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CHAPTER 56

AL-WAQI'AH (THE EVENT)

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SECTION 1

This chapter was revealed at Makkah at around the same time as the chapter, *Ar-Rahman* (The Beneficent) and it contains the same subject matter found in the last two sections of *Ar-Rahman*. It paints a more vivid picture of the hour of requital and furnishes further arguments in support so that this reality will be more firmly impressed in the minds of men, for the deeper our conviction concerning the reward and punishment for our deeds and our responsibilities and accountability for our actions, the more vigilant will we become and the more progress will we make in self-purification and righteousness.

1. *When the Event comes to pass –*
2. *There is no denying its coming to pass –*

Waqi'ah means a coming event and this refers to the hour when rewards and punishment will be meted out according to our deeds. Although here it really signifies the Day of Resurrection, yet it encompasses the hour of requital in this very life, especially the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) in which Allah, Most High, disclosed, in a small measure, a picture of the Great day of Requital. This is called the Middle Resurrection (the death of a person is referred to as the small resurrection). This small picture is given in this life in order to prove that every deed carries its own consequences and that there is a time and a future life when a perfect manifestation of our actions will come into plain view. This hour is called the Great Resurrection. The clear inference here is that if the prophecy that promised a requital of deeds in this life was truly fulfilled, then why should the prophecy about requital in a next life, when the corresponding reward and punishment for good and evil deeds will come about not be true?

Therefore, when the promised hour of requital comes, an event concerning which there is not the slightest tinge of falsehood, this will be the scene that will come to life:

3. *Abasing (some), exalting (others) –*
4. *When the earth is shaken with a (severe) shaking,*
5. *And the mountains are crumbled to pieces,*
6. *So they are as scattered dust.*

Hafizatun means ‘bringing low’ while *rafi‘atun* means ‘raising high’. When evil people will be abased and virtuous people or a righteous *jama‘at* will be elevated in honour.

Rujjat comes from *rajja* meaning to shake something violently or to throw into confusion.

Bussat is derived from *bassa*, meaning to crumble to dust.

Haba’an refers to small particles of dust floating in the air in the rays of the sun and which can be seen through a skylight.

Munbathathan comes from *baththa* meaning to scatter or disperse.

After sketching a picture of the day of requital, Allah, Most High, informs us that the most important point that will come to light and which is worthy of careful attention is that on that day one group will be humiliated whilst another will be exalted. Those who paid no attention to the Law of Allah and the disobedient ones who rejected the truth will meet a disgraceful punishment in consequence of their misdeeds. On the other hand, those who obeyed the Law of Allah and stuck steadfastly to it will be elevated and will be triumphant on that day.

This picture will be perfectly visible on the day of Resurrection, but Allah, Most High, has also given us in this life an example of it, though on a smaller scale. This was best manifested in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) starting from the battle of Badr and ending with the conquest of Makkah which is known as the Middle Resurrection. Allah, Most High, has emphasised the reality of the fact beyond the shadow of doubt that whoever obeys His law will be rewarded with victory and honour, whilst those who reject Him and disobey Him will suffer defeat and disgrace. Is this not sufficient testimony that actions do have inevitable consequences and if, generally speaking, these consequences are not fully apprehended in this life, is it not necessary that there be another world in which the results of actions will be plainly visible?

As it is a fact that in this physical world there is a veil over man’s eyes, he is told that this life he is experiencing is a transitory one. However, one day this earth will taste a violent shaking which will crumble the mountains and scatter them as dust after which a new world will be established. In exactly the same way, in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) the entire land of Arabia will experience a mighty convulsion and over the whole country an earthquake of disasters and wars will ensue so that those who, in their overwhelming pride, referred to themselves as mountains, will now vanish, or in other words, be destroyed. After the advent of this earthquake, the land of Arabia will be completely transformed and a new world will come into existence – a world in which idol-worship was rampant will see the worship of one God taking root, a world in which theft, highway-robbery, murder, vice and immorality, wildness and barbarity held sway, will give way to the rule of piety, honesty, purity and the worship of one God. And all this will come about as a result of actions.

Similarly, after the earthquake of the day of Resurrection, the present earth will be subjected to such a severe shaking, and such will be the levelling of the mountains that the whole contour of the earth will be transformed, and there will come into being a new world in which mankind will be divided into three parties according to their deeds as the following verse tells us:

7. And you are three sorts

These three groups are the same that have already been mentioned in the last chapter, *Ar-Rahman* (The Beneficent) and they are: the foremost, the companions of the right hand and the companions of the left hand. The first two are the inhabitants of Paradise whilst the last group comprises the dwellers of hell. I have already mentioned in my commentary of the last section of *Ar-Rahman* that these divisions are a representation of the three stages of the soul of man, that is, the soul at rest (*nafs-ul mutma'innah*), the self-accusing soul (*nafs-ul lawwamah*) and the soul that commands evil (*nafs-ul ammarah*).

Firstly, those whose souls are at rest are those persons who excel in adopting every kind of goodness, and obedience to Allah becomes so natural in their lives that without pain or ceremony, virtue flows from them spontaneously. Indeed, whether in response to a command of the Law or in acceptance of a Divine decree, not only do they obey willingly, but more so, they find joy and happiness in doing so. These are the ones who are foremost of those drawn close to Allah, Most High.

The people of the second stage, that is, of the self-accusing soul, are those who are waging a constant battle against their inner satan and in their striving to obey Allah's commands they have to confront the promptings of their own desires and animal passions at every turn. In this contest, they are successful at most times, but sometimes they are defeated and thus commit a wrong deed. However, if at the time when deeds are taken into account, their good actions outweigh their evil ones, then they will be inheritors of Paradise.

At the third and lowest level, that of the soul that commands evil, are those persons who instead of submitting to the commands of Allah, Most High, are instead slaves to their egoistic desires and base emotions. If sometimes there happens to appear a spark of goodness in their hearts, this goodness is drowned in a flood of their desires and animal appetites. So, just as men are divided into three sorts as regards their deeds, so, too, in regard to the results of actions also, the Holy Qur'an has divided mankind into three classes as is elucidated in the following verses:

8. So those on the right hand (maimanah); how (happy) are those on the right hand!

9. And those on the left (mash'amah); how (wretched) are those on the left!

Maimanah is derived from *yumn* which means blessings or good fortune. So the companions of the *maimanah* are those whose good deeds have made them the recipients of blessings. Another meaning of *maimanah* is right hand.

Mash'amah comes from *shu'm*, meaning misfortune or bad luck and it is the opposite of *yumn*, that is, prosperity or good fortune. The companions of the *mash'amah* refer to those whose evil deeds have brought misfortune and calamity on themselves. This expression also means 'companions of the left hand' for the left hand is metaphorically considered to relate to bad luck whilst the right hand pertains to felicity.

However, whatever the meaning is assigned to 'right hand' or 'left hand', we can draw the conclusion that those who do good deeds in response to the urgings of the 'self-accusing soul' will stand at the

right side in the court of the Almighty, whilst those who obeyed the evil suggestions of the ‘soul that commands evil’ will find their position on the left side of the court of Allah, Most High. In fact, even in the courts of justice in this world, offenders are made to stand on the left side.

10. *And the foremost are the foremost* (sabiqun).
11. *These are drawn (nigh) to Allah.*

Sabiqun (from *sabaqa*: to be in advance, to go before) means that those who were foremost in the doing of good deeds will be ahead of all others in Allah’s court. And why not? For it is only fitting that those who excelled in virtue should have precedence in the presence of the Almighty and, indeed, the Holy Qur’an states that they will be drawn close to Allah. In other words, in His court they will be given a position of honour and intimacy. These are the revered ones of the highest stage – that of the ‘soul at rest’.

12. *In Gardens of bliss* (jannatin-na‘im)
13. *A multitude* (thullatun) *from among the first*
14. *And a few from among those of later times.*

Thullatun means a *jama‘at* and in the opinion of some it signifies a particularly large *jama‘at*.

The expression *jannatin-na‘im* means gardens of blessings, and these are explained later on.

But before this, the Holy Qur’an says the foremost will comprise a very large *jama‘at* of those who have gone before and only few from later generations.

A question arises here: why the necessity of mentioning gardens of bliss together with the reference to the foremost of those drawn nigh to Allah? Logically speaking, they should be mentioned at the place where an elucidation of gardens of bliss is found and not here.

The reason for this is that those happy inheritors of a ‘soul at rest’, whether they are in this world or in the next or on the day of Resurrection, are constantly experiencing the pleasures associated with a garden of happiness. At no time are they separated from this garden. Even in this life we notice whether in a court of justice or a royal court, the foremost always occupy a position of honour, peace and happiness. Thus, in the same way, whether in this life or the next the foremost of those drawn nigh will never be separated from their garden. They will be in a garden in Allah’s court also. This is why when mention is made of them here, gardens of bliss are also spoken of. In other words, they and gardens of happiness will be inseparably bound. This actually has been explained in the *Hadith* in the words: “They will be under the shadow of Allah’s ‘*arsh* (throne).” That is, they will reside in a kingdom of peace. And what greater gardens of bliss can there be than that when account is taken on that dreadful day also, a man should taste peace and tranquillity and occupy a position of honour?

In relation to the presence of the foremost in the court of Allah, it is said that there will be many from the early times and few from later times. Who are *awwalin*, that is, those of former generations? The Holy Qur’an itself has given the answer in another verse: *And the foremost, the first of the Emigrants and the Helpers, and those who followed them in goodness – Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them Gardens wherein flow rivers, abiding therein forever. That is the mighty achievement* (9:100).

This is so because the degree of sacrifice displayed by those people in the early days of Islam was never equalled by those later on. It does not at all mean that Allah has closed the door of perfection to Muslims of a future age nor has he restricted it. The words ‘many’ and ‘few’ have been used by way of comparison or proportion. That is, those who accepted the religion of Islam in the very beginning had to face overwhelming pain and tribulation in the path of Allah and so a large portion of them qualified to enter the court of Allah. On the other hand, as a very large number of Muslims of later generations did not have to encounter such obstacles, therefore, many of them did not attain the rank of those drawn close to Allah, Most High. And it is generally known that in the time of every prophet or commissioned one those who give assistance to the chosen one of Allah and make sacrifices for him will attain a place of closeness to Allah that those who came later can never achieve, or at any rate, there will be few who will attain this honour. By referring to the degree of closeness to Allah of the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), the Holy Qur’an has refuted the false teachings of three groups of people.

