

# Chapter 54

## AL-QAMAR (THE MOON)

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### Section 1

This chapter, The Moon (*Al-Qamar*), is an early Makkan revelation. In one sense, this chapter completes the subject matter of the last one, *An-Najm* (The Star), in which the prophecy of the Middle Resurrection was given in the verse: “*The near Event draws nigh*” (53:37). This chapter begins with the words: “*The moon was rent asunder*”, which serve as a testimony to the fact that the promised Hour was drawing close, in that a heavenly sign was sent in the form of the splitting of the moon – a reality that was witnessed by both friend and foe.

In addition to this, evidence is drawn from history which reveals that whenever a law-bearing prophet came to the world, the Middle Resurrection always came in his wake. As a result, that same Hour had come and would remain forever. The picture of this coming Hour is painted in such vivid colours that it fills the heart of every right-thinking person with great ecstasy. This happens especially when he realises that this picture was depicted at a time when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was in the depths of weakness and helplessness as well as loneliness and destitution. Further, he could never have imagined in his wildest dreams that a day would come when he would have at his side a community which would oppose this powerful, bloodthirsty and vengeful nation and emerge so decisively victorious that the triumph of Islam would be established for all times to come.

1. *The Hour* (as-sa‘at) *drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder* (wan-shaq-qal qamar).
2. *And if they see a sign, they turn away and say: Strong enchantment* (sihrum-musta-mirr)!

*Sihrun-mustamirr* means mighty or powerful magic or such magic that has been coming down from ancient times.

*As-sa‘at* is a reference to the coming of that phenomenal revolution that was destined to bring about the chastisement of the opponents.

*Inshaq-qal qamar* means that the moon was cleft. This was a Divine sign heralding the approach of the threatened Hour.

As regards the miracle of the splitting of the moon, Ibn Athir relates that there is a continuous and authentic chain of references to it in the *Hadith*: In *Bukhari*, Ibn Mas‘ud recounts that in the Holy Prophet’s lifetime the moon was rent asunder with one piece visible above the mountain and the other concealed behind it, and that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) instructed everyone to witness the event. In Ibn Abbas’ account, mention is made only of the splitting, whilst Anas states that in answer to a demand from the people of Makkah for a miracle, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) showed them the splitting of the moon. There is an ample number of reliable *ahadith* which prove conclusively that the moon was rent asunder in the Holy Prophet’s time, but there is no unanimity in regard to the position of the two halves. However, when it comes to the historical authenticity of this event, there are two impeccable

sources of evidence – a genuine and unbroken chain of narrators in the *Hadith* as well as the plain and decisive testimony of the Holy Qur'an. To say that among the reliable reporters Ibn Abbas was not yet born and Anas was only four years old when this event took place does not in any way discredit the reality of this occurrence, for besides them, there is the clear and unanimous testimony of a whole community. Further, in the whole history of miracles there was none that was so powerfully supported by evidence as that of the splitting of the moon.

From another point of view, in reply to those who believe that this rending of the moon will really occur in the Hereafter and that this statement is only a prophecy of that event, one can well ask how can the moon be divided into two pieces on the Day of Resurrection when the moon as well as the earth itself will become non-existent. So, what will be there for people to see? It is clear, therefore, that there is an error in the understanding of the words: "*The Hour drew close*", for this Hour refers not to the Great Resurrection but the Middle Resurrection which is, in reality, the destruction of the Quraish or the unbelievers of Makkah as the concluding words of the last chapter, *An-Najm* (The Star) indicate: "*The near Event draws nigh*" (53:57).

Before answering the objection that the splitting of the moon is a violation of the laws of nature, I consider it important to present a few explanatory remarks.

The first point one must remember is that a miracle does not contravene the laws of Allah, Most High, as is commonly believed. In fact, it is itself one of His laws and it comes into existence in order to prove the Divine provenance of a prophet or commissioned one. We must bear in mind that since the time of Prophet Adam (*as*) Allah's laws have been manifested in two ways:

1. Firstly, there are general laws which are concealed under the veil of causes, and these influence everyone.
2. Secondly, there are special laws which operate through the agency of known causes, or even without special causes, and these extend to such people who have lost themselves in the love and pleasure of their Lord.

In other words, when a man makes a transformation in himself by cutting off himself completely from all human connections for the sake of Allah, Most High, and solely for His pleasure, then Allah, Most High, in accordance with this changed condition, also develops with him an affinity with which others are not blessed. To call that a miracle is not to say that it is contrary to the laws of the Almighty but it only means that it is not in accordance with the general or universal laws of Allah, Most High. This is not strange, for we see the same thing operating in the physical world. For example, two friends may increase in love, friendship and sincerity to each other and this may give rise to a mutual closeness which they do not share with other people.

Thus the source of extraordinary events or, in other words, what puts into motion special Divine action is the changed condition of man's soul. When the transformation in it becomes perfect, its effects then begin to become manifest. Many a time, the mighty current of love for the Supreme as well as sincerity and arduous efforts to attain certainty of faith transports man to such a sublime state that in this exalted condition, if he is put through fire, he will suffer no ill-effects whatsoever from it, and even if he is thrown to lions, bears and wolves, they would not be able to harm him at that time for his perfect truthfulness and love and his majestic splendour have stripped him of his humanity and turned him into a higher being.

Just as when a piece of stone in fire is transformed both externally and internally and assumes the colour of the fire, so, too, the overwhelming power of the fire of Allah's love which consumes the soul of the true devotee begins to exhibit some of its peculiar characteristics. So it is no wonder then if the perfect influence of Divine Providence falls on man's servitude to such an extent as to make him exceptional and superior in our sight to the everyday occurrence of Divinity. Indeed, it should be strange if after such a powerful Divine intervention man's servitude to the Almighty remains unaffected, for if a piece of stone is heated in fire and begins to assume some resemblance to it, then this is totally in accordance with the laws of nature. If, on the other hand, it undergoes severe heat and still remains the same with no change in its former condition, then this indeed would be patently false according to reason and intellect.

Thus, a miracle is indeed a Divine law which comes into special operation in the time of the chosen ones of Allah and it is obligatory that it should come at that time. When a chosen servant reaps the reward of success as a prophet or commissioned one, then at that time it becomes incumbent on Allah, Most High, to display such signs of heavenly help in this servant's support as would prove beyond the shadow of doubt that he has been sent by Allah, Most High, and so, too, his revelation and the Book with which he comes. And this is so in order that his credentials may receive the stamp of Divine approval in the eyes of the common folks.

What happens is that Allah, Most High, in consonance with His attributes of '*Alim* (Knowing) and '*Qadir* (Powerful), bestows on His servant, from His perfect knowledge, insight into hidden matters and inspired mysteries, and through His Omnipotence, He manifests exceptional examples of His assistance and support which possess such a unique distinction that man's power and knowledge are powerless to produce anything remotely similar to these manifestations. This, in the terminology of Islam, is called a miracle, and in the Holy Qur'an it is referred to as a sign (*ayah*) of Allah, Most High.

The second point of clarification is that the Holy Qur'an uses a particular figurative expression – *sunnat-ul-Laah* (the way or practice of Allah) – which means the working of Allah or, in other words, Divine laws, which in Allah's perfect and complete knowledge, have been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. In addition to this, Allah, Most High, says in the Holy Qur'an: "*But thou wilt find no alteration in the course of Allah; and thou wilt find no change in the course of Allah (sunnatul-Laah)*" (35:43).

Thus, if anyone should relate any incident contrary to this, we must not accept it.

Unfortunately, many atheists have come to the understanding that whatever little scientific knowledge of nature we have acquired is referred to in the Holy Qur'an as the *way of Allah (sunnatul-Laah)*. So, according to them, if they witness or hear anything contrary to their acquired scientific truths, they will not believe it, although this is indeed an erroneous position to assume that whatever ways of Allah are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an are really those Divine laws that are recorded in the Holy Book itself and not somewhere else. As the Almighty discloses this knowledge to us from His perfect storehouse of knowledge, there can be no suspicion of error in it, for the Creator encompasses every law and way of His. When He explains a matter, it is impossible for anything to be excluded from it. These are the Divine laws of which the Holy Qur'an states: "... *Thou wilt find no change in the way of Allah*" (35:43).

Thus, if we are told of any event contrary to these laws, we must never take it as true, for how can there be any alteration in Allah's ways? For example, the Holy Qur'an states: "*Allah takes (men's) souls at the time of their death, and those that die not, during their sleep...*" (39:42), and in another verse we read: "*And it is forbidden to a town which We destroy: they shall not return*" (21:95).

Now, this is the way of Allah which, in His perfect knowledge, He has explained in the Holy Qur'an. In the light of this clear edict of the Holy Qur'an, we cannot accept that any prophet or saint can perform such a miracle as would give life to a truly dead person whose soul has already been taken away for this is contrary to the way of Allah Who has already said in the Holy Qur'an that there is no change in His way (35:43). Thus, if we read among the miracles of any prophet that he brought the dead to life we will not take it literally but attribute to it a metaphorical meaning. That is, he infused life into spiritually dead people, or he removed the distress of a person in the throes of a calamity, or he healed people of a deadly disease.

Thirdly, whatever law is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an refers only to those laws which Allah, Most High, has revealed out of His perfect knowledge and which are written in the Holy Book. They do not apply to those laws which man deduces from his observation of natural phenomena and his experimentation nor do they include such knowledge which in philosophical jargon materialistic philosophers and even common folk refer to as Science. To regard man's observations and experiments as Divine laws is really a folly for man's knowledge is not perfect like that of the Creator but is indeed limited and defective. While it is true that his experiment and demonstration may indeed be profound and the laws he deduces may also be true, yet to accord them the rank of Divine laws is not correct for we cannot say with total certainty that they have encompassed a particular matter from every conceivable vantage point. It is quite possible that there may be some matters which are hidden. As a result, if we hear something contrary to those laws which Science has discovered, we cannot be precipitate in rejecting them out of hand on the ground that they are contrary to true scientific laws which have been based on our accredited experiments and observations for, it is possible that our findings could not cover every aspect of those laws. Thus, it is an act of gross stupidity to immediately pronounce as contrary to the law of Allah any matter which is beyond our comprehension and experience.

If man's limited intellect and defective knowledge cannot comprehend some of the marvels of God's creation and His Divine laws, then our policy should not be to reject every new matter which is beyond our understanding but instead to evaluate its credibility or lack of it. If it can be verified as true then we should include it in our list of established laws of nature and if it is not, then we should simply state that it is unverified.

The wise position is that the laws of nature that Science has discovered should always be ready to accommodate new wonders that are continuously coming into being and we should never adopt the position that these peculiar phenomena that arise from time to time in the world must be rejected (in spite of proof) on the basis that they are outside of our present store of knowledge. To take this attitude is to put an end to all scientific progress, and if scientists had followed that kind of behaviour they would not have made such astounding advancement in science. What can be more foolish or idiotic than to consider and to place our limited and doubtful experiments of a few days on the same pedestal as the Almighty's perfect laws of nature? And further, to consider whatever natural mysteries may come in future as contrary to the Divine way?

Thus, if we ponder over the matter carefully we cannot say that the rending asunder of the moon contravened the laws of Allah, Most High, for nowhere in the Holy Qur'an does the Creator say that this is an impossibility. Neither can it be said that it is contrary to the laws discovered by Science, for, as regards the systems and wonders of the heavenly bodies, our knowledge is very deficient. In fact, every day our knowledge is being increased with the manifestation of newer and stranger and more unusual occurrences. Again, the means for us to acquire further knowledge of the celestial bodies are

also inadequate and extremely rudimentary, not to mention the fact that changes and upheavals in the heavenly planets are constantly being detected. Even in the case of our sun there are mighty convulsions that occur regularly and on many occasions many spots become visible even to the naked eye – a fact which led experts in astronomy to conclude that there is a fissure in the sun.

So it is not far-fetched to infer that some mighty convulsion within the moon took place and split it in two or at least two pieces came into view. It is entirely possible that the Most Wise God in His limitless wisdom had pre-ordained for a particular time the splitting of the moon and its rejoining and all this perhaps was necessary and useful for the proper working of the Universe.

Thus the verse: *The Hour drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder*, may well be a sign that the predestined time for the splitting of the moon had come and the moon was rent asunder.

In conclusion, when Science generally, and Astronomy in particular, accept the manifestation of fresh natural phenomena, that is, as new natural wonders become known, our knowledge is increased and our imperfect knowledge is supplemented, then how can we consider as impossible an event, which was witnessed by both friend and foe and which has come down to us through a chain of authentic narrators, on the grounds that it was beyond our accepted body of knowledge? No wise person can really deny an occurrence that was seen by both friend and enemy. Besides, historical accounts in support of it are so authentic as to surpass all other recorded happenings. Leaving aside the reliable *Hadith*, the fact that it is recorded in the Holy Qur'an constitutes the most powerful of all proofs.

We shall now consider what Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, says in his writings about this matter.

