning means to bring the future into the present so that something can be done about it. Whenever people work in a correct and productive manner, they make progress. Those who do not work and take practical steps toward success are deprived of success even if they should be pious and devoted. Matters need to be weighed, possibilities assessed and policies adopted to identify these new opportunities, develop them, invest in them, and promote them for the benefit of humanity. Those possessing knowledge, authority and influence in society are required to acknowledge that there will always be differences of opinion. They need to respect and accommodate one another and work together for the common good of the Muslim ummah.

While effort and sacrifice will always continue to be major requirements, it is presently futile to restrict our ummah to the same solutions advocated by scholars of past generations while ignoring recent changes and developments. On the other hand, Muslims cannot be content with importing Western answers to the questions posed by Western modernism and contemporary attitudes. They must go back to an Islamic worldview, with its distinct moral and ethical values, through which they can generate answers to the many problems raised by spread of globalization and Western lifestyles.

The secret of early Muslim victories and success in achieving the goals of Islam was that by reason of their complete acknowledgment of Allah's command and their deep desire for His approval and reward, they had full communal willingness to respond to every one of the ummah's needs and readiness to arise and meet every one of its requirements, no matter how much difficulty or sacrifice might be involved.

Those who would adhere to the path of our pious predecessors need to be aware that what remains essential is the soundness of their methodology. In addition to a firm foundation in the religious texts, scholars are required to have thorough knowledge of the contemporary world in order to issue suitable rulings and to determine when flexibility is allowable and when firmness is obligatory.

Muslims must have the patience and foresight to pursue worthy goals over a long period, to realistically evaluate circumstances and strike a balance between aspirations and practical expectations. They must be adaptable enough to respond to various situations and look for resourceful ways to proceed. They can avail themselves of new ideas and new opportunities, seeking assistance through positive thinking and good counsel, continually reviewing past judgments and renewing activity, seeking out wisdom wherever it can be found.

Thus, we are ordered to take the appropriate means and measures, and then put our trust in Allah for every affair, as He has said:

فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ.

“Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah. Indeed Allah loves those who put their trust [in Him]”³⁴⁴

We ask Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, to forgive our errors, unite us in pursuit of the truth and enable us to earn His acceptance. *O Allah, let not our misfortune be in our religion and make not the world our greatest concern nor the sum of our knowledge.*³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Sūrah Aali ‘Imrān, 3:159.

³⁴⁵ An authentic supplication of the Prophet (ﷺ) narrated by at-Tirmidhi and al-Hākim.

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