Firstly, there are the Christians who, seeing in the Holy Qur’an the words *minal muqarrabin* pertaining to Prophet Jesus (*as*) in 3:44: *When the angels said: O, Mary, surely Allah gives thee good news with a word from Him (of one) whose name is the Messiah, son of Mary, worthy of regard in this world and the Hereafter, and of those who are drawn nigh (to Allah) (minal muqarrabin)*, jump to the conclusion that only he attained closeness to Allah, Most High, and no one else. This verse of the Holy Qur’an - *A multitude from among the first* - incorporates a large number of the early believers, those who fled with the Holy Prophet to Madinah (*Muhajirs*) and the *Ansars* (helpers of Madinah) and effectively underlines the point that in relation to the degree of nobility they were equally as noble as the Prophet Jesus (*as*) and that as a consequence of their good deeds they were worthy of being in the company of the prophets (4:69).

As regards the second group, the Shi ‘a sect, this verse (13) and verse 100 of chapter 9 quoted above stand as a decisive proof against their teachings. To brand those who fled with the Holy Prophet (*Muhajirs*) and those who helped him (*Ansars*) as hypocrites and to make the majority of believers dependent on the appearance of an absent *Mahdi* (guided one) is also an erroneous belief. The Holy Qur’an has clearly refuted it in the clearest words in the verse under discussion (13) that among the early generations there is a large number of those drawn closest to Allah, Most High, whilst there will be a smaller group of a later era.

Thirdly, the Qadiani Ahmadi erroneous beliefs are similarly repudiated in these verses. Today they are attempting to establish a new prophethood with the result that they have gone so far as to insult the honour of the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) when they write that as these noble souls had not displayed perfect obedience to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) therefore, no one from among them had attained the rank of prophethood. This verse provides a decisive testimony against the Qadianis, also, for after stating that a large portion of the companions will be among the foremost in Allah’s court, it goes on to say that the high level of obedience they showed to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) will be matched only by very few people in later times.

15. *On thrones inwrought (maudunah)*

16. *Reclining on them, facing one another.*

Maudunah – woven from gold and silver threads; strong or studded with jewels; arranged.

The description of these gardens of bliss now begins. It is clear that the picture given here is a scene of a splendid party at the court of a shah or a king. And the picture of the foremost in the life hereafter

ought to be like this. In this life, if there is an invitation to the elect at a king's court, or if preparations are made for a party, then one may see the most splendid couches and chairs arranged in rows; servants move about offering the most sumptuous dishes in beautiful utensils and glass goblets; people sit facing one another in great honour and happiness and carry out conversations as they enjoy themselves and the presence of their wives, also gorgeously decorated, bring to perfection the feeling of peace and ecstasy.

This is a description of this world's parties and assemblies, the pleasures and delights of which are imperfect and transient, and the honour of which is temporary. However, just imagine the good-fortune of those people who will be gifted with all kinds of joy, peace and honour in the court of the Great King – a gift that will never be cut off and although the description is given in words which we use to portray the pleasures and joys of this world's assemblies, yet according to the *Hadith*, a true cognition of this paradise is beyond the imagination and comprehension of man. There, in Allah's court, or in His honourable assembly, thrones studded with gems will be arranged in rows and sitting on them in everlasting honour, contentment, and delight will be Allah's chosen servants facing one another, blissfully enjoying the blessings of Allah given to them.

In short, those who, in this life, accepted all kinds of disgrace, grief and pain in obedience to Allah, Most High, will now receive from Him copious blessings of honour, joy and peace.

17. *Round about them will go youths never altering in age* (wildanun mukhalladun),
18. *With goblets and ewers, and a cup of pure drink —*
19. *They are not affected with headache thereby* (yusadda'una), *nor are they intoxicated* (yunzifun),
20. *And fruits that they choose,*
21. *And flesh of fowl that they desire,*

Yusadda'una is derived from *sada'*, which means a headache, that is a headache brought on by intoxication.

Yunzifun is from *nazafa*, meaning to become intoxicated.

Wildanun mukhalladun – youths not altering in age.

These are the youths who will provide service.

We are told that those people who spent their lives in the service of mankind will in turn find themselves waited upon and their service to others will take the form of servants who will minister unto them. As these will be their own deeds which will take the form of youthful servants and as the reward for good deeds is everlasting, therefore, the condition of these young ones will remain unchanged. The fact that the servants are young children points in part to their innocence. If the pure deeds of love and service to Allah's creation – deeds which were dependent on sincerity and truth – are to assume the embodiment of servants, then they can take no other shape but that of children.

I once saw a picture painted by one of Europe's most famous artists. It was the picture of an unfortunate but virtuous woman who had died and was going to the next world and very young and innocent children, beautiful and loving, were bearing garlands of flowers in a circle around her. One was garlanding here whilst another was looking after her. Such was the joy and innocence of that scene

that however much I looked at it my heart was not satiated. In other words, those servants in Paradise will be the essence of sweet innocence.

Fix this picture in your mind: people sitting face to face on gem-studded thrones which are very neatly arranged in rows with servants bearing silver cups more transparent, and clearer than glass, and jugs of the same kind, serving honoured guests. In those vessels, whatever is given to drink will come from Allah's beautiful fountains which are perpetually flowing and will never come to an end. That water will be the water of a chaste life which those servants drawn close to Allah spent in righteousness and purity in this world.

In this world's aristocratic assemblies, whatever is served as drink is such that causes intoxication, for example, wine etc. After the intoxication of these drinks wears off, the after-effect still includes a hangover. But in Allah's court, the goblet of drink that will be offered, although vastly surpassing this world's drink in sweetness of taste and enjoyment will not carry any ill-effect as, for instance, a hangover, neither will it be intoxicating so as to cause drunkenness in the drinkers.

Every worldly pleasure suffers this fate, that when the enjoyment reaches a climax, man loses his senses and, under the influence of this headiness, he commits such actions as fall way below the standards expected of a sound intellect and high morals. Furthermore, after a little while, this indulgence suffers a reaction with the result that fatigue and depression take hold of his mind.

Consider the case of those who, in this life, find exhilaration in service to Allah and remembrance of Him. Their pleasure does not impair their intellect and, instead of dulling their understanding, it makes it sharper and leaves no ill after-effects either. For example, after performing prayer with true humility and meekness the sweetness and delight that a person experiences do not bring about fatigue nor dejection in him. Instead, it appears as if his soul is drinking from a jug of eternal ecstasy. Thus, if deeds of kindness towards Allah's creation will take the form of servants in waiting, then their hands will hold a goblet of the remembrance of Allah which will fill the hearts of the drinkers with deliciousness, joy and transport.

Man's good deeds will also take the form of fruits in the next life. Just as in this life the believers gave precedence to Allah's will over their own desires when faced with a choice of action, on that day they will receive their fruits but this time it is their desire that will be given preference for their every pleasure will have followed the straight path in life. So, the blessing for putting Allah's pleasure before theirs in any course of action in this life will be that their pleasure will be given preference in the next life. In addition, as they sacrificed their pursuit of their own worldly ambitions and desires whenever they, too, seemed at variance with the commands of Allah, Most High, on that day it will happen that their sacrificed hopes and ambitions will be presented to them in the form of the flesh of birds.

Now, it is common knowledge that the flesh of fowl is not only more delicious than any other meat and more strengthening and more easily digestible but it causes no kind of harm to the body like, for example, an excess of uric acid etc. The point is that whatever meat is given in Paradise will cause no injury to the system and, furthermore, it will be replete with all kinds of nourishment for goodness does not give rise to any deleterious consequences. Instead, from beginning to end it is a source of sheer blessings.

22. And pure beautiful ones (hurun 'inun)

23. Like unto hidden pearls

24. A reward for what they did.

Hurun is the plural of *haura* and means a woman white in colour, the white of whose eyes is intensely white and the black excessively black.

'In is the plural of *a'yunun* and *'a-ina* signifying a woman with very large and beautiful eyes.

The peace and harmony of the Paradise of the foremost could not be complete unless their true companions, their wives, were not with them. Thus, it is said that those wives who had attained closeness to Allah through their faith and good deeds will be present with them on that day and those (wives) who possessed beautiful morals will see a glorious and palpable manifestation of that beauty on that day. Those who turned away their eyes from not only strange men, but from anything disapproved by Allah, will witness a true resplendence of the beauty of their eyes. Those (wives) who guarded themselves from every attack of Satan will find that their radiance will be likewise constantly preserved on the day of Resurrection.

I cannot understand why people should object to the presence of women in heaven. As a matter of fact, Allah, Himself, has created women and has allowed certain relationships with them, and His actions can never be without purpose. Companionship with woman is embedded in the nature of man and no man's life can be perfect without her company. So, unless man's nature is not eradicated in paradise, male-female companionship is a necessity. Of course, we all know very well that there will be no need for the perpetuation of the human race in heaven. However, the need for joy, peace, happiness and tranquillity that woman provides is a crying need much in the same way as food and drink will be needed, not for personal physical survival, but for comfort and delight.

The late Al-Hajj Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din once had the opportunity to deliver a lecture on the philosophy of heaven and hell to an atheist gathering in England. At the conclusion of the address, someone objected to the presence of beautiful women (*houris*) in paradise. To this, he replied: "Is there any society in the world that is complete without women? Indeed, man's rough edges, his wildness and barbarity can never be removed unless woman is present. So, if the presence of women is compulsory in this life for the nurturing of a society's civilisation and culture, then will they not be needed in heaven which is a place for the advancement and perfection of every aspect of civilisation and culture?"

When they heard this reply, all the ladies in the audience were extremely delighted and gave the *Khwaja* a resounding round of applause, and the President of the group, a lady, thanked him specially for his contribution.

At this juncture, let me add another observation and that is in this world's society there is harm in one way for there is a distinct possibility of unlawful relationships developing when men and women intermingle freely in mixed parties. However, that danger does not exist in heaven where one will hear not even the name of sin or vanity. Instead, there will be a perpetual overflowing of blessings.

Besides all this, I cannot understand that if women are excluded from heaven where will they go especially since they form half of this world's population? If in this life their presence in any society does not necessarily lower the standards of purity and chastity, then why in paradise? When both men and women are Allah's handiwork and both were created for mutual comfort, bliss, love and tranquillity, why should they not be companions in the next life? And since heavenly society will be one of righteous souls, why should women not be a necessary part of it as men will be? We are told that

this life of honour, ecstasy, peace and sweetness which is called heaven is a reward for our own good deeds. It is really our faith and righteous actions that build a paradise for us.

25. *Therein they hear no vain or sinful talk –*

26. *But only the saying, Peace! Peace!*

Laghw means a task or an affair in which there is no benefit.