“The Holy Qur'an is a peculiar Book that the revelation of each verse was conveyed to the believers and the opponents also and it was also propagated as well as committed to memory by hundreds of people. Muslims read it in prayers and outside of prayer. Thus when a matter is clearly contained in the Holy Qur'an that the moon was split, and when this sign was observed by the unbelievers who proclaimed it an act of magic as the Holy Qur'an states: *'The Hour drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder. And if they see a sign, they turn away and say: Strong enchantment!'* (verses 1-2), then, in this circumstance, it was incumbent on the deniers of that era to proceed to the Holy Prophet's home and question him thus: When and at what time specifically did the moon split and when did we perceive it (as you allege)? However, even when this verse became widely known and was circulated far and wide, and still all the opposers kept silent and not a single one voiced a protest, then it becomes clearly evident that they definitely saw with their own eyes the splitting of the moon so much so that there was no room for disputation. In short, this matter is very clear and very useful for any right-minded seeker after truth to understand that in the Holy Qur'an the Holy Prophet (*sas*) could not have cited as reference to his opposers any false miracle included in the Holy Book. On the other hand, if anything false was recorded in the Holy Qur'an, how could the Prophet's contemporary rejecters and his fellow-countrymen allow him to get away with it? In addition to this, one ought to realise that there were thousands of Muslims who heard of this sign and who even related it to others and each person was sure in his heart that if anything deceitful or fraudulent ever came to light about a particular leader, preceptor or prophet, then faith in him would be completely shattered and such a person would be regarded as an evil person in the eyes of all. It is abundantly clear, therefore, that as regards this matter, that is, if this miracle was not witnessed and was only a fabrication, then the thousands of Muslims who believed wholeheartedly in the Holy Prophet (*sas*) ought immediately to have renounced their faith after

having become privy to such a blatant fabrication. However, it is evident that no such eventuality ever took place and this is cogent proof that the splitting of the moon was an indisputable occurrence. Every judge should search his heart and see for himself whether, historically speaking, it is not sufficient proof that the miracle of the rending of the moon was recorded in the Holy Qur'an which referred to the eye-witness testimony of the opponents and this was published abroad, and yet every opponent kept silent even when they heard of it. No one ever spoke or wrote a word of rebuttal, whilst the accounts of thousands of Muslims of that era still stand as evidence of the truth of this miracle" (*Surmah Chashm-i Arya*, p.63).

Later on he continues:

"If a person who is a conscientious opposer declines to produce corroborating evidence, then that is something surprising. However, what would be more amazing is if an opponent should stay silent when a bogus claim is exposed and not even lift a pen to expose this falsehood, nor even to beard the counterfeiter in his home. So I ask that if the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was false in his open and widely published claim that the moon was split at his hands, and this was also witnessed by his opponents who branded it as magic, then why did the Holy Prophet's contemporary rejecters remain silent even though this news had reached them with the accompaniment of drums? Further, why did they not call the Holy Prophet (*sas*) to account by questioning him thus: When did you split the moon in two and show it to the world? And when did we call it magic and refused to accept it? And why did they choose to remain reticent up to their dying breath to such an extent they left this world without saying a word? Does this silence, which is diametrically opposed to their attitude of unyielding opposition and fierce opposition, not clearly reveal that there was some massive obstacle preventing them from speaking out? However, except the clear truth, what other impediment could there be? This miracle took place in Makkah when Muslims were still in a weak, helpless and feeble condition, so of still greater wonder is the fact that the children and grandchildren of the opponents never voiced a word of refutation although it was obligatory on them, and circumstances demanded that they should write books and publish and circulate them everywhere in order to rebut such a grandiose claim that was really based on a falsehood that had been circulated for miles around.

Thus, when there was no one amongst the hundreds of thousands of people including Christians, Arabs, Jews, Magis, etc. with the courage to write against it whilst the Muslims were openly proclaiming their eye-witness evidence to thousands and thousands of people face to face (and this testimony remains extant up to the present day in books which were written in those days) then this proves beyond the suspicion of a doubt that the opponents had indeed witnessed the splitting of the moon for themselves and so they had no occasion to write against it and this was the only reason why they could not raise an uproar against it. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) was not an ordinary dervish or recluse so that a plea can be made to the effect that he should be excused because he was a peace-loving ascetic who was not inimical to other religions. On the other hand, he had proclaimed all his opponents as fuel for hell. As a result, ample reasons for generating passionate feelings against him were present everywhere" (*Surmah Chashm-i Arya* , pp. 74-77).

In refutation of the rejecters, we read a little later on in the same book:

"If the fact that something written in the Holy Qur'an does not constitute historical proof, then you, O objectors, please say what prevents the writings of such a book from being historical evidence, especially a book which makes reference to the testimony of the rejecters in support

of a much celebrated event of the time. Further, this is a book from a person whose high renown and nobility had received universal acclaim. So, if this is not historical proof, what else is it? Can we find in the annals of history a more cogent and illustrious example recorded in a book of an occurrence that took place at the same time the book was being compiled and of which the author was an eyewitness who was the most important man of his era in terms of honour and reputation? And in addition to all this, the compiler has cited his opponents as witnesses of the event? And is there any other book preserved in its pristine purity that has come down to us and whose noble reputation has spread to many parts of the world today? Further, which other book has been preserved in memory by thousands of famous memorisers from the beginning of time until today to the extent that their members will exceed hundreds of thousands? In addition, in this age, we find in existence several printed copies with full commentaries in them. Further, which other book is read in prayer five times a day by devoted servants of the Beloved whilst there are constant recitations of it and it is taught continuously to others? If, besides the Holy Qur'an, you have come across in the whole world any historical book that possesses in full all these qualities of the Holy Qur'an, then you should present it as testimony. If you cannot do so, then sufficient for you is the well-deserved pain of shame and disgrace that will befall you because of your inability to respond" (*Surmah Chashm-i Arya*, p. 80).

If, in spite of the proof of the Holy Qur'an that the splitting of the moon is not contrary to the laws of nature, we deny it on the basis of our imperfect and defective knowledge of Astronomy then that is tantamount to stupidity, ignorance or stubborn pride, especially when additional historical evidence abounds. It is ironical that if some event, however strange and extraordinary, is published in English newspapers in Europe or America, see how quickly people will hasten to believe and accept it even if it is completely false! On the other hand, when it is a matter of Divine revelation, even if it is attended by abundant historical evidence, people's hearts are reluctant to accept it and they accuse us of breaking the laws of nature step by step. This is the influence with which the *Dajjal* has infected our minds.

Many religious preceptors have attributed this phenomenon to a lunar eclipse in which the moon was separated in two and the shadow in the middle was visible like a line, from which it appeared as if the moon was rent in two. At this point, a doubt can arise in that the moon was not really split but seemed so to the eye although in reality it was not. This is the kind of reply that such people give by saying that whatever the opposers wished was seen by their eyes, whilst in truth, whatever comes before man's eyes in this whole world is really representations devoid of the essence of reality. As a result, they allege, there was no real fissure at all but only an imaginary one, and as regards an imaginary matter, to say that the moon was split is nothing more than the use of a figure of speech.

For example, we say in everyday speech: The sun rose and also that it set when in reality it never actually rises nor sets but because of the revolution of the earth it appears to us as such. Therefore, they argue, just as we speak metaphorically of the rising and setting of the sun, so, too, the imaginary splitting of the moon was spoken of.

There is no problem if people believe that the splitting of the moon was not real. However, if that were so, then another explanation would be needed except that of an eclipse, because in the eclipse of the moon, the shadow of the earth that falls on it always comes from one direction and whether it darkens half of the moon or the whole of it, it never happens that the circular shadow of the earth falls on it like a line giving the appearance that it was split in two pieces. Thus, this could not have been an eclipse. Of course, in a physical manner, it could have happened that the moon had undergone a temporary upheaval of the kind that accentuated the darkness in the middle of it and so caused it to appear as if it had been divided into two pieces. Also, from a spiritual viewpoint, the Holy Prophet's visionary power

was extraordinarily mighty so that on many occasions its influence had fallen miraculously on others so that they, too, shared in the spiritual visions of the hidden world that the Holy Prophet was experiencing.

This may promote a suspicious thought in the mind as to how one can differentiate between magic and spiritual phenomenon. The answer is that magic merely pulls the wool over people's eyes and has no substance to it whilst spiritual visions embody a reality which is, in fact, shown to the recipient as a powerful sign or prophecy. Accordingly, in this vision, what was intended to be shown was that the moon was the emblem of the Arabs. Just as different nations have all established their own national insignia, similarly, for the Arab people, the moon had come down as their emblem and motto since time immemorial. As a result, they counted their months and years by the moon. The fact that the moon was the national symbol of the Arabs had become common knowledge among other nations so much so that Lady Safiyyah, mother of the faithful (*ra*), who was a Jewess from among the Children of Israel, experienced long before her impending marriage to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) a dream in which she saw herself in the lap of the moon. When her father, who was a Jew, heard of this dream, he became so upset that he slapped her on the face and asked reproachfully: "Do you wish to get married to the King of the Arabs?" Ultimately, that is what really happened, for she got married to the Arab King of both religion and worldly life.

In short, the Arabs regarded the moon as their national emblem and insignia. Therefore, in this scene, the moon symbolised the Arab people and, by showing it, the intention was to demonstrate that since the appointment of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), Arabia had become divided into two sections: one, Muslim, and the other, pagan.

The verse: "*The Hour drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder*" (verse 1), indicated that up to that point the Muslims and the unbelievers were enjoying social relations together in Makkah but the promised Hour of the revolution had come in which deeds were to be accounted for. Thus, it would come to pass that the Muslim and unbelieving communities would part ways on the occasion of the *Hijrah* so that there would be a differentiation between them, for without this separation it would be impossible to make a distinction in the consequences of deeds. The upshot would be that the Arab nation would be split into two clearly discernible groups and not only the *Hijrah* (Flight), but also the incidence of wars would make this cleavage brighter than the midday sun so that a whole world would witness it with consternation, and father would fight son and brother would go against brother.

However, the good news is given that after this rift, the split in the Arab nation would disappear and all would become Muslims, forming one nation and through Islam, there would be established such cohesion and brotherhood as the world would never see.

Opposition and prejudice, too, are severe calamities. The unbelievers of Makkah saw and experienced everything and still denied. So illustrious an example they saw and yet they obstinately persisted in their opposition and when they did give a verdict, what did they say? That it was magic or sorcery, but of a very powerful kind. Why did they say so? The Holy Qur'an tells us:

3. *And they deny and follow their low desires; and every affair is settled.*

We are told that they rejected this extraordinary sign merely because they followed their own low desires and this made their hearts unprepared to accept this clear portent. However, it mattered not whether they believed or not for the hour of that revolution in which they would receive a divinely ordained punishment had drawn close. The splitting of the moon was an indication of the proximity of

that hour, so if they still refused to believe then world events would very well compel them to. A particular time was destined for every matter and so this chastisement had its own predestined moment. The splitting of the moon had already revealed the peculiar nature of this retribution which was that the Muslim and pagan communities would be split into separate groups and this would lead to wars that would bring about the destruction of the unbelievers and the disintegration of their power.

4. *And certainly narratives have come to them, which should deter—*
5. *Consummate wisdom (balighatun) — but warnings avail not;*

*Balighah* (consummate) means the perfect method of conveying the meaning (of something).

Allah, Most High, tells us that He employed every method that was necessary for warning a nation: they were made aware of the evil consequences of their false beliefs and practices and they were also apprised of the exemplary fate of former peoples. In short, they were admonished in every conceivable way in a wise and intelligible manner and were taught words of eloquent wisdom that were extremely beneficial to them. They were also threatened with dire consequences for their deeds but all this was of no avail to them. Now, it was only the severe retribution of Allah, Most High, that would bring them to their senses.

6. *So turn away from them. On the day when the Inviter invites them to a hard task (nukurin) —*
7. *Their eyes cast down, they will go forth from their graves (ajdathi) as if they were scattered locusts,*
8. *Hastening to the Inviter (ad-da‘i). The disbelievers will say: This is a hard day (yaumun ‘asir)!*

*Nukur* signifies anything distasteful or unpleasant.

*Ajdath* literally means graves but metaphorically it refers to the homes of the Makkah unbelievers. This figure of speech is used because on many occasions they are called dead in the Holy Qur’an as in the verse: “*So surely thou canst not make the dead to hear ...*” (30:52). This is why their homes were regarded as tombs.

By *ad-da‘i* is meant an inviter or caller. If the reference is to the Day of Resurrection then Allah, Most High, is the Inviter, whilst if the conquest of Makkah is the designation, then the summoner is the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

*Yaumun ‘asir* means a day of hardship, or a very difficult day and it refers to the Day of Resurrection, or the day of the conquest of Makkah.

The picture that is drawn here can properly apply to the Great Resurrection, but if we consider the sequence of the subject matter we can very well deduce that this day is really the day on which Makkah was conquered. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) underwent a time of great weakness and helplessness and the unbelievers spared no effort in persecuting him. Yet, look how boldly and challengingly was this prophecy made of the Holy Prophet’s crowning success and triumph over his enemies that a day would come when those who had now condemned the splitting of the moon as magic would see with their own eyes the perfect unfolding of that event – a day when the summons of the inviter, that is, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) would force those who listened to no one before to come out of their graves, that is, their tombs, with their pride and their presumption in tatters. In fact, their heads would be bowed in shame and remorse and in great humiliation they would hasten to offer themselves in service to the inviter they formerly used to scorn. They would discover then what a distressing day it was, the day that

brought Makkah to its knees. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) had announced that those who showed no desire for hostilities and remained at home behind locked doors were safe. The Makkan disbelievers accepted this offer and the first thing the Holy Prophet (*sas*) did was to rid the Ka‘bah of idols. After this, he summoned the unbelievers who, as soon as they heard, came running to him. Just imagine the scene for a moment and look at the plight of an incredibly proud, arrogant and oppressive nation that for years, far from obeying the Holy Prophet (*sas*), had not even deigned to listen to him, but instead had made fun of him and had inflicted every conceivable kind of pain and grief on him, even driving him out of his home and not leaving any stone unturned in their systematic programme to oppress and even to kill him! Now that same nation was tasting the bitter fate of disgrace and humiliation to such an abasing degree that they had to hasten to the summons of that person whom they once considered their enemy, and to do so with such mortification and repentance that they could not even lift up their gaze from the ground. How bitter it must have been to them to be forced to stand now in abasing defeat before that very person against whom they had spared no pains in trying to humiliate. The Arab people, especially the tribe of the Quraish, were a very proud nation. Freedom was their essence and oppression was second nature to them. What a sobering lesson it was for them that their condition had suffered such a reversal that all their beloved leaders were already killed. Only one, Abu Sufyan, now remained, and he had become a Muslim and now found himself standing in utter shame and disgrace before that very person against whom he had been plotting all his life to abase and destroy. All his gods for which he had waged endless wars now lay in pieces at the feet of the one whose invitation to belief in one God used to cause him to fly into an ungovernable rage. What a mighty lesson is contained in his end that he saw no way out of his plight but to seek forgiveness with humility and meekness! Would it be surprising if in his condition the words: “*What a distressing day!*” should escape from his lips? He had indeed suffered a living death. If the earth were to have opened it would have been very easy for him to be swallowed up in it.

After announcing that extraordinary prophecy with such boldness and majesty, the attention of the unbelievers is drawn to religious history and they are told that whatever was going to take place will be along the lines of prophethood (as has been discussed in the commentary of the last chapter, *An Najm – The Star*). Among all books, the one which first pointed to a philosophy of history was the Holy Qur’an. Today, people read the histories of past nations and also the biographies of famous men and many beneficial conclusions are drawn from those sources. However, I ask: Which was the first book that drew attention to such a reality? The answer is clear: it was no other book but the Holy Qur’an, for it was the very first book that proclaimed that all world events follow definite laws. Just as the birth, upbringing and death of each individual are subject to certain laws, so, too, are the rise and fall of nations. And just as the deeds of man play a significant role in his advancement or decline, so, too, the actions of nations have a major impact on their progress or decadence, or their exaltation or destruction. When a nation is heading towards perdition because of its transgression and evil-doing, it is the custom of the Most High to send just before its fall a prophet or reformer to that nation so that its people should heed his call and reform their lives and so rescue themselves from the abyss of ruin. As a result, that section of the population that heeds the summons of the prophet is saved whilst the majority are hurled to destruction because of their heedlessness and denial of the truth.

This is why the Holy Qur’an makes repeated references to the example of different prophets and their peoples and in their accounts very explicit prophecies are disclosed concerning the salvation and successes of the prophets and their communities as well as the abasement and defeat of their opponents. To this effect, they are told that as the Holy Prophet (*sas*) belonged to the blessed company of the prophets and messengers of the past, it was therefore inevitable that history would repeat itself and so in his case, too, the same circumstances would come about as took place with the prophets before him, and just as they and their communities were helped by Allah, Most High, and were eventually

triumphant whilst their enemies tasted the bitter draught of defeat, so, also, would be the case with him and his band of faithful companions.

It is clear that after hearing the accounts of those former prophets and their communities the heart of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and those of his companions must have been filled with great peace and tranquillity and in the time of pain and persecution they must have derived a wonderful source of patience and forbearance. The Holy Qur'an itself explains the salutary effects of narrating the circumstances of the former prophets as it states, for instance, in the verse: "*And all We relate to thee of the account of the messengers is to strengthen thy heart therewith. And in this has come to thee the truth and an admonition and a reminder for the believers*" (11:120).

In this chapter, attention is focussed on the history of the following nations: the people of Prophet Noah (*as*), 'Ad, Thamud, Prophet Lot (*as*) and Pharaoh. All these nations lived in areas surrounding Arabia so that when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) came, the Arabs had no excuse to reject him for they had examples in their own country and in the regions around of what had happened to rejecters. So it was up to them to take a warning and be cautious of their own fate.

The first nation to be mentioned is that of Prophet Noah (*as*), and in a few concise but comprehensive words the Holy Qur'an highlights the entire history of that people in a nutshell:

9. *Before them the people of Noah rejected — they rejected Our servant and called (him) mad, and he was driven away.*

The people of Noah (*as*) are spoken of first and we are told that they rejected their prophet and then their act of rejection is emphatically repeated. And whom did they reject? The Holy Qur'an says: It is Our servant (that is, Allah's servant) that they renounced. It does not say that Prophet Noah (*as*) was rejected but "Our servant". In other words, the reason for being *maghdubi 'alaih* (earning the wrath of Allah, Most High, in this life) is their repudiation of "Our servant". By Allah! How can one measure the love of the Almighty for His beloved servant? Those who are completely devoted to Him in obedience and have lost themselves in His love and who, at His command, stand firm for the reformation of His creation fall in the category of: Whoever stands up for Allah, will find Allah in his corner. On the other hand, those who do battle against His messengers really fight against Allah, Most High, Himself. The people of Prophet Noah (*as*) witnessed their messenger's complete submission to the Creator and what was their reaction to his pure and holy teachings he brought them? They heard what he said but yet called him a madman. In the eyes of evildoers and worshippers of this world's life, there is no greater madness than rejecting righteousness and the principle of worship of God.

So when Prophet Noah (*as*) promised them safety and prosperity if they followed him, or the toils of Allah's punishment if they refused, then there remained no doubt in their minds that he was insane. Those mighty people could not bear to hear such words. Therefore, they threatened him severely, asking him to desist else they would flog him, and that he should care for his life.

10. *So he called upon his Lord: I am overcome, so do Thou help.*

This is the last weapon that the prophet of the Almighty uses. This is the last means that prophets, messengers, saints and those drawn close to Allah, Most High, employ after they have expended every effort and exertion in trying to make people understand the message and to persuade them to follow the right path, and yet have been rebuffed by people who go beyond the limits in persecuting them to the point of being ready to assassinate them. At that point, the chosen ones of the Almighty turn to Him as

their resort and asylum and beseech Him for help. It is *du'a* (petition to Allah, Most High) that ultimately initiates a mighty revolution, because through this means the Omnipotent Being comes to the assistance of His servant with the result that those who are bent on destroying the Divinely-chosen one are themselves exterminated. *Du'a* is a very powerful instrument. The *Mujaddid* of the Age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, always used to say that some people find pleasure in their wealth and some in their wisdom, whilst others revelled in their high rank or their honourable status, but his pride and joy were derived from the realisation that his God had power over all things. If a particular task in this world cannot be accomplished despite all man's planning and deliberation, then by having resort to that Being Who has control over everything, the matter can easily be solved.

This is what happened here to Prophet Noah (*as*). When his enemies not only laughed him to scorn and afflicted him with severe oppression, but were also bent on taking his life, he then turned to his Master and beseeched Him, saying: "O my Lord, I am very weak and overwhelmed, so do Thou come to my assistance." As a result, Allah's help came in the form of a deluge.

11. *Then We opened the gates of heaven with water pouring down* (bi maa'in mun-hamir),
12. *And made water to flow forth in the land in springs, so the water gathered together according to a measure already ordained.*

"Opening the gates of heaven" is a metaphorical expression meaning that whatever came from heaven began to descend abundantly and copiously. As a further explanation, the expression *bi maa-'in mun-hamir* (with water pouring down) clearly discloses that the thing for which the doors of heaven were opened was water that began to rain cats and dogs, for it also signifies heavy or pelting rain that came down uninterruptedly. That is, water started to pour forth from above as if the doors of heaven were opened and together with this, water started to rise from the earth as springs and fountains overflowed and both sources created a veritable deluge.

In short, when the rains start to descend vehemently from the heavens, it affects the earth so that its water underneath, too, begins to surge upwards in the form of springs. This is exactly what took place in the time of Prophet Noah (*as*) but in a very great measure. We are told that whatever was already decreed, that is, the punishment that was to bring about the destruction of the unbelievers, was brought about by the union of water from the heavens and the earth and in the resulting flood, the people of Noah were drowned. We must bear in mind here that in the view of some commentators of the Holy Qur'an, the water on earth rose so high that it met the water from the heavens, or that the whole world was drowned in this flood of Prophet Noah (*as*) are nothing more than stories and tales that have no basis in fact. How grossly unjust would it be for the whole world to be drowned when only the people of Prophet Noah (*as*) were guilty of rejecting their prophet. Prophet Noah's flood took place in Arabian Iraq and Armenia where his people used to live and only those who opposed him were drowned.

13. *And We bore him on that which was made of planks and nails* (dusurin),
14. *Floating on, before Our eyes — a reward for him who was denied.*
15. *And certainly We left it as a sign, but is there any that will mind?*

*Dusur* is the plural of *disaar* meaning nails, whilst the expression *dhati alwahin-wa dusur* means made of nails and planks, which, in fact, signifies a boat.

The question arises here: Why did the Holy Qur'an not say in plain words that it was a boat instead of referring to it as something made up of planks and nails? This is because Prophet Noah's occupation

was not that of a boat-maker who makes boats of a fine quality. As far as he could understand the command of his Lord, he put planks and nails together and fashioned a kind of an ark. This explanation is necessary because it is quite in order for Allah, Most High, to say that although He made Prophet Noah (*as*) sail in a boat and so saved him from the flood, yet it is wrong to name his conveyance a boat for in reality it was only a crude contraption roughly constructed with planks and nails. In other words, Prophet Noah (*as*) was not rescued from this flood by means of a boat, but instead, his deliverance came about because the ark sailed under the care and supervision of Allah, Most High.

The intention behind using this type of expression is to break man's worship of means which is the greatest of all hidden polytheism that has spread all over the world to such an extent that people of the highest intelligence have been caught in its trap. For example, if a person is successful in a court matter, he attributes it to the fact that his lawyer made a brilliant address to the court and this influenced the judge to rule in his favour. Again, if a sick person is healed, then it was because of the brilliance of the doctor, or the medicine was very efficacious. In short, wherever you turn, you will find that man's gaze does not extend to the Almighty Who is the real and only Causer of all things, and through Whose grace it is that man wins his case, or the sick is healed, or all the world's problems are solved. Man's eyes are blinded by the veils of means and do not reach up to the Creator. This is latent polytheism from which it is difficult to extricate oneself and for overcoming which the Holy Qur'an lays down an elaborate plan which is divided into two branches: strict regard for means, and total reliance on Allah, Most High. The following incident elucidates the point:

Once, a desert Arab came to visit the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and leaving his camel unfettered, he entered the *masjid* (mosque). The Holy Prophet (*sas*) asked him why he had not tied his camel. He replied that he had full trust in Allah, Most High, whereupon the Holy Prophet (*sas*) counselled him: "Trust in Allah, Most High, but first tie your camel." In other words, make use of means but do not put all your reliance on them. Instead, implicit trust must be placed in Allah, Most High.

Thus, it is imperative that man should make use of medicines and other forms of treatment but he should depend on Allah, Most High, for the healing of his ailments. Similarly, he should strive to the fullest to earn a livelihood but his dependence must always be on Allah, the Provider (*Razzaq*), for whatever benefits man receives all come from the reservoir of Allah's grace. If His grace is not forthcoming, then the means to bring about a result to our satisfaction will not be put in train. Thus, the acme of belief in one God is for man to make use of means but to place reliance on Allah, alone, Who is the true Causer of all causes.

Another example of this principle comes from the Holy Qur'an. When Lady Mayram (*ra*) was living in the temple in the care of Prophet Zacharias (*as*) as a result of the vow her mother had made to devote her to Allah, people made all the necessary arrangements for her and from time to time they would bring fruits and other forms of sustenance for her. Once, when Prophet Zacharias (*as*) went to visit her, his eyes fell on the fruits and he inquired of her whence she got them, to which she replied: "*It is from Allah*" (3:36).

When he heard this little child's reply that was filled with such deep trust and reliance on Allah, Most High, his heart was touched with admiration and he thought to himself: "Such an infant! People bring fruits to her and yet her eyes are not on them but on the true Giver of sustenance." On witnessing this picture of complete faith in one God and total reliance on Him, his heart melted with emotion and straightaway he made this petition to his Lord: "... *My Lord, grant me from Thee goodly offspring ...*" (3:37).

In this incident, some commentators of the Holy Qur'an take Lady Maryam's reply: "*It is from Allah,*" to mean that it was Angel Gabriel who used to bring fruits to her. This is mere fancy without an ounce of credibility in it. Would there be anything extraordinarily beautiful in Lady Maryam's reply if the Angel Gabriel had told her that it was Allah, Most High, Who had sent him with the gift of fruits? In that case, what exemplary lesson can we learn from this event? None whatsoever. Allah, Most High, does not send fruits through the agency of Angel Gabriel to anyone today, nor is anyone in need of such fables. The real lesson of faith in Allah's unity and reliance on Him comes from the fact that it is people who supplied Lady Maryam (*ra*) with fruits, yet her eyes cut through the intervening veils of means and she saw all the time that it is Allah, Most High, Who is the true Provider. This is the true teaching of the Holy Qur'an on faith in One God and trust in Him and this is the lesson it desires to impress in the mind of every believer.

Here, too, it must be said that Prophet Noah (*as*) was in the flood sitting in the boat but the fact is that it was not that contraption of wood and nails that saved him. He was saved because the ark was under Allah's protection and that guardianship was granted to him as a reward for his good deeds even after he was rejected and humiliated by his people. However, Allah, Most High, valued the purity of His servant's actions and so rescued him. In this event, there is a potent sign provided that people benefit from it and internalise the admonition and the counsel. In other words, the deeper implication is that whoever comes from the Almighty brings from Him a teaching and that message, too, is like a boat and those who act on it are like people who are sitting safely in a boat. And whatever storm of opposition they may confront, or however agonising the trial of Allah may seem to be, yet whoever sails on the boat of divine teachings is always saved.