The bliss and contentment of the heavenly community can never be ideal if two matters are not mentioned. Firstly, nothing of sin or vanity will be heard there and secondly, this state of ecstasy and comfort will never wane. In this worldly life, these are the very two things – sin and decline of blessings – that destroy the well-being and prosperity of man.

Sin is something which destroys the peace and harmony of a society. For example, if the dangers of lying, theft, adultery, treachery, embezzlement, murder exist in a society then they sound the death-knell of happiness and felicity. For to live in constant anxiety of falling to some cunning act of fraud, or being dishonoured by an evil person, or being robbed of one's wealth etc, spells ruin and havoc to peace, contentment and happiness of a community.

The verse tells us that not only will there be no sinful actions in paradise but even the rumour of sin will not enter the ear of anyone. There are many people who are innocent of evil but as soon as they hear others speak of a sinful exploit it triggers off an impulse in the heart for committing that act of wickedness. In other words, the preliminary incitement to evil comes about most times by hearing of it or at least, having heard of it, man's heart becomes polluted on many occasions because his thoughts begin to focus on it. As a result, we are told that no sinful talk will be heard in heaven. In short, from every point of view, that community will be preserved from all kinds of sin, whether hidden or manifest. Even more so, no vain talk will be heard there either.

A decline in any blessing brings about a loss in all delight one formerly derived from it. If wealth and children, contentment and happiness are attended by a niggling fear of losing them at any time, then the pleasure inherent in them is destroyed. We are told that whatever blessing will be bestowed on the inhabitants of paradise and in whatever direction they will turn their gaze, they will be greeted with expressions of peace on all sides. There will be no fear of harm or diminution and that is the blessing that supersedes all others.

It is true that even in this very life man also enjoys pleasures, luxuries and delights. However, these are not preserved from vanity, destruction and degeneration. This is the special characteristic of paradise which is missing in the luxuries and joy of this world.

The paradise that the Holy Qur'an presents is totally different from the place of deliverance (*mukti*) that the Aryas speak about where souls, caught up in a cycle of transmigration, have to endure countless re-births until they find a refuge. But even then, they do not remain there forever but are expelled in order to re-commence another cycle of re-births.

On the other hand, the heaven of the Holy Qur'an is the heaven of a merciful and generous Lord Who, through His grace and favour, will reward good deeds with an everlasting paradise which will never be cut off as it promises in another verse: '*ata'an ghaira majdhuz*, that is, *a gift never to be intercepted* (11:108).

Furthermore, the paradise of the Holy Qur'an is also completely dissimilar to the Jewish and Christian heaven into which, as they allege, Satan, disguised as a snake, had slipped and had deceived Adam and Eve causing them to commit a sin and so bringing about their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Contrary to this, the heaven that the Holy Qur'an describes is a heaven from which Satan is totally excluded and it is a place where not only sin can never be committed but not even any talk of sin can be heard. Thus the account we find in the Bible is nothing but a story. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'an in plainly stating *I am going to place a successor in the earth (2:30)*, has corrected that erroneous belief of the Jews and the Christians by openly disclosing that Prophet Adam (*as*) was made a ruler on earth and not in heaven. In addition, it is clear that the heaven which he was given to inhabit as a gift from the Almighty was a verdant, fruit-bearing tract of land. Or, it may refer to that condition of bliss, peace and ecstasy that man enjoys prior to his commission of sin and which was described by Allah, Most High, as paradise.

27. And those on the right hand; how (ma) happy are those on the right hand!

Here, the word *ma* (how) is used to indicate honour.

The description of the next life or the heaven of the companions of the right hand now begins. The Holy Qur'an asks: "How can it be described?" In other words, it is a condition of inexpressible eminence.

- 28. Amid thornless (makhdud) lote-trees,*
- 29. Amid clustered (mandud) bananas (talhin)*
- 30. And extensive shade*
- 31. And water gushing (maskub)*
- 32. And abundant fruit*
- 33. Neither intercepted nor forbidden*
- 34. And exalted couches (furushin)*

Furushin is the plural of *farshun*, meaning a carpet or bed. Many are of the opinion that in this context it signifies women.

Makhdud refers to a tree from which the thorns have been extracted.

Mandud means fruits piled one on top of the other.

Talhin is the banana plant.

Maskubin means falling from above as water falls in a waterfall.

Arabia is a dry, arid country in which the lote-tree provides abundant shade which, however, has one drawback in that the tree contains thorns. In eloquent Arabic terminology, when one wishes to make reference to a beneficial, shady tree, then no other tree besides the lote-tree can be mentioned. Therefore, when speaking of the presence of shady, fruit-bearing trees, the lote-tree was specially named, but it was considered necessary to mention the absence of its defect. So, the Holy Qur'an tells us that there will be indeed lote-trees in heaven, but they will be free of thorns, for, in paradise, there can be nothing injurious. So whatever lote-trees there will be in heaven, and these will be different from those on earth and of a much better quality, we are told that there all the benefits of these trees will still be available but with one exception: there will be nothing detrimental or harmful in them.

On the other hand, the banana tree needs a lot of water. The Holy Qur'an also speaks of *fakihat* and *kathiratin*, that is, fruits in abundance after the mention of the lote-tree and the banana. From this, there is a clear inference that there will be several kinds of fruit-bearing trees in paradise in addition to the two spoken of above.

The question is why these two trees were specially chosen for mention. The reason is that, as everyone knows, the lote-tree is found in the driest areas in the earth and the banana requires abundant water. This provides a clear indication that in the next life there will be trees of two kinds of soil. Like dry and wet lands, there are also two kinds of hearts in men who aspire after spiritual progress. One kind is like this: however parched the soil is, that is, however much irreligion and misguidance may overspread every corner of the land, these men possess within them, like the lote-tree, the innate power of growth and development to such an extent that even in the most arid wastes, their inherent capabilities and spiritual powers continue to stride along the path of progress and perfection.

The second kind of heart is the one that stands in need of extensive knowledge and example in order to make it advance in the journey of progress. For example, people with such hearts require to sit in the company of righteous or knowledgeable people in order to advance and share in spiritual perfection. Hence, both kinds of hearts will partake of fruits corresponding to their nature and their deeds.

In short, in the next life, man will receive the fruits of his spiritual progress and they will be plentiful. In this world, two defects adhere to fruit trees. Firstly, they bear only in a particular season. For example, when the mango season comes, mangoes flourish bountifully and everywhere there is a flood of mangoes but then the season ends and there are no more fruits.

Secondly, there may be fruit trees in abundance but we may not have permission to pick their fruits, for the owner will not allow anyone to slip into his garden. Or, one may have permission to take a stroll in his orchard, but no consent to pluck the fruits. We are told that in the next life these two drawbacks will come to an end, and there will be no any hindrance whatsoever to partaking of them.

This is as far as fruits go, but in addition to this, if we consider the picture of Paradise as painted by the Almighty we get a true concept of what heaven is like: it is a green, luxurious valley in which there are trees that cast long, extensive shadows; water fountains spout water uninterruptedly; there are all kinds of fruit-bearing trees from both dry lands and wet lands; one can eat whatever fruit one chooses and however much one desires without interdiction, for there will be no fear that the supply will be exhausted. And in the shade of the trees, and at the edge of the water-fountains, a raised carpet is spread out.

In this life, a brief glimpse of this pure and pleasant life can be seen in the picnics that people enjoy in the lush, green valleys in the season of spring. But in this world, no one can relish this joy with perfect freedom from anxiety nor is its pleasure and contentment everlasting. Whatever we are given here fades away and degenerates. Firstly, there may be no fruit trees and if there are, they may be of one variety only. Furthermore, after a short time we may become filled and fed up with the same fruits. And then, as if in a wink of the eye the exhilarating season of spring vanishes. However, heaven is devoid of these deficiencies and whatever is given there will be exalted and permanent. Indeed, its true nature is beyond the reach of man's imagination and intellect.

In spite of all this, this blissful life in the meadow of paradise will be incomplete if men do not have their wives with them. Indeed, those who have studied human nature and understand it can very well

appreciate the vital need for female companionship. Of course, a sterile philosopher who is afflicted by a diseased intellect and a deformed nature and is thus given to raising unwarranted objections (to women in paradise) will be ignorant of this reality. So, in order to fill this deficiency, the Holy Qur'an states:

35. *Surely We have created them a (new) creation*
36. *So We have made them virgins,*
37. *Loving ('uruban), equals in age (atraban)*
38. *For those on the right hand.*

The word *'uruban* is the plural of *'urubun* and refers to women who love their husbands greatly.

Atraban means of the same age, or also rich, that is, possessing a high degree of beauty, elegance and intelligence.

Wives, too, will be in attendance. As a result of their pious deeds, the light of spiritual beauty that was already lit in them in this life will become visible and more so, will shine brilliantly in paradise. Over there, old age, which indicates weakness, waning of powers and death will be non-existent. Instead, every female will be blessed with youth.

This is a source of great joy for the women in this world that if they should be pleasing to Allah, Most High, and imbue themselves with deep faith and righteous actions in this life, then they will be transformed into a new creation in the next life as the Holy Qur'an clearly promises: *Surely We have created them a (new) creation*. This new creation means that instead of being afflicted by the blemishes and deformities of old age, as in this world, they will be young and loving to their husbands and even more, they will be of the same age and will be well-endowed in beauty, splendour and sagacity in the next life. And, indeed, these are qualities that women love excessively and seek to acquire in this life.

It happened once that an old woman went to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and requested him to pray for her to enter paradise. He replied that there would be no old women in heaven. At this, the old woman began to cry bitterly as she bewailed her fate. Whereupon, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) explained to her thus: "What I mean is that no woman will enter paradise in a condition of old age. Instead, they will become young before they gain admittance as the Holy Qur'an states: *Surely We have created them a new creation and have made them equals in age*" (Tirmidhi).

In this *hadith*, the Holy Prophet (*sas*), in applying the words of the above verses to old women, has given a clear verdict. He has also given women an overwhelming piece of good news that all those qualities that they strive to attain night and day in this life and which cause them great anxiety of heart will become available to them by means of their good deeds and will remain with them forever in the next life. Therefore, they should exert themselves to the utmost in trying to please their Creator.

After enumerating the above blessings, the Holy Qur'an states that all these will be given to the *companions of the right hand*. This promise is repeated here for the sake of emphasis so that it may be firmly fixed in the minds of the listeners that all these limitless favours will certainly accrue. So, if there was any doubt in their minds they should expunge it.