16. *How (terrible) was then My chastisement and My warning (nudhuri)!*

17. *And certainly We have made the Qur'an easy to remember, but is there anyone who will mind?*

*Nudhur* is the plural of *nadhira* which is the noun from *andhara* meaning to warn or admonish.

*Nudhur* is the infinitive noun and means warning or anything that inspires fear, whether human or non-human.

The deniers are asked to take a lesson from this incident and see how excruciating was Allah's punishment and how appropriate His advance warning was. Therefore, if they have any sense at all, they should desist from their evil course and accept the truth. The verities of the Holy Qur'an are simple and easy to understand even for people of ordinary intelligence as well as the highly intelligent and they are very much in accordance with human nature. Therefore, nothing prevents the rejecters from acknowledging and accepting them except that their inordinacy and prejudice put a veil on their eyes.

In this chapter, these two verses are repeated every time after Allah's destructive punishment of a people is mentioned so that whatever admonitory chastisement was given by Him would be fixed deep in the minds of people, and that they might pay attention to the fact that they should meditate over the message of the Holy Qur'an; they should try to understand it to the best of their ability and profit from it, and not only save themselves from punishment, but also become the inheritors of all material and spiritual blessings to which the Holy Book invites.

At this juncture, there is another point that deserves consideration and that is that the Holy Qur'an says in this chapter: "*We have made the Qur'an easy to remember*" or to understand, whilst in 56:79 it states: "*Which none touches but the purified ones,*" that is, unless a person is a *muttaqi* (pious one), he

cannot grasp the deeper knowledge of the verities and esoteric meanings of the Holy Qur'an. At first sight, there seems to be an apparent contradiction between these two verses. However, in reality, there is none. Even in a perfect human being there is no discrepancy between word and action, so how much more so for Allah, Most High. Can there be anyone in whom there is greater harmony between speech and action than on Him? The Holy Qur'an is the word of Allah, Most High, and His action is the book of nature which is always open before us. As a result, in the Holy Qur'an, whatever rules and laws have been taught to man are always in accordance with nature to such an extent that in order for man to grasp the secrets and mysteries of the spiritual world the Holy Qur'an always gives examples and evidence from the physical world. For example, when it wants us to comprehend the need for divine revelation it draws testimony and example from the rain: if the earth is in need of rain from the heavens to sustain its life, then the soil of the heart also requires for the maintenance of its existence spiritual rain from above, and this comes in the form of divine revelation.

For this reason, in order for us to understand the verses under discussion, we should focus our attention on the pages of nature where we observe that Allah's favours come in two ways: the first way is general, from which all His creatures benefit; for example, air, water, the light of the sun and the moon, grain, corn and many more. These favours are so abundantly and copiously acquired that every human being, whether rich or poor, benefits from them, for these are gifts upon which man's life depends and so Allah, Most High, has made them common and easy to obtain. On the other hand, the second class of favours is special: for example, gold, silver, diamonds, pearls and so on. To acquire them demands strenuous labour – cutting and drilling of rocky mountains, or diving deep down under the seas. In short, one has to expend hard labour and make arduous efforts before one can possess them. As man's life does not depend on them, but only his buildings and his beauty and adornment, Allah, Most High, has placed great difficulties and severe struggle in the way of acquiring them.

The same principle pertains to knowledge of the Holy Qur'an in that there are also two aspects to it. The first part is that on which man's spiritual life depends, that is, the creeds and principles, the permitted and the prohibited actions that man is constrained to believe in and to act upon because his spiritual nourishment and his physical and mental success are contingent on them. These are easy and straightforward rules and principles intelligible to all – even a person of low intelligence as well as a philosopher can grasp their meaning and act upon them. These matters are so natural to man that as soon as he hears them he instinctively exclaims that they already exist in his heart.

Today, in England and Germany, where Islam is spreading, we frequently hear recent Muslim converts say of their own accord that when they heard speeches about Islam for the first time and the principles and rules of the religion were explained to them it appeared to them that these were words for which their own hearts were yearning. In other words, it appeared as if these were voices from their own hearts. This is why the Holy Qur'an referred to its words as *Adh-Dhikr* (the Reminder). That is, it is a reminder to man's inner nature and they contain such principles as would elevate man to a position of great honour and nobility if only he were to fashion his life according to them. Thus, this is the part concerning which the Holy Qur'an states above: "*And certainly We have made the Qur'an easy to understand, but is there anyone who will mind?*"

However, there is another side to the Holy Qur'an – the part that comprises the mysteries and secrets of the spiritual world as well as deeper and deeper Divine gnosis and more and more esoteric verities and insights into the nature of Allah, Most High. These incorporate the treasure house of the jewels and pearls of Divine wisdom and in reference to these the Holy Qur'an says: "... *And whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good*" (2:269).

These are the branches of knowledge of spiritual secrets and heavenly truths and divine enlightenment and perception in regard to which the Holy Qur'an affirms: "*Which none touches save the purified ones*" (56:79). In other words, this "touch" is known only by those who are mystics and who, having transcended every station of the spiritual pilgrim's journey, become irradiated by celestial light. To obtain this is to acquire wealth beyond computation and this light is the apparel of spiritual adornment, gorgeous embellishment and exquisite beauty.

After Prophet Noah (*as*), attention is drawn to the people of 'Ad to whom Prophet Hud (*as*) was sent. They lived to the south of Arabia in Hadramaut and Yaman. Hindus take great pride in the antiquity of their civilisation, claiming that it has existed for tens of millions of years. However, this is totally false and is a gross exaggeration. European researchers have confirmed that the age of the Vedas does not exceed four thousand years. Also confirmed is the fact that Egyptian civilisation pre-dates that of the Hindus and older than that of Egypt was the civilisation of Yaman, that is, the very country inhabited by the people of 'Ad. Recent archaeological excavations there have discovered a stone tablet with the name of Prophet Hud (*as*) engraved on it together with some details relating to conditions at that time. This tablet has put an end to the objection of Christian priests who, from the very beginning, denied the existence of Prophet Hud (*as*). At the same time, it has confirmed the authenticity of the Holy Qur'an which was the first Book to make reference to Prophet Hud (*as*) and has thus placed his existence firmly in world history. These people possessed such a high level of civilisation and power in their time that in relation to them the Holy Qur'an says in chapter 89, *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn): "*Hast thou not considered how thy Lord dealt with 'Ad (of) Iram, having lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the land?*" (89:6-8). A people who had become so proud and intoxicated with their pomp and power was never inclined to pay heed to the message of Prophet Hud (*as*). The result was:

18. *'Ad denied, so how terrible was My chastisement and My warning!*

In this account, the name of Prophet Hud (*as*) is not even mentioned. The Holy Qur'an considered it sufficient to speak only of 'Ad's rejection, for whether it was Prophet Hud (*as*) who was denied or some other prophet in his time, it really amounts to the same thing: it is synonymous with waging war against the Almighty, Himself, for to show contempt for the prophet or his messengership, that is, his teachings, is really to pour scorn on the Sender. Thus, punishment was sure to come. However, it did not descend out of the blue but every effort was made to make them understand and to warn them. So, if no one minded, what recourse was left? What form the punishment took is given in the following verses:

19. *Surely We sent on them a furious wind in a day of bitter ill-luck* (*yaumin nahsin*),

20. *Tearing men away as if they were the trunks* (*a'jaazu*) *of palm-trees torn up* (*munqa'ir*).

*A'jaazu* is the plural of *'ajzun* meaning the base or foundation of something. Here it refers to the tree trunks that were uprooted.

*Munqa'ir* means torn up from the roots and flung away.

*Yaumin nahsin* is a day of great misfortune.

By itself, a day is neither fortunate nor unfortunate. Here it is called an unlucky or ill-fated day because on that day the terrible calamity of the people of 'Ad came into being. Something is said to suffer ill-fortune because some calamity or Divine retribution befalls it.

We are told that ‘Ad was struck by a fierce sandstorm which uprooted people and flung them far and wide. This was a cyclone, to understand which one must picture to oneself a whirlwind: a whirlpool forms in the water and so powerful is its eddy that whatever falls in this water is dragged down below the water and it is difficult to escape from it. In the same way, the wind begins to swirl furiously and this is called a whirlwind or a tornado. It has been witnessed on many occasions that if, in the water of the tornado, there happens to be sand or similar substances in that area, the power of the wind takes them straight up to the sky. If it passes over a populated region, so violent is the blast of wind felt and so turbulent is the vibration of the doors and household articles that it would appear as if the Day of Resurrection had arrived.

Imagine now the wind forming a tornado extending for miles around and try to estimate the extent of its power. If a whirlwind with a diameter of a yard can lift and carry objects high up in the sky, can one imagine, then, the ferocious fury of a cyclone with a diameter of several miles and can one guess at the havoc it would cause? When this cyclone strikes, so destructive is its force that it causes roofs of houses, human beings and animals to fly in the air and if there is a desert nearby, the houses are covered over with sand.

Accordingly, a tornado struck the people of ‘Ad and so mighty was its power that it raged continuously for seven nights and eight days. Just imagine the destructive force of this cyclone! The result was that the entire country was devastated: men and animals were uprooted and killed whilst villages and cities were buried under the sand. Recently, an Englishman travelled over the desert in the southern part of Arabia called the “Empty Quarter” and reported that he saw, buried under the desert sand, signs of a very large city.

21. *How terrible was then My chastisement and My warning!*

22. *And certainly We have made the Qur’an easy to remember, but is there any who will mind?*

The Holy Qur’an asks us to consider how Allah’s punishment came upon them and how true was His warning. As a result, we are reminded that He is still admonishing us by means of the Holy Qur’an and promises that if there is anyone who will benefit from this warning, He will make the Holy Qur’an easy to understand for such as would take heed of its advice. In other words, its counsels and admonitions are based on principles that are easy and simple to comprehend and are in total conformity with human nature. As a result, every human being can immediately grasp and profit from them provided he applies a modicum of sound thinking or common sense to them.

## Section 2

This subject is continued in this section also, namely, the history of former peoples is recalled so that a lesson can be learnt from their fate and that the unbelievers may take a warning from their end.

23. *Thamud rejected the warnings (nudhur).*

The people of Thamud lived in the northern part of Arabia called the Hejaz, and their settlements extended up to Palestine. They were extremely adroit in hewing mountains and large rocks from which they built their homes and palaces. In the days when a railway ran from Madinah to Damascus, many pilgrims used to travel from Madinah to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and they reported that on the way they saw the settlements of Thamud and the houses which they had hewed out of the mountains

and big blocks of stones. They had acquired a great dexterity in the art of hewing and all their forts, palaces and homes were built in this manner. It was among this people that Prophet Salih (*as*) was raised.

Here the word *nudhur* (warnings) is used in the plural to signify that Thamud had rejected all warnings. Perhaps, besides Prophet Salih (*as*), there were other messengers who had come to that nation.

Alternatively, it could mean that the rejection of one messenger is tantamount to the rejection of all messengers and so the plural *nudhur* (warnings) is employed. Or, the plural is used here to denote respect in that the warner was a person of lofty status, for he was a messenger of the Almighty, but he was scorned by his people whose justification for doing so is given in the following verses:

24. *So they said: What! A single mortal from among us? Shall we follow him? We shall then be in sure error and distress (su'urin).*

25. *Has the Reminder been sent to him from among us? Nay, he is an insolent liar (ashir)!*

*Su'ur* means madness. In other words, they say that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is only a mortal from among them and to follow him will lead them surely into error. In fact, they contend that it would be the height of insanity to heed his call for no one with a modicum of intelligence can accept him.

If *su'ur* is taken as the plural of *sa'ir* (hell or burning fire), then it would mean that to heed the words of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) will land them in the fire of hell.

*Ashir* signifies a proud and conceited person.

From whatever point you begin to read the history of religions you will find that Allah's characteristic remark has been that every prophet or commissioned one has always been rejected on the grounds of being a mere mortal with the deniers claiming that they could not follow such an insignificant person. This error of judgement has existed from the very beginning. Mankind has always been of the opinion that if a person has been sent by the Almighty, he should come with some miraculous signs which should set him apart from ordinary men even though such has never been the case for the messengers always claim: "I am a mortal just like you." As regards the Holy Prophet (*sas*), the unbelievers exclaimed in astonishment: "*What a Messenger is this? He eats food and goes about in the markets. Why has not an angel been sent down to him to be a warner with him?*" (25:7).

In Islam, there was a highly respected saint by the name of Dhun Nun, who lived in Egypt. A certain person heard of his exalted reputation and so went in search of him and when he arrived at the city in which the saint lived he began to inquire of him. Someone told him that he was at the butcher's shop purchasing meat. When the person went there, what could he see but a dark-complexioned man in ordinary clothes standing in the butcher's stall! Allah alone knows what fanciful picture of this saint he had in his mind. However, when his eyes fell on a man looking undistinguished and no different from ordinary people, he was filled with disgust to the point that he left without even speaking to the saint.

In short, those who persecuted the venerable saints of the religions in their lifetime and branded them as unbelievers (*kafirs*) did so merely because, in their eyes, these exalted ones looked like nondescript people who, it was alleged, were claiming to be saints and commissioned ones solely through the bidding of their inflated egos and thus they were looked upon as liars and fabricators. Another point of difficulty for certain people is that an apostle, or one sent by the Almighty, appears so different from what was expected of him that people are not inclined to believe in him. In their minds, it must be

another person who is rightfully deserving of this high rank and not such an unprepossessing looking person. He must be, they think, a man who belongs to a noble or aristocratic family, or he must be a very erudite man, or some distinguished scholar with a high reputation, or a very revered religious guide (*pir*) whom they conceive to be a person specially chosen by the Almighty. However, Allah, Most High, looks into the hearts of people and is fully aware of all those who are close to Him and is more acquainted than anyone else of their capabilities and merits. So, when He decides to select someone, His designated choice falls to the lot of a person who is unknown to people and thus the religious divines are greatly deceived and, like the People of Thamud, they exclaim in astonishment: “*Has the Reminder been sent to him from among us? Nay, he is an insolent liar*” (verse 25 above).