Here, there is a subtle point that deserves further consideration and that is that in the garden of the foremost, and that of the companions of the right hand, there is a distinct difference: the blessings of the foremost that are mentioned are generally of the kind that relate to advancement in civilisation and

culture for which the heart of man yearns, and this can be seen among those drawn closest to the King, that is, his nobles, chiefs and grandees. For example, one can find in that group gold-studded thrones, elegant clothes, and such assemblies in which every provision for bliss and contentment is provided replete with attendants, servants, pomp and splendour.

On the other hand, the bounties of the companions of the right hand reflect the joy and peace that man derives from the initial stages of culture and refinement. Therefore, especially for the sake of desert dwellers and rustics, there are provisions for comfort and pleasure like the lote and banana trees, gushing fountains and trees with extensive shade.

This same kind of demarcation was also observed in the last section of the chapter, *Ar-Rahman* (The Beneficent). There, it is stated that the trees in the garden of the foremost are multitudinous and that one can perceive in them flowing fountains as in the gardens of princes. As for the garden of those on the right hand side, attention is drawn to the presence of green vegetation and gushing springs as we see in verdant meadows and in jungles and mountains. *Houris* are also mentioned but these will be confined to pavilions just as we find tents pitched in green valleys. On the other hand, there is no allusion to pavilions when the *houris* of the garden of the foremost is described. Instead, over there, the spectacle is one of pomp and grandeur and magnificence together with the splendour of servants ranged in attendance. The reason is that the people closest to Allah are those who have made extraordinary progress in spiritual sophistication and grace. As a result, the gifts that are spoken of here are those that are described in terms relating to the provisions of bliss and tranquillity reserved for people who have made phenomenal spiritual headway. In contrast, as the companions of the right hand have just embarked on the road to culture and civilisation, the blessings mentioned for them correspond with those that are closely associated with people who are on the first rung of the ladder of upward mobility.

We must bear in mind that man prepares his own garden by means of his deeds. To this effect, there is a *hadith* which states that if a believer observes a fast, a tree grows for him in paradise. Therefore, as the foremost sent before for themselves countless wealth in the form of good deeds and also developed their souls to a high degree of sophistication, in the next life the luxuries and comforts made ready for them will also be of a similar level of elegance and exaltation. In other words, these are people who possess spiritual wealth and honour to excess.

On the other hand, the people of the right side did not send so much wealth beforehand. They only sent as much as would make them escape from pain and punishment and would make them enjoy a limited share of Allah's blessings. As a result, the provisions of peace and happiness made ready for them will also be in the same measure as their good deeds.

39. *A multitude from among the first,*

40. *And a multitude from among those of later times.*

These verses tell us that there will be many from the earliest times and many also from later times who will comprise the companions of the right hand. If, because negligence towards religion had set in amongst Muslims of a later era, there will be few among the foremost who have drawn close to Allah, then unfortunately, we have to suffer the consequences. However, when it comes to the people of the right hand, there will be a multitude from later generations. Thus, if there will not be many among the foremost, Muslims should try their best to qualify for the right side. After this, the chapter begins to describe the punishment of the people of the left hand. The reason for this is that after placing the bounties of the two preceding groups in close proximity with the punishment to be meted out to those

on the left side, the difference may become so striking that it may provide a compelling lesson for the believers to avoid this fate and to try hard never to be among the companions of the left hand.

SECTION 2

The first section of this chapter deals with the foremost and the companions of the right hand. This section gives a description of the fate of those on the left hand.

41. *And those on the left hand; how (wretched) are those on the left hand!*

Ashab-us-shimal is another name for *ashab-ul-mash'amah*, that is, people of the left hand or the unfortunate ones. These are the ones who rejected the truth or who committed evil deeds. These are the people whose souls commanded evil (*nafs-ul-ammarah*). That is, they were slaves to their egoistic desires and animal passions.

42. *In hot wind (samumin) and boiling water (hamim).*

43. *And shadow of black smoke (yahmumin),*

44. *Neither cool nor refreshing.*

Samumin comes from *sammun* which means a narrow entrance. *Samma* is derived from this and means to enter or to penetrate. It also means poison because its insidious influence penetrates the body. *Samum* also signifies hot air because this too, like poison, spreads its effect over the whole body. Many are of the opinion that *samum* also means a fiercely-hot fire. *Yahmumin* means smoke that is intensely dark and excessively hot.

We are told that the companions of the left hand will be in hot, poisonous air and boiling water. That is because in this world, the fire of their desires and passions raged so fiercely that the water of their life was affected by this heat to such an extent that it drove out the peace and tranquillity of their hearts. Furthermore, their lives became a boiling cauldron as they lived day and night in the fire of greed and lust or anger and envy.

We ought to remember that the emotions which reside within man can be divided into two categories: love and anger. The feelings relating to love can be further sub-divided into two main parts: greed and lust. Similarly, anger, too, can be differentiated into two aspects: anger and envy.

Without greed, there will be no incentive in man's heart to earn a living nor to engage in all kinds of profitable enterprises. In the same way, if lust is absent there will be no desire for conjugal relations. Without anger, there will be no bravery, no jealousy and no strategies to safeguard one's life and property in this world. If there is no envy, then there will be no impulse in man's heart to outdo one another or to make progress in this world. These are the kinds of heat in man's heart that motivate him and give him impetus to work for a livelihood, engage in trade, get married, safeguard himself and strive to outstrip others in the race of life. Allah, Most High, has told us in His Holy Book that the purpose of these passions is for us to use them in the right manner and so achieve material and spiritual progress. However, when man misuses these emotions, then these very passions lead him to the pit of destruction.

The blazing fire of greed drives man to engross himself in the evils of avarice, miserliness, selfishness, dishonesty, theft, banditry and treachery, with the result that he drives away the water of his life, that is, the peace and tranquillity of his heart.

The fire of lust involves him in fornication and its resultant evil consequences whilst the heat of envy and anger incite him to abuse others and even to beat and murder people. Thus, the cool, refreshing water of life begins to boil and so the coolness and peace of his heart is replaced by an ever-raging fire within him. But that is not all. The atmosphere, too, surrounding such a person is so contaminated by this sinful and poisonous air, that if another person should come close to him, he, too, cannot remain unaffected by the poisonous influence of this unfortunate individual.

So, if in the life hereafter, such a person finds himself in an environment of his own boiling water and black, poisonous smoke, it is indeed his own unrighteous conduct that gave rise to that setting and its water. As he was disobedient to Allah, Most High, in this life and spurned His protection and was always running after the shelter of others besides Him, today it will be that same alien shade which will envelop him in the form of hot, black smoke. That will be a palpable manifestation of the condition which adheres to the shadow of others besides Allah in this life also.

In other words, in seeking shelter and protection in others besides Allah, Most High, man can never acquire true serenity and coolness nor does it bestow on him the honour which human dignity requires. The nobility of humanity demands that Allah's servants seek refuge in no other source than their true Lord (*Rabb*). Whoever seeks a sanctuary in anyone except his Lord destroys the dignity of humanity and his own honour as well with his very hands. This is why Allah's messenger taught us the following supplication:

“O Allah, make what is lawful (*halal*) sufficient for me so as to keep me away from what is prohibited (*haram*) and through Thy grace make me free from want from anything besides Thee.”

45. *Surely they lived before that in ease* (mutrafin)

46. *And they persisted in the great violation* (hinh).

47. *And they used to say: When we die and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised?*

48. *Or our fathers of yore?*

Hinhun means a very grave sin, and *hinh-il-‘azim* signifies the most grievous of all sins.

Mutrifun comes from *tarafun* meaning rich. A *mutrif* is one whom opulence and wealth have made arrogant. The reason for their punishment is that these people in this world's life had become so proud because of their riches and property that even when they committed gross sins they felt no shame whatsoever. In fact, not only minor sins, but not even the most grievous of sins provoked any remorse in their hearts. Instead, they persisted in their evil ways with utter shamelessness.

The fact is that when man falls prey to the intoxication of money and easy circumstances, he forgets Allah, Most High, to the point where the thought of the Almighty never comes to his mind. He casts aside obedience to Allah, Most High, and has not the slightest anxiety about having to stand in His presence after his death. Proud of his wealth and luxury he commits all kinds of licentious and wicked deeds without feeling an ounce of shame and even if someone tries to restrain him, he pays no attention and stubbornly persists in his wickedness. And that is because in his heart the sin of pride has already reached its zenith.

The reason is that wealth and opulence have made him forget that he has to die one day after which there is another life where he will have to account for his deeds. When every worldly desire of man continues to be gratified to his satisfaction, then ease and luxury produce a kind of intoxication which makes him feel and think that this idea of the hereafter as well as having to account for one's deeds is only a delusion. After a while, this idea gradually penetrates his heart and intellect so that he begins to deny outright the belief in a life after death. He puts forth the objection that when man has died and his bones have become dust, he cannot return to life. He thinks this is impossible for as he says, man dies and becomes dust and that is the end of the matter. There is no other life and no day of accountability; there is this world alone, and nothing else; therefore, man should eat and drink and enjoy himself as much as he can.

To those who harbour these thoughts, Allah, Most High, replies:

49. *Say: The ancients and those of later times*

50. *Will surely be gathered together for the appointed hour of a known day.*

The messenger was given the message of guidance and was sent to the whole of mankind and decisive proofs and enlightening arguments in support of his truthfulness as well as heavenly signs have already been sent from heaven for his assistance. To this same apostle is the command given to proclaim fearlessly to the people that a day was coming when all past and present generations would be gathered to give account for their deeds. That hour will certainly come for there is an appointed time for every affair, so the unbelievers should not try to hasten it. Instead, it will be wise for them to fear that dreadful hour which will be a most distressful time for the wrongdoers. Their life in the next world will really be fashioned out of the consequences of their evil deeds and will be a most agonising existence for them. Whoever wishes may catch a glimpse of it in the following verses:

51. *Then shall you, O you who err and deny,*

52. *Eat of the tree of Zaqqum,*

53. *And fill your bellies with it;*

54. *Then drink after it of boiling water (hamim),*

55. *And drink as the thirsty camel (him) drinks.*

56. *This is their entertainment on the day of Requital.*

Zaqqum is the cactus plant. This is the food of the unbelievers in the hereafter.

Hamim is hot, boiling water. This is the drink of the wrongdoers in the next life.

Him is a thirsty camel. When a camel is thirsty, it drinks as if it is sick because it stores water in his abdomen for several days. Many are of the opinion that *him* refers to sand, for sand soaks up water so greedily that there is no trace of it left.

Zaqqum or the cactus plant contains within itself a remedy for many poisons in man's internal system. Hazrat Maulana Nur-ud-Din, a well-known physician, tried out this prescription on a syphilitic patient and on observing the salubrious effect he said:

“I have come to the opinion that hell also is a hospital where sinners will find a cure for whatever spiritual illnesses they are suffering from.