In other words, they question how the words of Allah can be revealed to such a person when there are amongst them so many holy personages more deserving of the honour. So they consider his claim as bogus, and look upon him as a notorious liar and a very conceited person for daring to claim for himself the mantle of messenger or commissioned one of God. What a realistic picture of the mentality of people and the nature of deniers is painted here that, from the beginning of creation, whatever place or time is investigated, one will always find that the strongest reasons given for the rejection of messengers or apostles of the Almighty are those that are depicted in the above two verses of the Holy Qur’an.

For example, in relation to our own Holy Prophet (*sas*), we find a prophecy of Prophet Moses (*as*) in Deuteronomy 18:18 in the following words: “(And the Lord said): I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put My words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him.”

However, when he was appointed from among their brethren, the Ishmaelites, in complete fulfilment of the above prophecy, the Children of Israel rejected him solely on the grounds that the promised prophet must come from the House of Israel.

Similarly, when Prophet Jesus (*as*) announced that he was the Messiah to the Children of Israel, they replied: “Is this not Joseph’s son, Jesus, whose parents we know? How can he say now that he has descended from heaven?”

In another place, it is recorded in the Gospel that they said that this was the son of a carpenter and his sisters lived amongst them so how could he claim to be the Messiah. In short, they were greatly deceived in that the promised one did not come from the expected place but from an entirely different quarter.

In the same way, although the *Mujaddid* of the Age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was acknowledged with great reverence as a learned, distinguished and pious soul of the highest rank, yet when he claimed to be the Messiah and announced that Prophet Jesus (*as*) was dead and that the coming Messiah was only a *mujaddid* (reformer) who was referred to metaphorically as the Son of Mary and that he was that person, the result was that people poured scorn and contempt on his claim.

#### *26. Tomorrow they will know who is the liar, the insolent one.*

Although it is not explicitly stated, these are the words of Allah, Most High. There is no need for saying so openly because the subject of the verse clearly indicates that this is the reply of someone. Further, the requirement of logical speech demanded that a reply to the insult be given and without delay the answer comes from on High that they would find out on the following day who the insolent

liar really was. In this context, the word *tomorrow* means the time was close when the consequences would become clear. In other words, very soon it would come into the open who the egoistic liar was – Allah’s messenger or those who were opposing him. Soon Allah, Most High, would give a decision and disclose that those who called the messenger a liar were themselves the liars and were in fact themselves the impudent ones, for they were contradicting the truth and were prevented by their own pride and self-conceit from submitting to the Divine messenger.

27. *Surely We are going to send the she-camel as a trial for them; so watch them (far-taqibhum) and have patience (was-tabir).*

28. *And inform them that the water is shared between them.*

*Far-taqibhum* means wait and see how they behave towards the she-camel, whilst *was-tabir* encourages the Prophet to have extraordinary patience. In other words, he must display extra patience in order to endure their taunts and reproaches and persecution for through the she-camel they have received their last piece of evidence.

Many commentators have written that this camel had come out of the mountain and was born of neither male nor female. This is a mere tale without a shred of truth to it. To them, what constitutes a sign or a miracle is for us to witness an extraordinary event which is beyond our powers of comprehension, and so they contrived this story. If this fable were true, why did the Holy Qur’an omit to mention it? Was Allah, Most High, (may Allah forbid) afraid of the objections of the atheists? The fact is that this story has no basis in truth. The commentators are also wrong when they write that when Prophet Salih (*as*) ordered his people to give his camel a time to drink, so unusually wondrous was this animal that it would drink up every drop of water in the reservoir.

People who are acquainted with the conditions in arid, irrigated countries where there are no wells, nor rivers, nor springs will know how people in those regions build reservoirs or construct dams in low-lying areas. When rain falls, the reservoirs are filled and water is collected in the low-lying areas because of the dams to form a pool. This is the water that people drink and use for domestic purposes as well as for watering their animals. In other words, their lives depend on this water. In a settlement with two reservoirs, one is set aside for humans and the other for animals, but where there is only one, both humans and animals have to share the same tank.

In our country, whoever wishes may see for himself the same kind of difficulty that people have to undergo in the district of Atak in the sub-district of Pindi Ghaib and Fathe Jang. This is what the people of Thamud had to endure in a country where there was not a well nor a spring, neither a river nor a stream. So they collected rainwater for home use and for their animals, too. As a result, different families watered their animals at separate intervals designated for them. As water was a scarce and precious commodity in those parts, people could not give their animals to drink unless their leaders gave them permission to do so. Prophet Salih (*as*) made this arrangement with his people that as they had their turns to water their beasts, they should not interfere with Allah’s she-camel at the turn of anyone of them and that they should allow it to drink freely.

So far, so good. However, for the commentators to say that the camel drank up all the water is quite wrong. If we were to accept this as true, then it would mean that the instigator of mischief was Prophet Salih (*as*) himself. In a country where the lives of men and animals all depended on the water in a reservoir, if a calamity like this were to strike them that in one go all the water were to disappear instantly, then it would be incumbent on the inhabitants to remove that threat to their very existence. After all, self-preservation is the first rule of life. So to preserve their lives and those of their families

and animals, they could have no recourse but to kill the she-camel. In that case, it would make no sense to say that Allah, Most High, became angry and destroyed them for this action, for that would mean that He (may Allah forbid) stood accused of an act of cruelty and injustice.

Further, it is impossible to understand how that pond could be filled up time and time again after the she-camel had emptied it in one drink. Where was the water to come from? This is the result of going astray merely for the sake of fabricating a miracle. Allah's Person is free of such a blemish as would make Him send a camel that consumes all the water the people had stored up and when they took steps to save their lives by destroying the camel, He (may Allah forbid) would become angry and kill them all in retribution. To attribute such a "miracle" to the Supreme Being is nothing but slander.

The truth is that among the tribe of Thamud there was a custom where very wealthy or high-ranking people of the nation used to set loose an animal bearing their name. This beast had freedom to eat and drink wherever it wished and could even attack people with impunity. No one had the power to kill that animal or to seize it or even lay hand on it. To slaughter or capture it was tantamount to sending a message to the owner implying that the attacker had no regard for the owner of the animal and was even prepared to do battle with him. This would prompt the master to get ready for battle so as to punish the offender with due punishment in order to demonstrate and preserve his authority and prestige, or to die in the attempt. If he remained alive without having been able to exact retribution, then that signalled the end of his power and rank.

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

In short, this constituted the symbol of Thamud's power and it has always been the way of Allah, when manifesting His power or displaying a miracle, to keep under consideration the customs and traditions of the people to which His messenger had been sent. Thus, in demonstrating this knowledge or power in the form of a miracle, many times He does so in such a way as to confront the area of expertise in which the nation exhibited their pride and power so that His sign may serve as a devastating proof to these people.

For example, in the time of Prophet Moses (*as*) there was a tradition amongst the Egyptian people of performing wondrous deeds through their deep powers of concentration and willpower of which they were very proud. As a result, Western researchers have written that as regards mesmerism or, in other words, deep concentration and willpower, the consequent marvels that resulted from this skill owe their origin to Egypt and this ability was at its highest in the time of the Pharaohs.

It is this art that the Holy Qur'an speaks of as magic (*sihrun*). In short, when Allah, Most High, sent Prophet Moses (*as*) as His messenger to Egypt, of all the signs vouchsafed to him, the greatest was that of the rod seemingly being transformed into a snake. And this was an especially appropriate challenge to their dexterity in mesmerism or hypnotism.

Many commentators interpret this miracle in this way: they say that the rod (*'asa*) stands for a community (*jama'at*) and the fact that the rod was being turned into a living snake points to the eventuality that the dead Israelite nation was going to be revived at the hands of Prophet Moses (*as*). This, too, is a correct interpretation. However, the contest between Prophet Moses (*as*) and the

magicians cast a transparent light on the matter in that the whole incident portrayed a test of power between the strength of the will of the Almighty and that of the will of man. The whole intention behind this was to impress on the mind of man that in confrontation with the power of God's will, man's willpower was nothing whatsoever, even if it was backed up by a large and willing community of followers.

This miracle brightly illuminated an important point: the big gulf between mesmerisers and a prophet of God and that is that the mesmerisers strengthen their willpower and thereby perform extraordinary feats which are beyond the power of ordinary people to imitate. However, these accomplishments, sad to say, have not even the slightest influence on their morals and it is plainly evident that many mesmerisers are engrossed in the lowest level of behaviour of those who love this worldly life and whose greed for it knows no bounds. Thus, the very magicians who came to do battle with Prophet Moses (*as*) started to ask for money, even before the contest, as is recorded in the Holy Qur'an: "*And the enchanters came to Pharaoh, saying: We must surely have a reward if we prevail (on Moses)*" (7:113). In other words, the motivating force behind these people's actions was greed for the luxuries of this world together with lust for pomp and power and nothing of a noble nature was present in them.

On the other hand, the prophet subjects his will to the will of Allah, Most High, and in order to win His pleasure, he grows in obedience to such an extent that he causes his own will to be effaced by the will of his Lord. Further, in order to fulfil the desires of Allah, Most High, he annihilates completely his own wishes, desires and ambitions and in this way a death comes over his passions, his longings and his will power. It is thus that he attains the lofty station of *fana fil-Laah* (annihilation of the self in Allah) at which stage Divine light irradiates his heart so profusely that in place of his own willpower the power of God's willpower takes over. He is given a new life in which he has already abandoned everything pertaining to his self – now, whatever remains is solely for his Lord, Most High. He speaks according to the bidding of Allah, Most High, and walks when He says so. In other words, every word or deed of his accords with the will of the Almighty. This is the meaning of the following verse of the Holy Qur'an relating to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) at the Battle of Badr: "*So you slew them not but Allah slew them, and thou smotest not when thou didst smite (the enemy), but Allah smote (him)*" (8:17). Here the Holy Prophet's action is equated with the action of Allah, Most High.

This same significance is conveyed in a long *hadith* of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), part of which is quoted here: "If My servant keeps drawing near to Me with supererogatory acts, I shall love him, and when I love him, I shall be his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps and his foot with which he walks. If he asks from Me, I shall certainly give him and if he seeks refuge in Me, I shall certainly give him refuge..." (*Mishkat al-Masabih*, p. 477, Robson).

Here, by *servant* is meant the perfect slave of God – the one who has reached the utmost limit of obedience and whose every personal desire, wish, longing or ambition has already been extinguished. Thus, it is bound to happen that as he resides in Allah in his new life, all his words, actions, thoughts and feelings operate under Allah's commands. In other words, this means that he has coloured himself with the colours of his Lord and in him righteous and noble morals have reached the topmost peak.

Thus, a mesmeriser is only concerned with increasing his hypnotic powers and since, by lack of obedience to Allah, Most High, he does not allow the Divine will to have any control over his own will, therefore, for the sake of Satan or for his own base animal desires, he has the opportunity to utilise his enhanced hypnotic powers in any manner he chooses, and in relation to the common folk he can employ his advanced will-power to seek his own advantage.

On the other hand, a prophet subdues his own baser instincts and through perfect obedience to his Master, a passion develops in his heart impelling him to make his Lord's will predominant over his own. Thus, he increases in spiritual excellence and his sole concern is to spread knowledge and wisdom and the doctrine of Divine Unity throughout the world. There is nothing of self in his work and the will-power of the whole world can do him no harm nor thwart his plans. This is indeed the true manifestation and proof of his miracle and we have palpable evidence of this in the life of Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and that of Prophet Moses (*as*) in particular. In fact, the human will is like straw face to face with the Divine will.

Firstly, look at how the will of Allah, Most High, was evident in the mission of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and see how he influenced the hearts of not two or three people, but a whole nation responded to his magnetic appeal and look at the number of enemies he vanquished when they tried to impose their will on him. Secondly, look at how the will of God gave to Prophet Moses (*as*) the power to destroy Pharaoh and his hosts and to liberate a whole nation – the Children of Israel – from bondage. In the miracle of the rod, therefore, there was a proclamation and a reminder to the world that the will of God will always be triumphant over the will of man.

At this stage, there are a few points left to be considered:

1. By dint of hard labour and discipline the mesmerisers improve their hypnotic powers to such an extent that they can influence the eyes and minds of other people, and according to the measure of their capability and ability, they can produce an impression and govern the minds of people, and under this spell they can do whatever they want to. For example, there may be clear, transparent water in a drinking glass. However, if they should so direct their powers of concentration and will on the viewers they can make them see the water as green in colour, or red, or whatever colour they may choose. In this way, they exhibit hundreds of displays and games. This is the miracle of man's will-power. As a result, whoever augments this power can influence not only a few human beings but also a very large community, and within reasonable bounds they can conjure up whatever scene they wish to.

For example, a certain incident is recorded in *Tuzk-i Jahangiri*. Although this is an old event, yet in this same regard a few months ago the *Times of India* also related the eyewitness accounts of a few Britishers. It reports that a juggler came up to them and threw a rope in the air and it stood erect without any visible support. A young boy then grasped the rope and climbed up to the top of it, and then descended to the ground, still holding onto the rope. This scene bewitched the eyes of the English tourists and the other spectators who were around. It so happened that once, when the boy climbed up the rope and started to perform some juggling feats on the top of it, an Englishman took a picture of the scene with a camera. When the film was processed, lo and behold! it became clear to all that the rope was lying on the ground all the time and that the boy was sitting at the end of it and was performing his tricks. It is quite evident that the strong hypnotic power of the juggler cast a spell on the eyes of the beholders but the photograph, being a lifeless object, could not be deceived, and thus revealed the true state of affairs.

In addition to this, there is another point that must be borne in mind: if a person's willpower is weaker than that of another, then when the former is attempting to hypnotise the latter, what will happen is that he himself will be conquered by the intended victim. Another point to be considered in relation to mesmerism is that one mesmeriser cannot prevail over several other mesmerisers simultaneously for man's power and abilities are limited. This goes to prove that

when Prophet Moses (*as*) triumphed over the combined willpower of four thousand magicians, it was not his power but the majesty of the Almighty that was victorious.

2. The second point worthy of remembering is that Prophet Moses' rod did not change its intrinsic nature and become a real snake. Instead, it was seen in the form of a snake. From the verse: *Laa tabdeela li khalqil Laahi* (There is no change in the creation of Allah – 30:30), it clearly proves that there is no alteration in the nature of Allah's creation. And Allah, Most High, Himself says in the Holy Qur'an that only its appearance (*seerat*) underwent a change but not its nature (*khalq*), as the following verse testifies in respect to the rod: "*He said: Seize it and fear not. We shall return it to its former state (seeratahal-oolaa)*" (20:21).
3. The third point is that the staff (of Prophet Moses) assumed the form of a snake not through Prophet Moses' willpower but by Allah's. Proof of this is that when Prophet Moses (*as*) first received the command to cast his rod and that it would appear as a snake, he himself conceived such a fear of the apparent snake that he ran away from it as the following verse demonstrates: "*So when he saw it (the rod) in motion as if it were a serpent, he turned back retreating and did not return ...*" (27:10). This conclusively proves that Prophet Moses' powers of suggestion or his strength of will had no input in this matter. Whatever took place was a demonstration of the miracle of the Divine Will and it was with this that the magicians of Egypt were routed, even though, according to the Torah, there were four thousand of them gathered together in a show of force and they had cast their ropes and their cords making them appear as serpents as the Holy Qur'an itself relates: "*He (Prophet Moses) said: Cast. So when they cast, they deceived the people's eyes and overawed them, and they produced a mighty enchantment*" (7:116).

Another description of this scene is given elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an: "*He (Prophet Moses) said: Nay! Cast you down. Then lo! Their cords and their rods – it appeared to him by their enchantment as if they ran. So Moses conceived fear in his mind*" (20:66-67).

This enchantment demonstrates the force of human will-power. It had a deep effect on the thinking faculties of the people when they saw the cords and rods beginning to run like snakes. As a result, Prophet Moses (*as*) was struck with consternation at this spectacle and wondered fearfully what force his miracle would have. Will falsehood not be enlightened by this fact? It is the same fear to which the Holy Qur'an alludes in the verse quoted above (20:67). However, Allah, Most High, reassured him thus in the next verse: "*We said: Fear not, surely thou art the uppermost*" (20:68).

So Prophet Moses (*as*), acting under the command of Allah, Most High, threw down his rod, which swallowed up the fabrications of the magicians and thus underlined the fact that the community of the Israelites would come alive and be the agent of the destruction of the Egyptian society. It was important for this to take place before the eyes of the Israelites and later events were to prove the truth of this symbolism when the Egyptians were drowned in the presence of their former slaves. The vanquishment of the Egyptian magicians was only a premonition of this occurrence. Thus, Prophet Moses' extraordinary miracle took place in the same area of expertise in which the Egyptians took great pride and in which they never considered anyone else of any worth to challenge them, and this happened so as to provide them with overwhelming proof of the truth of Prophet Moses (*as*).

So it was, too, that in our Holy Prophet's time the Arabs prided themselves greatly on their linguistic eloquence and fluency. In addition to this, from the beginning of the Holy Prophet's age right up to the Day of Resurrection, man's knowledge has been increasing at a mind-boggling rate and this has caused him to become vain and conceited. As a result, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was given a most marvellous

miracle in the form of the Holy Qur'an in which Allah, Most High, has forcefully and undauntedly challenged all opponents of Arabia (and all times) to produce even a single chapter like it which will match the Holy Qur'an in fluency and eloquence, knowledge of the Unity of God and deep esoteric knowledge, principles of Law and sublime moral and spiritual values. In addition, their book must rival the Holy Qur'an in possessing the quality of perfect, all-pervading and all-comprehensive knowledge and wisdom. Further, it should contain the same magnetic power over the hearts of people as the Holy Qur'an has displayed in every single one of its chapters. Allah, Most High, then emphatically declares that they can never do so even if they should solicit the help of everyone else in the world besides Him, for this Book comes from Allah, Most High, and man can never produce a parallel to His word which is a miracle of knowledge and power.

Thus it happened that in that age and despite the outstanding prowess of the Arabs in their facility of language in which they took great pride, they were still powerless to compete with the linguistic brilliance of the Holy Qur'an, and this served as a powerful evidence to them that if the Holy Qur'an had been the work of man, it could easily have been surpassed by human ingenuity. The fact that all Arabia lay prostrate before the incomparable fluency and eloquence of the Holy Qur'an proved beyond a doubt that this was a Book of such knowledge and power as was beyond the ability of man to devise. Further, in point of its knowledge and science, it remains as a standing testimony not only to the Arabs but also to rejecters of every age up to the present time that, in spite of man's colossal explosion in knowledge and science, the challenge of the Holy Qur'an has remained and will always remain unanswered.

Thus, the perfection of a miracle lies in the fact that in whatever department man becomes haughty because of his great knowledge and power, in that very area he is laid low so that he may have incontestable evidence that the prophet who brings such an unassailable demonstration of God's power and knowledge does indeed come from the Supreme Being.

Consequently, the People of Thamud were thereby furnished with clear evidence. Prophet Salih (*as*) was a weak, forlorn and helpless man, whilst on the other hand the tribe of Thamud was a powerful nation that considered the prophet to be a liar. Their nine tribes plotted to kill him and the Holy Qur'an records their conspiracy and the aftermath in the verses: *"There were in the city nine persons who made mischief in the land and did not act aright. They said: Swear one to another by Allah that we shall attack him and his family by night, then we shall say to his heir: We witnessed not the destruction of his family, and we are surely truthful. And they planned a plan, and We planned a plan, while they perceived not. See, then, what was the end of their plan, that We destroyed them and their people, all (of them). So those are their houses fallen down because they were iniquitous. Surely there is a sign in this for a people who know. And We delivered those who believed and kept their duty"* (27:48-53).

This was an opportunity that called for the displaying of a sign. So in order to demonstrate His sign as well as His power, Allah, Most High, presented the she-camel and announced: "This is My camel, so do not interfere with her, nor prevent her from drinking."

Then the manifestation of Allah's power demanded that the miracle that was to be shown should be in accordance with the entrenched traditions of this nation. In this, there was a subtle sign that the perfect soul of Allah's apostle was in fact His camel on which He rode. In other words, the prophet's heart was the place on which descended Divine splendour and majesty and his Master held in His hands the reins of His servant's walking and roaming, rising and resting, speaking and acting just as a human master exercised power over his camel. The prophet's water was the drink of heavenly guidance which he brought from Allah, Most High, and on this water man's everlasting spiritual life depended.

Accordingly, whoever wished to destroy the messenger and to obliterate the guidance he brought was really keeping the human soul away from the water of eternal heavenly life, and considering Allah's power as insignificant, he was intent on doing battle with Him. Under these circumstances, it was incumbent on the Almighty to manifest a sign of His power and might and to eradicate such impudence. Thus, He desired to present this matter before the People of Thamud in such a manner that they could never misunderstand it. That is, He put forward a she-camel and ordered them to stay far away from killing the messenger who was, indeed, Allah's she-camel. In fact, the camel in their midst served as a palpable sign to them. Allah, Most High, designated it as His Own and warned them of the consequences of harming it. However, this nation could not understand, and riding high on the wave of their power and might, they killed the she-camel as the Holy Qur'an relates:

29. *But they called their companion, so he took (ta'aata i.e., a sword) and hamstrung her ('aqara).*

30. *How (terrible) was then My chastisement and My warning!*

'Aqara means to cut the tendons. It was a custom among the Arabs that before slaughtering a camel they would cut its tendons so that it would fall down and not be able to run away.

Ta'ata means to dare to stretch one's hands to take up something that is unlawful to take.

Indeed, the People of Thamud would never condescend to accept a challenge from Salih (*as*) who, although he was a prophet of God, was considered by them as a weak and helpless individual. They were totally displeased at the idea of allowing this camel to drink of their water, especially as it was left, as a demonstration of power, to roam freely in the land. It appeared as if there was among them a particular person who was very bold and audacious and who was extremely arrogant because of his might and power. So the people decided to put an end to the camel and so they slaughtered it. In keeping with the custom of these people, this action issued a challenge that spoke as clearly as words that if Prophet Salih (*as*) was from God, as well as his camel, then his God could do whatever He liked. As for them, they cared not a whit. So the result that indeed ensued was, according to their tradition, just as one would expect if a person were to attempt to besmirch the honour of a powerful person. In other words, they were seized with a bitter retribution with which they were threatened beforehand.

31. *Surely We sent upon them a single cry (saihatan waahidatan), so they were like the dry fragments of trees, which the maker of an enclosure (hasheemul muhtazir) collects.*

*Muhtazir* is a hedge or a fence, and refers to one who builds a fence.

*Hasheem* signifies leaves etc. which have been broken up into very small pieces. Thus, by *hasheemul muhtazir* is meant the fence-maker who makes a fence out of dry branches tied together. Then those leaves etc. fall down and become ground to bits.

In giving this analogy, Allah's intention is to indicate that such people have no worth nor value in His estimation.

*Saihatun* literally means a loud voice, whilst metaphorically it signifies a disaster or a calamity, for when disasters and tribulations befall man, he usually shrieks out aloud and the tumultuous din that results brings to mind (may Allah protect us) the disasters of the Day of Resurrection.

It sometimes happens, too, that a loud roaring noise precedes an imminent earthquake. By saying that it was “a single cry” means that Allah came upon them suddenly. An alternative meaning is that He put an end to them with a single threat. That threat came in the form of an earthquake, which destroyed everything in the twinkling of an eye.

32. *And certainly We have made the Qur’an easy to remember, but is there anyone who will mind?*

This is an address to all people who are spoken to by the Holy Qur’an, that it is a Book which Allah has made easy for man to remember. Whoever wishes can follow its teachings and remind his inner self of a forgotten lesson and thus attain the status of nobility and reverence for which man was created.

In addition to this, the objective here is to provide a lesson for the pagan Arabs through reference to the People of Thamud, for the Holy Qur’an specially mentions this tribe to emphasise the point that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) is “the she-camel of Allah”. Thus, those who attempt to harm him will be requited with retribution from Allah, Most High, and certain destruction. Unfortunately, the unbelievers of Makkah failed to heed this salutary lesson and there came a time when they resolved to kill him. Just like the People of Thamud, nine tribes, too, formed a mutual alliance for the purpose of surrounding the Holy Prophet Muhammad’s house at night and putting an end to him. However, they could not harm him in the least. On the other hand, those who formed that compact were themselves annihilated and Allah’s prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.

33. *The people of Lot treated the warning (nudhur) as a lie.*

I have said already that Prophet Lot’s people inhabited the villages of Sodom, which is in Palestine. They, too, rejected the warners who came from Allah, Most High. In other words, by refusing to accept Prophet Lot (*as*), it was as if they were belying and opposing a whole community of warners.

Or, *nudhur* (warners), plural of *nadhira* (warner), is the plural in terms of respect. The People of Prophet Lot (*as*) were guilty of committing an abominable sin: they approached males with lust. Prophet Lot (*as*) desired to reform them and so warned them of Allah’s punishment but they, too, gave him the lie.

34. *Surely We sent upon them a stone-storm except Lot’s followers; We saved them a little before daybreak.*

35. *A favour from Us. Thus do We reward him who gives thanks.*

The punishment came at dawn: there was a volcanic eruption of such ferocity that there issued from the mountain a rain of hot molten rocks that brought destruction on the inhabitants of the area. In addition, an earthquake struck and turned the earth upside down and caused water to gush from the ground. This formed a very large lake, which is known as the Dead Sea because there is no living organism in it, nor can there ever be. It is also below sea-level.

Allah, Most High, saved Prophet Lot’s people. *Aal* (family) really means followers as the Holy Qur’an itself explains: “*And so We parted the sea for you, so We saved you (the Israelites) and drowned the people (aal) of Pharaoh while you saw*” (2:50).

It is clear here that the word *aal* signifies followers and the wife and children of Pharaoh. The reason for using the word *aal* (family members) is that these members of the family are followers. Allah, Most High, designates the preservation of Prophet Lot’s followers as an act of great favour, kindness and goodness. By using the word *ka-dhalika* (thus), Allah, Most High, indicates that this favour is general.

That is, it is not limited specially to Prophet Lot (*as*) and his people but was conferred on them because of their attribute of gratitude. Thus, those who are thankful today will receive the same blessings from Allah, Most High. *Shukr* (gratitude) is not merely an expression of the tongue for some favour; instead, genuine gratitude is to appreciate the value of the gifts Allah, Most High, has bestowed on us. In this regard, we must realise that the Book He has given to us and His Prophet also, are blessings of the highest order, and being grateful for them entails belief in them and acting on their teachings. Thus, those among Prophet Lot's people who exhibited this type of true gratitude became worthy of what the Holy Qur'an promises us: "*And when your Lord made it known: If you are grateful, I will give you more*" (14:17).