So, if Allah, Most High, has prescribed different kinds of spiritual and internal cactus and boiling water for healing the poisonous sins within man, why should we not administer physical boiling water and cactus to the physical bodies of patients in this world? Accordingly, a patient suffering from syphilis was given pills made of the milk of the cactus plant to swallow as well as boiling water to drink. Glory be to Allah! After using this prescription for a few days he was completely cured. Granted that this is a miracle of faith and conviction. However, the fact remains that if the fruit of man's evil deeds is not the tree of *zaqqum* and boiling water, then what else can there be?

Therefore, if in this world people gorged themselves with sins and satisfied to their heart's content all their sensual desires and animal appetites just as greedily as a thirsty camel drinks, and if now they receive their recompense in the form of cactus and boiling water, is that not retribution for their deeds in a tangible form?"

In this world, man continues doing evil and although his conscience gives him a bitter feeling, yet, by not heeding this discomfort he makes his evil an integral part of his life. For example, take the case of a bribe-taking officer. His conscience reproves him but he disregards it and even begins to think that his life depends on accepting bribes. In other words, this becomes for him a kind of food with which he must fill his abdomen. If his conscience is afflicted by any feelings of unpleasantness or distaste then so be it.

Similarly, a voluptuous rake goes on committing fornication. His conscience bothers him all the time but the pleasure of his life lies in this sin. In other words, that evil becomes the sustenance of his life and whether he recognises the twinges of his conscience or not, his degenerate nature finds appeasement for his hunger in this violation.

There is another special characteristic of evil and that is, whatever passion or desire incites man to commit a particular sin, once he perpetuates it, the fire of his appetite rages even more. For instance, if a person takes a bribe once, he is not contented. Instead, his desire is inflamed even more and he becomes bolder and bolder in his actions with each passing day. In the same manner, a drinker goes on imbibing more and more each day. One drink does not give satisfaction, so he continues on and on and is still not gratified. So, too, is the case of the gambler. He goes on gambling and cannot restrain himself, yet he derives no contentment from it.

Thus, in the life after death, when these evils bear fruit, then just as man felt bitterness and distaste in his conscience and still continued to fill his belly with sinful actions, in the same way when the fruit of these actions take visible shape in the form of the tree of *zaqqum*, that is, the cactus, man will have to fill his belly with it whether he likes it or not. The bitter feeling of his conscience will on that day be intensified and he will experience this bitterness with terrifying severity. When he becomes aware of the reality of his vice and the consequences become clear to him his heart will grieve but there will be no alleviation for him that day for he will have to eat whatever food or whatever thorns he had sowed in life.

On that day also, the insatiable nature of evil will take the form of hot water. Virtue, like cold water, gives peace and comfort to the soul whilst evil, in the manner of hot water, generates restlessness and pain in the soul which derives no tranquillity or coolness from it. Instead, the heat and bitterness flare up even more. Thus, that vice that could bring no appeasement to man, but instead after committing it, man's passion became more excited, will on the day of Resurrection be turned into boiling water which will neither quench thirst nor afford coolness or tranquillity. And just as under the mounting excitement

of that passion he continued to increase in evil and never ever found contentment, so, too, in the hereafter, he will go on drinking boiling water as a thirsty camel drinks or as sand absorbs water. And yet he will find no solace.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib has disclosed a subtle reason for the special mention of the tree of *zaqqum* as one of the fruits of evil. He says that in the chapter *Ad-Dukhan* (The Smoke), after speaking of this same sustenance (*zaqqum*) for the inhabitants of hell, Allah, Most High, says: *Dhuq-innaka anta 'azizul karim* (Taste – thou art forsooth the mighty, the honourable) – 44:49.

That is, if you were not flushed with your high and mighty power and had not disdainfully turned away from the truth in disobedience to Allah, Most High, you would not have had to taste this bitter fruit of *zaqqum* today.

If we look carefully at this verse we shall see that the word *zaqqum* is an abbreviation of the words: *Taste – thou art forsooth the mighty, the honourable* because *zaqqum* is a compound word made up from *zaq* and *am*. (Bear in mind here that *zaq* and *dhuq* carry the same meaning) and *am* is a shortened version of: *Thou art the mighty, the honourable*. This kind of abbreviated expression is commonplace in the Arabic language and was employed by the Holy Prophet himself for in relation to the statement: *la hawla wa la quwwata illa bil-Lahi* (There is no might nor power except in Allah) we have a shortened form: *hawqal*.

Thus, the fruit of the cactus tree is specially spoken of because one of the main reasons for the commission of evil deeds by these people is their arrogance which prompts them to repudiate the truth and persist obstinately in their sinful ways.

In the verses above, Allah, Most High, speaking to the deniers about the life after death addresses them in the words: *O you who err and deny*.

The meaning is that they deny the message not because they are on the path of truth. Instead, their rejection comes about because of deviation from the truth and that is why they are renouncing it. It is for this reason that those *who err and deny* are told to listen to a description of the future life they will experience because of their evil deeds: they will have to fill their bellies with the fruit of the cactus plant but it will not satisfy them; they will have to drink boiling water but their thirst will not be quenched. On the day when deeds are recompensed they should consider the entertainment that is prepared for them. Furthermore, for them to think that life after death is an impossibility is a result of faulty reasoning. Instead, they should pay attention to the following logic:

57. *We have created you, (so) why do you not then accept?*

58. *See you that which you emit?*

59. *Is it you who create it or are We the Creators?*

The rejecters are pointedly reminded that they have already been created for the first time so their second creation should not be beyond their power to understand. If their Creator had the capability to create for the first time, is He not powerful enough to create again?

Let us limit our attention to the first creation alone so that our minds may not be unduly taxed. We are asked to begin there, that is, with the emission of the seminal fluid for that, Allah, Most High, says is the limit of our power, for we cannot make it enter the womb. When the male sperm and the female egg meet and find a resting-place in the womb, then, in the creation of a human infant, no man nor woman

has any further influence in causing that emission to coalesce in the womb. Who holds the power of life in the seminal emissions of male and female? And who has preordained such a measure in each one individually that when they meet, first of all, a power will be given to this sperm mixed with ovum to penetrate the womb and then form a close connection with it and cling tenaciously to it so that for its nourishment it may draw from the blood of the womb the necessary ingredients it needs for life?

Again, after uniting in the form of sperm mixed with ovum, a very subtle life form is brought into being and though it is so minute that it cannot be seen without a microscope, yet it becomes the entire blue-print of all that is required for the creation of the human body, that is, its diverse parts like the brain, heart, lungs, stomach, intestines, eyes, ear, nose, hand and feet. In short, even before any part is formed a perfect design is made and its different centres are established. Consider then how each constituent goes on drawing sustenance and after this nourishment has reached a particular point, it proceeds along the path of fashioning a male or a female infant as intended. Indeed, we have to ponder over the whole chain of creation.

Thus, can we say that that Being Who brings into existence all these miracles of creation is unable to create man a second time? After all, it is He Who originated everything in the first instance, so wherein is the difficulty in His doing so again?

It is a fact that whatever scene of Divine creation man looks regularly upon ceases to hold any wonder for him because as he sees it so often he takes it for granted. Otherwise everything in the world contains such a miracle in its creation that if it were not present before man's eyes and he had only heard of it he would have never become convinced of it.

So, if we reflect, we will realise that the first creation of man is far from an ordinary event. Once an atheist European doctor was observing, through a microscope, the birth of a chicken in a hen's egg. Whilst looking he became so astonished that he involuntarily blurted out: "It seems as if God is bringing this into being." Man's creation is even more wonderful than this. Let us think for ourselves: to measure beforehand every single thing, then to provide in advance every necessity, then to put into the vital parts of every man such extraordinary wisdom and power, then to insert life and the ability to act in every single one so that each one in its own way can be of use to all the others in such a way that no other organisation in the world can be compared to it – can all this be possible without the agency of a Creator? No intelligent person can accept such a possibility. Can anyone see any organisation in the world without a superintendent?

If not, then can there be no Creator for this perfectly ordered and immensely wise system that is man's creation in which every single thing is bound by such rigid and unshakeable laws and where every thing that exists is placed in the most appropriate position?

Thus, does that Being Who brings into existence this wonderful, wise and intricate system not have the ability to give a second life to man? If we accept that it is this same being Who gave to man his first birth, why should we doubt His power to bring him to life again (after his death)?

Indeed, all the difficulties that attend the origination of a particular creation are veiled from our eyes only because that finished creation is present before our very eyes. When something is before us, all the difficulties that existed before it came into being are hidden from our eyes. If, before the invention of the radio, someone had predicted that such a facility would be invented, he would have been considered a mad-man. Indeed, when the inventor of the telegraph system claimed that telegrams could be sent

without electric lines people thought that he was insane. Yet, today, the presence of the telegraph and the radio has removed all the doubts regarding their invention.

This is the same with man's first creation. In the beginning, there was only energy. Then Divine power created ether from which came nebula, then electrons out of which came particles of matter that generated inorganic matter. This then took the form of earth and water and so flora and fauna were created. After further creative stages, man came on the scene and that is referred to as the *nashat-ul-ula* (the first creation).

Every stage in this chain of creation took millions of years until after having crossed all the stages of evolution, man made his appearance. Having brought him this far, is it difficult for that Being to bless man for the next stage which is called the *nashat-ul-ukhra*?

Death is only a name for a change in condition. Or, it is the next stage that brings an end to his first creation and initiates his second creation as the following verses elucidate:

60. *We have ordained death among you and We are not to be overcome,*

61. *That We may change your state (amthalakum) and make you grow into what you know not.*

Amthalun is derived from *mathalun* meaning likeness. However, this word can sometimes signify virtue or merit and this is what is meant here. That is, in Allah's saying: "*We have ordained death among you*" there is a clear proof that the One Who causes death is another Being for, as is generally known, man naturally hates death. If man were his own creator, he would never have ordained death for himself.

Allah, Most High, explains in the next verse that He has ordained death for man in order to change his condition and to create for him a new life, the nature and essence of which man cannot yet comprehend. There, He will provide the means for his spiritual growth and advancement. Man should not think that the Almighty is powerless to do so. In fact, it is a very easy matter for Him. In these verses, we are told that the reality of death is really just another name for a change in man's condition and form. As man's physical body is unsuited for future growth and nourishment, death comes upon it so as to release the human soul. What is generally known as death in this world is really another name for a change in man's nature and likeness. By this means, the human soul is separated from the material body and is changed into a different condition and form so that its further growth and development may continue in the future also. In other words, death is indeed a means for continued progress. However, it is a fact that man does not have full knowledge yet of the quality and state of that future life.