A most marvellous indication of this promise of more being given is the fact that Allah, Most High, saved them from that grievous chastisement whilst the rest of the nation was seized by it.

*36. And certainly he warned them of Our violent seizure, but they disputed the warning.*

That is, in his zeal to rescue them from imminent punishment, Prophet Lot (*as*) warned his people beforehand that if they were to be saved from Allah's retribution they should seek His forgiveness for their vile sin and reform themselves. However, when people become inebriated because of the intoxication that comes with comfort and luxury, power and wealth, they are not inclined to pay heed to such admonition at that time, and so proud and heedless man tends to engage in disputation against the truth. Thus, the People of Lot exceeded the bounds of civility and rectitude to such an extent that they came down to dishonour Prophet Lot (*as*) and his guests, as the Holy Qur'an relates:

*37. And certainly they endeavoured to turn him (raawadoohu) from his guests, but We blinded (tamasnaa) their eyes; so taste My punishment and My warning.*

The real meaning of *tamasa* is to obliterate whilst *raawadoohu* means to deflect from one's intention. That is, they made of Prophet Lot (*as*) a request that was contrary to his purpose and intention. The question as to who the guests of Prophet Lot (*as*) were (that is, whether they were angels or humans) has been discussed in detail in chapter 51 (*Adh-Dhariyat*). In any case, whoever they were, the fact is that they were seen by Prophet Lot (*as*) as well as his wife, through whom Prophet Lot's people came to know that he had guests. As soon as they heard the news, they came running in a frenzy to his home and requested him to hand over his guests into their custody. To subject his guests to such a disgrace was more than Prophet Lot (*as*) could bear. The ensuing dialogue is recorded elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an as follows: "*And his people came to him, (as if) driven on towards him, and they were used to the doing of evil deeds before. He said: O my people, these are my daughters — they are purer for you; so guard against (the punishment of) Allah and disgrace me not about my guests. Is there not among you any right-minded man? They said: Certainly thou knowest that we have no claim on thy daughters, and thou knowest what we desire*" (11:78-79).

This incident has proved very difficult for the commentators to explain for they construe it to mean that the people of Prophet Lot's nation desired to commit sodomy against the guests. He considered this an abomination and a disgrace to him, so, as an exchange, he offered his daughters to them that they might do whatever they pleased with them, for his daughters were purer than what they intended to do to his guests. Now, it is quite evident that such a suggestion from Prophet Lot (*as*) is not only a cause for shame and dishonour, but it is also contrary to the canons of human dignity and nobility for a father to offer his daughters as candidates for immorality. As a result, the commentators put forward two explanations for this event: Firstly, his intention was that they should get married to his daughters and

thus become husband and wife. Secondly, by daughters are meant the ladies of his people, for the nation's ladies are the daughters of a prophet.

These are two possible explanations and perhaps one of them is correct. However, their words: *Certainly thou knowest that we have no claim over your daughters*, cannot refer to their wives for to say such a thing of their own spouses makes no sense at all. Further, to say that what they really meant was that they had severed all conjugal relations with their wives is a far-fetched interpretation which the words do not bear, for here their categorical statement is that they had no right over his daughters. As for the explanation that it meant that they should marry and have spousal relations with them (his daughters) means that we will have to add the words “get married” to the text.

As for me, I like the interpretation which the late Hazrat Maulana Nur-ud-Din, the great scholar of the Qur'an, has given, but before sharing it with you, it is important to know that although Prophet Lot (*as*) was appointed a prophet to the Sodomite nation, he was, in fact, not one of them. He was Prophet Abraham's nephew and he was sent to this people because he had married among them and, considering himself to be one of them, he had settled down there.

In those days, there was stringent discrimination between people of different tribes and no people liked a person of another tribe to come and live with them. If that should be attempted, they would either kill the outsider or imprison him, or make him a slave, or they would humiliate him and chase him out of their town. Prophet Lot (*as*) had married from that locality and started to live there but under the strict condition that no one from outside the town should come to visit him, and the Holy Qur'an has preserved their unequivocal ultimatum on this matter. When they came to Prophet Lot's home and demanded that he should hand over his guests to their charge, they said quite categorically: “*Did we not forbid thee from (entertaining) people?*” (15:70), thus accusing him of having broken his covenant with them. If Prophet Lot (*as*) had given over his guests to them, they would have killed them, or would have dishonoured them and expelled them in disgrace and it would not have been surprising, knowing their propensity, if they had committed the crime of homosexuality against them. However, we cannot deduce from the Qur'anic verse that these people came to Prophet Lot's home with that purpose in mind. Prophet Lot (*as*) was trying to expunge from the hearts of these people the deep, suspicious thoughts that were aroused in their minds at the arrival of strange individuals in their town that they had come there to hatch a plot against them, or to instigate sedition in their midst, or with some such nefarious intention. In view of this, in order to reassure them, he said: “*These are my daughters, if you will do (aught) (in kuntum faa'ilun)*” (15:71).

In effect, he was offering his daughters as hostages to them in order to guarantee the safety of his guests, with the implicit understanding that he could do nothing detrimental to them.

Unfortunately, the commentators have taken the expression, *in kuntum faa'ilun* (if you will do aught) to mean “if you wish to have conjugal relations with them,” although this can never be the purport. The meaning is really this: “By coming to my home you seem to have a plan which you feel compelled to accomplish, so here are my daughters.” Now, what was the purpose for their rushing to his residence? Was it to have illicit sexual relations with the guests of Prophet Lot (*as*)? The Holy Qur'an does not say so. This is an idea that has issued purely from the minds of the commentators and it is wholly inferential. It is true that it has been established from the Holy Qur'an that they had gone there with the explicit intention of seizing the guests. So the purpose contained in the words: *If you will do aught*, can only be what the Holy Qur'an itself confirms and that is their capture of the prophet's guests. Thus, the distinct significance of Prophet Lot's words can only be this: “*If you have come here to capture my guests, then take my daughters in their place.*”

There is one last question to be addressed: Was there no fear that the honour of Prophet Lot's daughters would be violated if he were to place them in the custody of those people? My view is that there was none because the degree to which the prevailing local customs were clear to Prophet Lot (*as*) cannot be as evident to us. For our peace of mind, it is sufficient for us to realise that if it is a natural thing that no noble and high-minded person would place his daughters in a position where there was a danger of their chastity being violated, how can we expect such a dishonourable act from a prophet whose Divine responsibility was to inculcate sublime morals in a whole nation? Prophet Lot (*as*) knew very well that there was no threat to his daughters' honour if they were to be placed in the charge of those people. Hence his proposal.

In this there is a clear indication that he was offering them as hostages, for this was much purer for them than their seizure of his guests. To reiterate, there was no fear of improper sexual relations with his daughters, or any disgrace being placed on them, but as regards his guests, such apprehensions were present in his mind. As a result, placing his daughters in their custody was regarded as a much more decent measure, for we must remember that Prophet Lot (*as*) had married one of the maids of Sodom and so his daughters were their nieces. Thus, there was no anxiety about bad treatment being meted out to them nor any impure action against them.

Nowadays in our country also, the aristocrats consider the maids from their own villages and nations as their own and have regard for their dignity and respect for them as they have for their own daughters. However, the people of Prophet Lot's town were a very wicked people and they replied that they had no rights over his daughters and so could not accept his offer. Instead, it was his guests that they demanded. In spite of their tenacity, Allah, Most High, created such conditions that made it impossible for them to find the guests. If they were angels and Prophet Lot (*as*) was not aware of that fact at the time, then it was clearly evident that these people could not find them. In this circumstance, we would have to consider the event as an indisputable and obvious vision and Prophet Lot (*as*) and his wife erroneously thought that their guests were, in fact, flesh and blood human beings. Thus, how could creatures of the earth ferret out with their physical eyes beings who could only be seen by the spiritual eye? On the other hand, if they were humans, then Allah, Most High, kept them hidden from their intended malefactors. That is, in spite of their hunt, they could not discover them. The sentence: *We blinded their eyes*, does not mean that they actually became blind, but in this context the words "We blinded" (*tamasnaa*) are used in a metaphorical sense. In other words, in spite of searching diligently for them, they were unable to find the guests. Or, it may have been that they were concealed in such a place where their searchers could not get to them, or Allah, Most High, diverted their search from the hiding place of the guests.

Let us call to mind the fact on the night before the *Hijrah*, the Makkan unbelievers had surrounded the house of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) with the intention of assassinating him. Yet he escaped from the midst of them and those "blind" ones could not see him when he left. In this, there is a message from Allah, Most High, asking them how they could see on this night the same person whom they could not "see" in the day for thirteen years in Makkah, and whom they could not recognise as a true prophet of the Almighty.

The veil which was over their eyes according to the following verse of the Holy Qur'an: "*And when thou recitest the Qur'an We place between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter a hidden barrier*" (17:45), was the same one which fell over their eyes on that historic night. If, for so long, the eyes of their hearts were under a covering which prevented them from receiving the light of spiritual knowledge, is it surprising that a veil should cover their physical eyes that night and prevent them

from noticing the Holy Prophet (*sas*) when he made his escape from right under their noses? Is this not what the Holy Qur'an means when it says: “*And We have set a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, thus We have covered them, so they see not*” (36:9).

When Allah, Most High, wishes, He places the spiritual veil of the unbelievers over their physical eyes, thereby revealing to the world the spiritual blindness of such people.

38. *And certainly a lasting (mustaqir-run) chastisement overtook them in the morning.*

*Mustaqir-run* means something permanent, lasting or persisting. That is, it does not go away until it has destroyed everything.

The punishment that came at dawn was extremely devastating. The reason for this is that the people were fast asleep in a torpor of heedlessness and the crushing chastisement came suddenly without giving them the slightest opportunity to seek a means of escape. In this, there is also a warning sign that the end of those who are sunk in negligence comes in such a way that they are seized even while they sleep.

39. *So taste My chastisement and My warning.*

40. *And certainly We have made the Qur'an easy to remember, but is there anyone who will mind?*

The actual condition of the people describes the decree of fate of those on whom punishment comes, in that Allah is telling them, as it were, to taste His retribution and to remember how true was His warning that He gave them before the punishment came. Thus, wise is the one who profits from the warning and admonition of the Holy Qur'an. Allah, Most High, again states how He has made the teachings easy for man to absorb, but laments that there are very few who make use of this Divine bounty.

## **NOTE**

In several ways, Allah, Most High, has made the Holy Qur'an easy for man to comprehend:

1. The commands it gives to us are so simple and so much in accord with our inherent nature that there is no difficulty in complying with them, as the Book itself says: “*Allah imposes not on any soul a burden beyond its scope*” (2:286).
2. If we were to collect all the verities that there are in the world – truths that exist in hundreds of languages – and we attempt to sift the true from the false, even a lifetime as long as that of Prophet Noah (*as*) would not be sufficient for us to accomplish the task. Yet, look at how, with such ease and facility, the Holy Qur'an has gathered all these verities and bestowed them on us as a free gift. In reference to this, the Holy Qur'an says: “*Wherein are (all) right books*” (98:3).
3. The Holy Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, which is the mother of all languages, and the meaning of its words is so extensive and all-comprehensive that no other language can compare with it. Further, it is also very easy to understand the meaning and essence of Allah's words of guidance by themselves but there are dictionaries available for further elucidation.
4. Whatever portion of it is directed towards man's guidance, which provides him with spiritual nourishment, is very straightforward and is taught in a manner that makes it easily intelligible to all – the scholar as well as the simpleton can both derive benefit from it.

### Section 3

In this section, of all the prophets who have passed away, the story of Prophet Moses (*as*) and his people is related separately from all the others. The reason for this special treatment is that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is the like of Prophet Moses (*as*). After this, we are told that like all the opponents of Prophet Moses (*as*) and the other prophets, the enemies of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) would also taste abasement and destruction. This prophecy was fulfilled especially in the Battle of Badr and afterwards in the conquest of Makkah and thus the words of the Almighty came to pass with astounding clarity and truth.

41. *And certainly the warning (nudhur) came to Pharaoh's people.*

42. *They rejected all Our signs, so We overtook them with the seizing of the Mighty, the Powerful.*

*Nudhur* means warnings. The prophets of God all came with different kinds of warnings.

*Pharaoh* was the title of the kings of Egypt.

Prophet Moses (*as*) was sent by Allah, Most High, to Pharaoh and his people. He warned them of the bitter consequences of their evil ways, and several kinds of disasters befell them but to no avail. This is why the verse tells us that their seizure was so powerful and complete that it had all the signs of having issued from a mighty, all-conquering and majestic Being. Pharaoh, together with his army, relied on his earthly power and was supremely confident of victory over Prophet Moses (*as*) and his helpless band of followers. However, he had to deal with a Being of such mighty and overpowering strength that with one wave He broke the back of Pharaoh, and all the might and power Pharaoh had flaunted before to the world evaporated in the twinkling of an eye. The Arab enemies of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) were thus warned that they should take heed and desist from their opposition to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and their machinations night and day against him and so save themselves from the inevitable punishment that was destined for them.

43. *Are your disbelievers better than these, or have you an immunity in the scriptures?*

A brief summary is drawn from the histories of all the past prophets and it carries, in a most transparent manner, an emphatic prophecy that as the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was a prophet like those of old, his enemies could not be rescued if they continued to deny him. They are reminded that the opponents and rejecters of the previous prophets surpassed by far the Holy Prophet's Makkan enemies in power, wealth, dominion and in fact in every other sphere. Therefore, they were asked to state what special quality they possessed that would avert from them the destructive power of the Almighty. Allah, Most High, ironically asked them whether it was written somewhere or the other in the ancient scriptures that no matter how much they fought against the truth, they would still escape retribution. If that were not the case, then how could they be excluded from Allah's way of dealing with opponents? Seized they would be, and there was no avenue of escape.