Another meaning of the verse: *That We may change your state and make you grow into what you know not*, is that We cause death to you so as to make other people your inheritors and to transport you to another life, which you know nothing about, in order to provide continued advancement for you. In other words, death takes you away from this physical world and makes room for others and also carries you into another world which is equipped with provisions for your future advancement.

This, too, is a valid explanation which seems to be couched in the form of a prophecy. That is, the rejecters and deniers of Makkah will now experience a hereafter by suffering death which will open the way for Muslims to inherit them and this eventuality will furnish an incontrovertible proof of the assertion that after death they will be given a new life. Now, if this prophecy – that the deniers and rejecters will taste a devastating and disgraceful death – should prove to be true and other people, that is, Muslims will take their place, then it will also prove true that they will be given a life after death just

as the Arab nation which was considered dead came alive through Allah's grace and became inheritors of the earth.

In short, death is the name for a change in condition. This necessity for transformation comes about because the Being Who generates progress will not give us growth that is destined for a future life once we are in our present physical condition. Therefore, under the laws of evolution, as we observe operating in the world of physical creation, whenever nature changes the condition of something, it does so in order for that entity to take a further step in its evolutionary journey.

The following verse draws attention to this fact as it says:

62. And certainly you know the first growth, so why do you not then mind?

This verse draws attention to the fact that man knows the first growth, that is, he is very much acquainted with the first chain of creation: that nothing existed before except energy. In other words, through Allah's power, ether was created from which came nebula, then electrons, that is, electric charges, then physical particles from which minerals came into existence. When minerals and water combined to form soil, plants and animals came into being and after several stages of evolutionary progress, man finally came on the scene. So, in accordance with this law of evolution, why should the human soul not attain a higher stage than this in a future life where it can continue to receive further progress? Can man not see in this chain of creation and evolution that when something reaches full growth at a particular stage in its development and can get no further growth there, its condition changes so that it can continue to advance in a new stage? When minerals reached their highest point in their present stage they were changed into a new condition in the form of plants. And when the same occurred to plants they were transformed into animal life. So, too, when the animal stage reached its zenith and could go no further it gave rise to the stage of human beings. Now, when it has become impossible for man to make further progress in his physical condition then death comes to free the human soul from its earthly connection so that it can rise to the highest degree of spiritual elevation. Therefore, this verse asks man that when the first growth is there before his eyes, why does he not learn from it and draw the correct, logical conclusions?

In addition, if we contemplate the book of nature, it becomes clear that the Creator does not intend to wipe out the existence of man. Instead, He has ordained permanence for man and one argument for this is the requirement of the chain of evolution to which Allah, Most High, alludes in the above verse when He asks us to ponder over the first growth. According to the law of evolution, if the purpose for the change in condition of an entity is to open the way for more progress in a higher stage, then death is only another name for a change in condition so that the human soul may continue its onward march.

Another proof is furnished in the later verses in which man is invited to examine his own nature. Is it true or not that deep in man's heart there is a natural desire for permanent existence? If the answer is in the affirmative, and this is the most powerful of all the demands of man's nature, then it is left for us to see whether nature has provided external means for the satisfaction of this inborn demand of man or not. If it has made provisions, then that provides conclusive proof that this inherent instinct of man is not useless but serves a real purpose, because for nature to provide external support systems for him means that his Creator, Himself, desires everlasting life for him.

I have repeatedly written that the reason for the liberation of the soul from its physical attachments and its elevation to a higher level is that under the law of evolution, it may attain the kind of progress which it cannot achieve in this physical environment. Furthermore, this progress for which the soul has to be

transported into a next life cannot be obtained unless it receives in this physical world advancement and perfection in moral excellence which hinge on faith in the principles of truth followed by virtuous actions that are consonant with this conviction. And these are the two things (faith and righteous actions) for which the human soul stands in need of a physical body equipped with senses, emotions, intellect and perception.

Thus, the natural instinct for permanence that resides in the human heart finds expression first in man's wish for preservation of his physical body, for without it he will not be able to observe the principles of truth nor perform good deeds. So, before reflecting on the provisions prepared by nature in this world for man's development of high morals and spiritual perfection, we will concentrate on another question and that is: has nature made arrangements in the external environment in order for man to satisfy his innate yearning to maintain the life of his physical body, or not? If the answer is in the affirmative, then it will serve to prove that nature, herself, wants man's physical life to be firmly established so that he may perfect his soul in the present life in order that he may qualify himself to receive permanent life and become worthy of continued progress in the life after death.

First of all, we have to look and see whether, in order for man to satisfy his inherent craving, nature has made any provisions for sustaining this life of the physical body. First of all, though, we must appreciate the fact that in order to sustain this physical body, man depends on the warmth which exists within him and which is called body temperature. As long as this heat maintains its equilibrium in the body, even if man stops breathing or his heart stops beating, even then the hope for life cannot be extinguished. In other words, keeping the body temperature normal or at the correct level required is another name for the life of the human body.

To fulfil this requirement, nature has chosen three means: firstly, by creating warmth within the human body itself and this is produced by food; secondly, by reducing the heat of the body if it goes above the optimum level and this is achieved by water; thirdly, by making up for the deficiency in case the body loses heat and this compensation comes in the form of fire.

Food

Whatever food man eats is digested in the stomach and the intestines and enters the blood stream and through breathing oxygen, too, gets into the blood. The digested food and the oxygen combine and so combustion takes place or, chemically speaking, they burn. Thus, body temperature is produced within the human body itself. Those who think that warm clothes possess any heat are mistaken. In fact, there is no kind of warmth in any sort of clothes. Warm clothes have this one advantage over other garments: they are more effective in preventing the body from losing heat. Otherwise, it is the heat within the human body itself that keeps it warm. In short, food is the ingredient that produces body temperature.

Water

Water is the medium by which body temperature remains normal or, in other words, at an even temperature. When food causes body temperature to rise too high, then thirst sets in. Very often, man makes a wrong choice of food and consumes such foods that generate more warmth than is needed and so he begins to experience excessive thirst. Or, sometimes, because of hard, laborious work the combustion of the stored-up food reserves in the blood increases immensely and this results in greater heat. In order to reduce this excess heat to a normal or healthy level, the body needs water.

Thus, when hot food or arduous and strenuous work or fever causes body temperature to rise above the normal level then thirst becomes severe. In times like these, we need to drink water in order to lessen the heat. This is why nowadays water is regarded as the best remedy for fever. Glory be to Allah, that fourteen hundred years ago our Holy Prophet (*sas*) said that the cure for fever was water. In other words, this fact which European scientists have now discovered today was disclosed hundreds of years ago by that illiterate Prophet (*sas*). This is why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was a natural teacher in the true sense of the word and the source of his knowledge was the fountain of Divine wisdom.

Fire

There is another means by which human beings can keep their body temperature normal and that is fire. When man's body temperature itself is insufficient to help him combat intense cold and whatever heat his body generates and even warm clothing prove inadequate to preserve his body temperature at an equable level, then he needs to warm himself at a fire so that external heat may compensate for the deficiency in body temperature.

In conclusion, in order to keep the life of the body stable, body temperature is essential and to create this warmth and maintain it at a normal level, nature has instituted three natural demands within man himself, namely, hunger, thirst and the feeling of cold. We have to observe now whether nature has provided any external means for satisfying these three instinctive demands or not. We can see, as already described above, that nature created three things in the external environment to fulfil these three inherent human wants: food to satiate hunger, water to quench thirst and fire to combat the feeling of cold. Not only are these three things present, but in order to make them available the whole of creation works in unison. In the later verses, the Holy Qur'an elaborates and emphasises this point that in making these arrangements man had no input whatsoever. Instead, it is only his Creator Who, by His own power, has generated these means for man so that he may fulfil his inborn yearning to make his life lasting. So far removed are these things from man's ability to create that if nature does not do so, man, by himself, can never ever accomplish it for, in order to make these provisions, natural forces unite and work together with such efficiency that it is way beyond the power of a weak and helpless human being to achieve this feat.

Thus, it is proven beyond doubt that if, on the one hand, man possesses an inherent desire to perpetuate his physical life and for this very purpose nature has ingrained three demands within his body – hunger, thirst and feeling cold – then, on the other hand, nature, herself, has also prepared external arrangements to fulfil these three demands by providing food, water and fire. Further, the entire physical world is constantly engaged in supplying these necessities. We can conclude from this that man's inborn wants are not vain, but instead serve a real and more profound purpose.

Now, if there is a natural instinct in man for permanence, the first part of which requires the preservation of his physical body, then we can see that the hand of nature, herself, is fulfilling this first part in the best possible manner. And if nature has provided means to satisfy the first stage of this innate demand with fulsome power, glory and majesty, then it follows that she must also have done the same thing in the best manner, too, for man's second stage which pertains to the continuance of the human soul and its unending progress.

Furthermore, if nature has provided external means for the fulfilment of both these natural yearnings for permanent life, then it is also true that nature has ordained everlasting life for man and death does not signify total extinction, but is rather only another name for a change in condition, so that man can escape from the grip of a physical existence and become eligible for future advancement. In other

words, transformation by death is to facilitate permanent life so that progress towards perfection, which is impossible in this present earthly condition, can be achieved in the next stage.

Indeed, it is also true that everlasting life comes only as a bounty of nature or, to put it differently, it depends solely on the grace of the Almighty, for man needs the helping hand of nature in every step that has to be taken towards everlasting life. Man, on his own accord, can never achieve anything resembling a permanent existence. Whatever exists comes through the grace of Allah, Most High, and is dependent on nature for fulfilment.

I have explained above that the first part of man's inborn demand for permanent life is evidenced by his eagerness for securing the well-being of his physical body. The second part is demonstrated by the deep, latent desire in the human heart for perfection through which man can fulfil the real purpose of his existence and the way to achieve this is by acting on the guidance and teaching sent down by his Creator. In order of arrangement, this second term of man will be dealt with later in the third section of this chapter. However, the first term is explained in the verses that follow immediately.

Look how beautiful is the arrangement to which attention is drawn to the external provisions which are made by nature to satisfy the three instinctive demands of man – hunger, thirst and the sensation of cold – for ensuring the physical stability of his body.

63. *See you what you sow?*

64. *Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the Causer of growth?*

65. *If We pleased, We would make it chaff, then you would lament (tafak-kahun):*

66. *Surely we are burdened with debt:*

67. *Nay, we are deprived.*

Tafak-kahun is derived from *fakiha* which means to be amazed. It also means to feel sorrowful.

Food is dealt with before everything else for it is the first thing that is needed to prolong man's life. The Holy Qur'an points out to man that if he thinks that he is the one who creates food he is quite wrong. He does not even know where the grain he sows came from in the beginning of the world. It then asks a series of questions: Who invented that special characteristic in the grain that causes it to germinate in the soil? Who placed in the earth all the properties that the seed absorbs after which young plants spring up from the ground? Who supplied rain and water for their sustenance? Who created the sun and the moon to ripen them? Who made the seas that give rise to rain through water vapour? Who caused the winds to blow?

Man only sows the seed in the soil – he has not created it, neither has he placed those ingredients which the seed absorbs to make it germinate. He cannot cause rain to fall, neither has he brought into being the sun and the moon, nor can make the winds blow.

In short, from beginning to end, every single grain, nay, let man reflect and appreciate the fact that every conceivable kind of food was supplied to him by his Creator. And in this affair, his total helplessness is conspicuously evident from the fact that if Allah, Most High, decides to destroy his food crop, there is nothing he can do to prevent it.

For example, very often an insect comes along and destroys the crop; on many occasions ants bite and ruin the fields; grasshoppers, too, run riot; rain and flood often devastate the crops and rain storms also wreak their havoc. In short, in the face of all these hostile elements, if Allah, Most High, through His

power, does not save those crops, man will have nothing to harvest and can do nothing but lament over the destruction of his fields and weep in stupefaction because of his deprivation.

Thus, man's sustenance is totally out of his hands. It is the Almighty Who has marvellously brought together heavenly and earthly means by which food is created for man. Further, He continually safeguards his crops from every kind of calamity and difficulty. It is only then that man can put a piece of bread to his mouth. Thus, it is only Providence that satisfies this innate yearning of man for continued existence. The clear implication of this is that it is the will of nature, herself, that man should not be made extinct but should instead be given permanent life. And can we not assume that in like manner it is incumbent on Allah, Most High, to provide spiritual sustenance, too, for man?

Indeed, that sustenance comes in the form of the principles of truth and righteous actions through which man's soul attains perfection. The true purpose of life is achieved and this is what makes him a recipient of everlasting life.

68. *See you the water which you drink?*

69. *Do you bring it down from the clouds (muzni) or are We the Bringer?*

70. *If We pleased, We could make it saltish; so why not give thanks?*

Muznun means rain bearing clouds.

The second thing that man needs to perpetuate his life is sweet water. The sea from which water vapour rises and forms clouds which deposit rain on dry areas is full of salt and man cannot bear the taste of even one drop of it on his tongue for it cuts like acid. It also inflames the eyes if it happens to get into them. That is why the greatest need for ships sailing the seas is to carry sweet water for no one can drink the brackish water of the sea. If sea water encroaches upon any tract of land it turns it salty. In short, whatever sweet water the earth contains comes from rain. Man drinks it and through it the fields and orchards come alive. If there is no fresh water or, if it becomes salty, then that spells the end of man and all his sustenance.

Thus Allah, Most High, asks man certain questions: Tell me, my dear one, in order to produce sweet water on which your life depends, is it you who cause the sun to shine, or make the water vapour rise from the seas, or make the winds blow, or form the clouds to give rain, or is it you who store up the water in the earth in the form of springs, rivers, ice, wells, etc? Now, if you have no hand whatsoever in these matters, how ungrateful is it of you to look at nature's magnificent work which is calculated to perpetuate your life and yet deny the teachings of the Almighty: teachings which Allah, Most High, has showered on you like celestial rain in order to bless your soul with true, everlasting life?

If Allah, Most High, has made such elaborate provision for the prolongation of man's physical life, would He not do the same to give to man's soul unending spiritual life which is indeed the life supreme? To deny this reality is the limit of ingratitude.

71. *See you the fire which you kindle?*

72. *It is you who produce the trees for it, or are We the Producer?*

73. *We have made it a reminder and an advantage (mata'an) for the wayfarers of the desert (muqwin).*

Mata'an means arrangements or useful things.

Muqwina comes from *aqwa* meaning to go into the desert. (*Mafradat* of Imam Raghīb) Hence *muqwin* means a traveller.

The third thing that man needs to lengthen his life is fire. It was the Holy Qur'an that first disclosed the fact that fire comes from trees. When coal was discovered, the objectors made a great hue and cry against this statement. However, geological researches finally confirmed that coal was in fact created from trees which grew on the earth hundreds of thousands of years ago and because of upheavals and earthquakes were buried beneath the rocks and soil and so formed coal.

In short, whatever deposits of coal exist anywhere in the earth all came from trees, and firewood, as everyone knows, is obtained from trees. To explain the existence of fire, the emphasis is most likely placed on trees because it seems that fire is in fact latent in trees. This fire is really the rays of the sun which green trees absorb from the sunshine. The Holy Qur'an alludes to this fact elsewhere in another verse when it says: *Who produced fire for you out of the green tree, so that with it you kindle* (36:80).

That is, it is the green trees which are the agents for creating fire. Green trees have this peculiar quality that they absorb the rays of the sun and preserve them within themselves. When they become dry they are used as fuel and people kindle fires from them and when they are combined with oxygen the latent rays of sunshine become visible in the form of fire. In short, the provisions made by the Creator for producing fire take the form of trees. That is why Allah, Most High, poses the following question to man: *“Did you create the trees that produce fire or were We the Producer?”*

The verse tells us that in the creation of fire there is a reminder and a blessing for travellers. Look at how unfathomable is Allah's knowledge of the unseen. Who could have known fourteen hundred years ago that someday this same fire was going to prove so beneficial for travellers? For example, railways depend on fire, as well as steam boats, airplanes and motorcars, and journeys that formerly took days and months are now being regularly completed in a few hours. Thus, how beneficial a merchandise is fire or, in other words, what a useful thing it is! It is called a reminder for it warns man that fire will be of great use to him only when it is used with due care and caution for it has to be kept under control and must be used according to rigid rules and laws. If there is the slightest carelessness and it gets out of control, then that very fire which enables people to reach their destinations in a few seconds will bring about the death and destruction of travellers.

So, man is a traveller in this world and he also has to transcend stages of spiritual progress on which his future life depends and to enable him to do this, he has been equipped with the fire of emotions. Just as body temperature is required for the prolongation of his physical life, so, too, is the fire of emotions a pre-condition for the perpetuation of his spiritual life. Of course, like physical fire, this one, too, has to be utilised with proper care and must be employed according to strict rules and laws and then this same emotional fire will help him to traverse many destinations along the spiritual path with great speed. That is, just as physical fire, by means of automobiles and railways makes it easy for worldly travellers to reach their destinations very swiftly, in the same way, the hidden fire of human passions facilitates man's rapid journey along the spiritual path. The only condition is that in using this fire, it must be kept within limits for if it goes out of control it causes his destruction in this physical world and sends him to hell in the next life.

We must keep in mind here also that, unlike the principles of monkery, Islam does not aim at the obliteration of man's passions. If there were any virtue in exterminating them, then why did the

Almighty create them in the first place? If it is true that emotions came into being through the will of the Creator, then they must definitely be of some benefit to man for everything that is part of his nature is advantageous to him. Thus, Islam teaches us that in utilising whatever Allah, Most High, has given to us according to His will lies the true formula for winning His pleasure and achieving spiritual progress.

So, if we use emotions in accordance with the directions given to us by our Creator, then, like body temperature, they will serve as an impetus to us and like fire, they will assist us in traversing the stages of spiritual advancement. For example, if the feeling of love is non-existent in a person, he becomes cold like a piece of stone and he ends up living a worthless life. It is the emotion of love that motivates us to work hard for wealth in this world, to seek to acquire honour, to get married, to fulfil our obligations to our wives and children and to perform our duties to parents, friends, relatives and neighbours. Above all, it is this very emotion that makes us love our Creator and give preference to His pleasure and love above everything else.

If a person follows the straight path in the use of his emotions he attains human dignity and honour. But if these emotions should deviate from the straight path, then they end up being the cause of his destruction. For example, in working for wealth, if the feeling of greed predominates, then it will breed crimes like cheating, dishonesty, embezzlement, treachery, theft, highway robbery, extortion of bribes, etc. and will give rise to low morals. For instance, excessive love for women may cause a man to neglect his legitimate wife and make him ruin himself by indulging in fornication and voluptuous living. Or, if he goes over-board in his love for worldly possessions, then he may very well forget his Maker completely.

In short, those very emotions which, when used in the prescribed manner, are so beneficial to man and help him to cross stage after stage in his spiritual journey are the very ones which, if allowed to go out of control and to deviate from the straight path, will become the cause of his perdition and his hell. In this way, if the feeling of anger is employed on the proper occasion it can help man to attain spiritual elevation and develop sublime morals. For example, the use of it in the appropriate circumstances leads to the development of high moral qualities like steadfastness, bravery, honour and increased enthusiasm for growth and advancement. On the other hand, if it is employed out of turn or erroneously, then it may result in wild rage, envy, assault and battery, mischief, murder and massacre.

74. So glorify (sabbih) the name of thy Lord, the Incomparably Great.

Tasbih means to believe and to express the conviction that Allah's attributes are free from every deficiency or blemish. One kind is verbal, that is, to say, from our hearts that we consider Allah to be free of any shortcoming or imperfection and to make this very plain by way of public expression. The other kind is practical in that in order to fulfil the purpose for which our Lord created us, we try our utmost to walk along the path of His revealed laws of guidance through which our spiritual faculties receive nourishment and thereby manifest exalted morals.

Thus, no person's glorification is complete unless he exalts the name of his Lord in both ways: verbal and practical. Allah, Most High, reminds man that it is He, his Lord (*Rabb*) alone Who can satisfy the restless yearning in his heart for everlasting life. Wondrous are the natural forces pressed into service for his sake – forces that are way beyond not only his creative ability but also the power of his imagination.

Thus, how full of majesty is man's Lord and how unbounded is His gratuitous magnanimity to poor man that, purely out of His grace, He has prepared every facility for him to acquire unending life! Therefore, let man glorify and exalt the name of his Lord!

SECTION 3

In this section, mention is made of the second aspect of man's innate desire for permanent life. That is, it informs us of all the external provisions and means that Allah, Most High, has made in this life for the moral nourishment and perfection of the human soul so as to prepare it adequately for the life after death. And these are the teachings and principles of truth which, if accepted and obeyed, will ensure man's moral and spiritual advancement and perfection. Further, if by acting on these principles and teachings, man's soul can win everlasting life and can evolve toward perfection, then it is mandatory that the Creator of the world should Himself educate man from His own knowledge. Accordingly, this Divine chain of knowledge to man is visible throughout the world and is referred to as prophetic revelation which, in a collected form, is called a book. The Holy Qur'an itself gives proof of this when it says:... *for every people (there was) a guide* (13:6).