44. *Or say they: We are a host allied together to help one another?*

No book of God had given these people immunity from punishment. As a result, a second cause of their negligence and obstinacy could come only from a worldly source. This was hidden in their hearts but Allah, Most High, has exposed in this verse their innermost thought which ran along these lines: We are a people who come to the assistance of one another. More so, we rise up in unity to retaliate against our enemies. As a result, we are a powerful nation.

Allah, Most High, warned them not to rely on their supposed strength and invincibility for the time was quickly approaching when:

45. *Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they will show (their) backs.*

46. *Nay, the Hour is their promised time, and the Hour is most grievous and bitter.*

In *Bukhari*, there is a report from Ibn ‘Abbas to the effect that on the day of the Battle of Badr, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was in a tent making supplication (*du‘a*) during which he prayed thus: “O Lord, I beseech Thee according to Thy promise and covenant; O Lord, if such is Thy will, Thou mayest not be served after this day.” In other words, he was saying that he was not afraid to die. His only concern was that if that handful of Muslims were exterminated, then worship of Allah, Most High, would vanish from the earth. He had no desire for a long life or for worldly success. All he wanted was to see his Master’s name exalted in the world.

So fervently and intensely was he making this petition that after a while Abu Bakr (*ra*) took him by the hand and addressed him thus: “Please stop. So earnestly are you making this supplication to your Lord, O Prophet of God, that it is humanly impossible for anyone to exceed your ardour.” At that time, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was wearing his suit of armour. He then emerged from the tent and started to recite the above verses (45, 46).

From these reports, it is clear that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) himself understood these verses to refer to the Battle of Badr. Thus here, the word *Hour* certainly relates to the middle resurrection of the Quraish, that is, to the hour of their vanquishment and not the resurrection on the Day of Judgement. It has also been conclusively proven that these verses were revealed at Makkah in the fifth or sixth year of the Holy Prophet’s call at a time when he had only just begun his mission. At that time, there could not have been the slightest thought nor suspicion that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) would one day have so many followers with him as would allow him to march out to face the unbelievers in battle. Nor could anyone imagine in his wildest dreams that he would become so powerful as to defeat the unbelievers who constituted a very strong, tyrannical and tightly-knit community who were all united in a common cause, that is, opposition to the Holy Prophet (*sas*). (“*We are a host allied together*” – verse 43 above.)

In those circumstances, when he was experiencing the most profound depths of weakness, helplessness and powerlessness and no one even wanted to listen to his preaching, to make such an open, bold and challenging prophecy contained in the above verses (45,46) gives us indisputable proof of Allah’s perfect knowledge of the unseen and His power. This also serves to generate faith in the Supreme Being before Whose knowledge of the unseen and controlling power all human knowledge lies prostrate and, compared to this miracle, all other miracles pale into insignificance.

This was the reality that lay concealed under the sign of the splitting of the moon and therefore the words at the beginning of this chapter: “*The Hour drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder*” (verse 1), when applied to what happened here clearly prove that the rending of the moon was a physical sign of the approach of the Hour (of the overthrow of the Quraish). Thus, the fulfilment of this prophecy proved beyond doubt the splitting of the moon.

## NOTE

There is a profound explanation from Hazrat Muhy-ud-Din Ibn ‘Arabi (*ra*) that we ought to keep in mind and that is, when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was making petition (*du‘a*) to Allah, Most High, on the day of the Battle of Badr, so deeply engrossed was he in his prayer and with such evident humility and meekness was he engaged in it, that at that point his mantle fell from his blessed shoulder and lay on the ground. This is when Abu Bakr (*ra*) held his hand and asked him to stop and addressed him (in words given above) and further assured him that Allah, Most High, would definitely fulfil His promise (verses 45 and 46). The Holy Prophet (*sas*) then rose and went to the battlefield.

Here the saint asks the following questions: Was the faith of Abu Bakr (*ra*) stronger than that of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in that he had to speak to the Holy Prophet (*sas*), hold his hand and remind him that Allah, Most High, would never fail in His promise? Could the Holy Prophet (*sas*) (Allah forbid) not understand that Allah, Most High, was the Fulfiller of promises? He, himself, gives the answers saying that the Holy Prophet’s knowledge of the Supreme Being was vastly superior to that of Abu Bakr (*ra*) whose attention was focussed only on this attribute of Allah, Most High, that He was the Fulfiller of promises *par excellence*. On the other hand, the Holy Prophet’s attention was riveted on the Person of the Almighty – that He was Self-sufficient and above need of all the world. Thus, he knew that if the Muslim community was wiped away from the face of the earth that day, then that disaster would not affect Allah, Most High, in the least, for if He wished He could raise a community just like it or one even better than it. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) therefore was in great fear of the personal self-sufficiency of Allah, Most High. This is a very deep and esoteric example of Divine knowledge and Abu Bakr had not reached that far in spirituality.

47. *Surely the guilty (mujrim) are in error (dalaal) and distress (su‘ur)*

48. *On the day when they are dragged into the Fire upon their faces: Taste the touch of hell.*

*Mujrim* refers to one who has severed relationship with the Almighty or to one who has been charged with crimes.

*Dalaal* means going astray or destruction, whilst *su‘ur* signifies burning, whether it is of this world and results from hatred, frustration or from any other cause, or whether it takes place in the Hereafter in the fire of Hell.

We are told that the guilty have gone astray and the consequence of that is that they suffer burning which is brought about by their enmity towards the truth and their consequent inability to achieve their evil objectives, and in the next life, their burning is in the fire of Hell. In other words, the burning of their body and soul in this life will be seen in the form of a palpable fire in the Hereafter – and that is because in this life, in their attempt to obliterate the truth, they used to stoke the fire of conspiracies against the believers, and, driven by the heat of their passions and desires, they would put their intelligence and wisdom in abeyance. In the Hereafter, this inner spiritual scene will be manifested in a visible manner. At that time, they will see that their evil ambitions and emotions will be the cause of their being dragged into the Fire by their faces. However, while in this life they were physically and intellectually blind to this reality, in the next, all their feelings and perceptions will become sharp and sensitive. That is why they will be told: “Taste the touch of Hell.” In other words, *tasting the touch of the Fire* is the inevitable consequence of the Hell they were fashioning with their own hands in this world’s life.

49. *Surely We have created everything according to a measure,*  
50. *And Our command (amr) is but once, as the twinkling of an eye.*

*Amr* means command as well as punishment.

Allah, Most High, tells us that His universal law is to create everything according to a pre-ordained measure. Thus, the Middle Resurrection, that is, the promised Divine chastisement that is approaching, has a fixed measure. An example of this is a bowl that is floating on water. This bowl has in it a hole through which water enters in a steady proportion. Eventually it will be filled up and then it will sink. In the same way, the evils of an individual or a community gradually accumulate until their “bowl” becomes filled with enmity and persecution with the result that in the twinkling of an eye it sinks. In other words, Divine retribution strikes them and leaves them in total devastation. Thus, here, also, there is a measure and when it reaches its appointed term, the chastisement of the Almighty will come in the wink of an eye and these rejecters will be turned head over heels.

We are told: “*And Our command is but once.*” That is, as soon as it is set in motion it cannot be averted and there is no other like the Almighty Who has the power and might to turn aside this command. So as soon as Allah, Most High, issues the decree, it only takes the wink of an eye or less for it to be consummated. Therefore, the unbelievers should remember that as soon as their cup begins to overflow and the order for their punishment is given by the Almighty, everything will be over in the blink of an eye and not a second later.

Accordingly, this is exactly what happened. The Makkan unbelievers went to Madinah to exterminate the Muslims and to consolidate the power of the Quraish over the whole of Arabia. In the flash of a second, at the well of Badr, they were routed and laid low in disgrace. All the great Makkan leaders were killed and there was not a home in the city that was not in mourning.

Similarly, after the Truce of Hudaibiyah, the pagans of Makkah became supremely confident of victory over the Muslims. After about two years, in 8 A.H, the Banu Bakr, allies of the Quraish, suddenly attacked Banu Khuza’a, who were allies of the Muslims, and put them to sword. This was a blatant violation of the Truce. In retaliation for their contemptuous repudiation of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) invaded the city of Makkah and so sudden and unexpected was this invasion that the Makkans had not the slightest inkling of it beforehand. In the evening, when Abu Sufyan stood on the upper chamber of his house and spied a huge conglomeration of people surrounding Makkah, he inquired of his wife whether she knew who those people were. She surmised that it was a returning caravan. He disagreed, telling her that she had not appreciated the significance of the fires. “These are the fires of ten thousand people,” he told her.

It was the custom amongst the Arabs to dig long trenches and light fires on which they would cook their meals. In times of war, there was one ditch, and therefore, one fire, for every thousand soldiers. So when he counted the fires, he estimated the correct number of people.

As a result of this, Abu Sufyan proceeded to the city to make further investigations. On the way, he met Ibn ‘Abbas, who had already become a Muslim. Ibn ‘Abbas informed him that as the people of Makkah had violated the Truce of Hudaibiyah, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) had marched on the city. At this point, Abu Sufyan looked for a way of escape but realised in dismay that every avenue was blocked. He therefore presented himself before the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and sought asylum. He also accepted Islam. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) gave him sanctuary. Ibn ‘Abbas then addressed the Messenger suggesting to him that as Abu Sufyan was the chief of the Makkans he should be accorded honourable treatment. The

Holy Prophet (*sas*) agreed and announced that whoever sought refuge in the house of Abu Sufyan was safe. He went even further and guaranteed that anyone who remained behind locked doors and made no attempt to attack the Muslims would also be safe from injury.

In short, in the twinkling of an eye, Makkah was conquered and its inhabitants never had the slightest indication beforehand of this eventuality. In the wink of an eye also, the world witnessed the spectacle of the boastfully swaggering people of Makkah standing before the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in total shame, disgraced and humiliated, penitently seeking forgiveness of him.

51. *And certainly We destroyed your fellows, but is there anyone who will mind?*

The inhabitants are told that Allah, Most High, had already destroyed, in the past, people like them who had committed the same kind of evils like them, so that they should learn from the fate of previous nations and thus desist from their evil course and so save themselves from certain humiliation and ruin.

52. *And everything they do is in the writings (zubur).*

53. *And everything small and great is written down.*

*Zubur* in this context refers to the book of deeds which does not leave out anything, whether big or small.

The rejecters are reminded that nothing they do or say is destroyed. Every act, how little or big, is being recorded in their book, and on the day when their cup overflows they will be drowned. Glory be to Allah! Today, scientists have made the discovery that no word or action of man is ever destroyed but everything is being recorded on the pages of nature and is being preserved. If we should acquire the required means which will enable us to read those records inscribed in nature, we will be able to read all the events of world history with full details and ample commentaries. These findings have been published in European and American newspapers and magazines.

Now, whether man gains the opportunity in this world's life to read this record or not, yet this book of deeds is always present before the Almighty and it is this book in which the consequences of deeds are written, that will be presented to man on the Day of Resurrection. In this world, too, in the time of a law-bearing prophet, when in a small measure, the results of deeds are recompensed, and this is called the Middle Resurrection (which serves as an indication to prove the point that every deed bears its own consequence), it is this very book of records that will be under the eyes of the Almighty. As a result, whoever does evil will receive a like recompense and those oppressors who oppose a prophet of God will have to suffer shame and perdition. On the other hand, those who accept the Divine messenger and act on his teachings and conduct themselves along the lines of God-fearingness and righteousness (*taqwa*) will receive the most exalted and the most beautiful of rewards.

Consequently, having spoken of the punishment of the unbelievers, the Holy Qur'an directs attention to the reward in store for the pious ones (*muttaqin*):

54. *Surely the dutiful will be among Garden and rivers (nahar),*

55. *In the seat of truth (sidq), with a most Powerful King (Maleek).*

*Nahr* means streams or rivers as well as abundance, extensiveness and light.

*Sidq* signifies truth or something excellent and desirable.

*Maleek* (Great King) is the intensive form of *Malik* (King) Who possesses full dominion and supreme honour and majesty. In other words, He is Lord (*Rabb*) and *Maalik* (Master).

These words inform us that the righteous will reside in gardens with running streams and that they will be the inheritors of amplitude, light and spaciousness and most treasured of all, they will be in the presence of the Powerful and Mighty King of the two worlds, that is, of Allah, Most High, and it is evident that no other bounty can excel this.

In the Hereafter, the reward for the pious is logically necessary and expected, for their faith will take the form of gardens whilst their good deeds will assume the form of rivers. Just as a garden cannot flourish without a stream, so, too, faith without good deeds ultimately runs dry and bears no fruit. Further, in the Hereafter, the blessings of the Almighty will be given to man in fullness. Just as in this life, when the provision of the necessities of life exist in abundance, it brings about peace, happiness, comfort and luxury for man, in the same way, in the Hereafter, where man will find a life of tranquillity and ecstasy – which is called Heaven – he will also be given an abundance and overflowing of essential provisions and bounties in keeping with the piety of life he lived on earth.

In addition, just as in this world closeness to a temporal ruler becomes the source of pride and honour, similarly, in the next life, proximity to Allah, Most High, will be the most cherished of all of man's blessings. Again, in proportion to man's level of truth and sincerity, this closeness, too, to the Almighty will also be magnificent and highly desirable. This nearness will be with such a King that has no parallel and with One Whose powers surpass that of all others. It is well-known to all that the greater the power, glory and rank of a king, the more closeness to him becomes a matter for pride and honour. So, who is there who can exceed Allah's power and dominion?