Finally, leaving aside all these teachings which were given to a particular people or in a particular age, Allah, Most High, has collected all those everlasting truths and Divine messages and guidance in a permanent manner in the form of the Holy Qur'an. And having increased it in perfection in every conceivable aspect, He placed it in the hand of man so that he may learn from it the purpose of his creation and so observe those teachings that are conducive to the true permanence of his soul and its continued evolution. Thus, after nourishing and perfecting his morals he may make himself eligible for further progress in the next life.

As a result, after presenting in the following verses the means Allah, Most High, has provided through the Holy Qur'an for satisfying the inborn demand of man for unending life, testimony is proffered in support of its truth and majesty and the claim is made that this Book (the Holy Qur'an) is the only one which can enable man to fulfil his inherent yearning for everlasting spiritual life in the proper manner.

- 75. *But nay, I swear by revelation of portions (nujum) (of the Qur'an)! –*
- 76. *And it is a great oath indeed, if you knew –*
- 77. *Surely it is a bounteous Qur'an,*
- 78. *In a book that is protected*
- 79. *Which none touches save the purified ones.*

Nujum means stars. However, according to Ibn Abbas, Mujahid and Ikrimah, it signifies portions of the Holy Qur'an that were revealed from time to time to the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

The significance of the verse (75): *But nay, I swear by revelation of portions (nujum) (of the Qur'an)* is that man should not look at this Qur'an with disdain for it is not an insignificant book. Allah, Most High, tells us that He is presenting the mansions of the stars by way of testimony, namely, the reason the stars in the sky appear so small in our eyes is that they are very far above us in space. Thus, because of their heavenly elevation, they seem to be very tiny to dwellers on earth. Nevertheless, in their own right, they are really large planets and among them are many which are several times larger than our planet, Earth. As a result of their distance from us, their hidden wonders and the secret beauties they embrace are beyond our ken. Thus, it is the height of stupidity for any man to look down

contemptuously at the stars for they look small only because of their remoteness. Otherwise, by Allah, they are indeed massive orbs and boundless regions.

Similarly, because the revelations of the Holy Qur'an that came down to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in portions are so resplendent with heavenly light, that is, replete with spiritual and heavenly knowledge, they bear a resemblance to the stars. And just as the heavenly stars, because of their great distance from the earth appear small and contemptible to earthly people, in the same way, because creatures of the earth are distant from this celestial knowledge (of the Holy Qur'an) and far removed from its lofty truths and sciences, they regard the Holy Qur'an as just another book. However, as for those servants, who, through their piety and purity of heart make progress in spiritual knowledge, the closer they get, the more the majesty of the knowledge contained in these Qur'anic verses are disclosed to them in the same way as a person who approaches closer and closer to these physical stars will acquire greater and greater appreciation of their grandeur and splendour.

76. And it is a great oath indeed, if you knew –

This means that putting forward the lofty stations of the stars as evidence is a very weighty matter for it contains a mighty challenge to the whole world warning people not to treat the Holy Qur'an with ridicule. Like the heavenly stars, it embodies knowledge and science of the world.

By placing emphasis on it as testimony by way of an oath, Allah, Most High, is telling us that He is stressing this point so that after deep reflection we will come to discover that the more we cogitate on the Holy Qur'an, the more miraculous we will find it. To make a powerful claim like this is not a frivolous matter. Instead, it is an extremely remarkable one. Glory to Allah, even those hostile scholars who have pondered over this Holy Book have been struck by its majestic power. For example, the celebrated German philosopher, Goethe, wrote in relation to the Holy Qur'an: "This is a book which a man may sit down to read with hostility and hatred in his heart, yet before he finishes it, he will rise with his heart brimming with love and sublimity."

This is the testimony of a non-Muslim philosopher. However, beyond description will be the splendour of the Holy Qur'an that will be disclosed to those people who follow it and develop righteousness and purity of the soul and become closer on the path leading to the Holy Book. The spiritual truths and divine knowledge that are vouchsafed to such people amount to an ocean of knowledge from which narrow-minded people are debarred.

77. Surely it is a bounteous (karim) Qur'an.

This is an answer to the oath stating that this Holy Qur'an is really a marvellous book. That is, the more a person ponders over it and the nearer he gets to it, the more its glory and majesty become manifest to him. The word *Qur'an* means a book that is worthy of being read and also one that may be read often. By referring to the book as the Qur'an, there is, also, a prophecy that it will be read more frequently than any other book in the world. So we can see for ourselves that it is recited so often in formal prayers (*salah*) and in daily recitations and to such an extent that no other book, whether religious or secular, is read as repeatedly as this book is. Worldly books are read once and then discarded.

As regards holy books, man surely has to read these heavenly scriptures right through his life, but if one tries to read the Vedas or the Zend Avesta, one will find that the script itself is difficult to understand. Then there is the Bible, but the number of versions and revisions it has had to go through is

amazing. Yet, in spite of this multiplicity of editions, it is still not read with much frequency. It is read in church during Sunday devotions and that is the end of it.

On the other hand, the Holy Qur'an is recited in the regular prescribed prayers (*salah*) five times a day, in supererogatory prayers (*tarawih*) in the month of Ramadhan and on many other occasions and it is also memorised. In short, it is read in scores of ways to such a degree and Muslims consider its recitation such a binding duty on them that the like of it cannot be seen in the whole world.

Karim means noble and also something that is beneficial and confers rewards and favours. Both meanings are applicable here. The beauty of its grandeur is such that the more a person meditates and ponders over it the more he has to admit of its eminence and that indeed is an extraordinary feat. Those Muslims who chose the path of righteousness and virtue and attained closeness to it had to bow their heads in acknowledgement of its glory and magnificence and its knowledge and deep divine truths. However, latent in this verse, there seems to be another proclamation and that is the more non-Muslim nations continue to derive true knowledge of the Holy Qur'an the more they will be compelled to show reverence to it.

Couched in the word *karim* (noble) was a challenge to the unbelievers of the time that however much they strained every nerve and muscle to obliterate the Holy Qur'an, they would fail and its glory and majesty would increase and remain forever. And as to its claim to being bounteous, this, too, is true for the benefits that the Holy Qur'an has conferred on humanity has never been equalled by any other book in the world. For example, look at what it did to the Arab nation: from a barbaric, idol-worshipping people steeped in vice and immorality, not only were they transformed into a civilised and virtuous people, but they also became worshippers of one God and pious, God-fearing people. Further, they carried the torch of knowledge, both secular and religious, to all parts of the world, as well as the lamp of spiritual knowledge and the concept of the oneness of God. And it was through these very people that the thirst for culture and religious reformation and knowledge and the eagerness for progress finally reached Europe.

But that is not all. Whether the proud nations of Europe verbally acknowledge the truths of the Holy Qur'an or not, yet in practical life, they are adopting its principles one after the other and making them part of their country's institutions. To counteract the evils of drinking, gambling, and fornication etc intelligent Europeans are proposing the very remedies that the Holy Qur'an advocated so many centuries ago. The opposition to capitalism is indeed the very same that Islam proposes. Many European scholars of the highest eminence have been forced to write that if European civilisation had not come into contact with and absorbed something of Islamic spirituality, their civilisation could not have survived. In short, there is no book in the world that is more honourable nor more beneficial than the Holy Qur'an. Whoever takes the time to scrutinise the Holy Qur'an will have to accept the truth of its nobility and its bountifulness. It then tells us:

78. In a book that is protected

That is, not only is it noble and bounteous, but it is also protected from the attacks and machinations of enemies, meaning that they cannot destroy it. They can neither obliterate its words nor its meaning. Firstly, as regards its words, Allah, Most High, has preserved them by means of memorisation, writing and printing in such an unprecedented manner that no other book in the whole world can make a claim of preservation with such power and certainty as the Holy Qur'an does.

Secondly, in reference to its meaning, its preservation lies in the fact that whatever principles the Holy Qur'an has established are permanent and eternal and their truth and grandeur cannot be refuted by any philosopher. These are the Divine laws, the consequences of which are immutable. These are the principles of truth which if flouted by man, will debar him from ever enjoying true happiness and peace of mind. Furthermore, the truth of whatever news of the unseen and prophecies that have been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an have been established beyond the shadow of a doubt and will be fulfilled in the future also because they proceed from Divine knowledge and have been scrupulously safeguarded from any satanic interference.

79. *Which none touches save the purified ones.*

That is, only pure-hearted people and no one else will be able to penetrate its deeper meanings. In other words, enemies whose intentions are devoid of purity, that is, they try to gain access to its meaning with evil intentions of doing damage to it, can never succeed. In short, they will be powerless to inflict mischief. Friends, too, who wish to probe its secrets will find that access to it also depends on purity. That is, if they wish to touch it physically, they must first cleanse themselves physically and if they wish to delve into and discover its deeper truths and spiritual wisdom that, too, is contingent on their purity of heart. This point is forcefully brought out in the following excerpt from Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib, the *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century.

“To fathom Qur'anic sciences, righteousness (*taqwa*) is an essential prerequisite. Between the acquisition of knowledge of physical science and that of Qur'anic knowledge, there lies an extraordinary distinction. For example, to attain proficiency in grammar, material philosophy, astronomy, medical science etc. it is not incumbent on the seeker to be steadfast in fasting and prayer (*salah*) or to be careful at all times about what is permissible and what is prohibited, or to stick to the wisdom of Allah's commands in every word and deed. Instead, many a time, nay, it is a common occurrence to see experts in secular knowledge and students become atheistic in orientation and given to all kinds of vice and immorality.

However, the first condition in acquiring heavenly knowledge and Qur'anic secrets is righteousness and for this sincere repentance is mandatory. As long as man does not observe the commands of Allah with complete humility and meekness of spirit and does not tremble in awe at His majesty and glory and turn to Him in humble supplication, the door of Qur'anic wisdom will remain closed to him. Neither will he be able to gain the means of sustenance from this Book for nourishing the faculties and capacities his soul requires – sustenance that can engender pleasure and contentment of the soul, if attained. The Holy Qur'an is the book of Allah and its knowledge resides in His power. Thus, righteousness is like a ladder to ascend to spiritual mysteries” (*Al-Hakam*, 13 March 1901).

So, by these verses, Allah, Most High, is telling heedless man that since he is so embroiled in worldly wrongdoings, he has fallen far from heaven and engrossment in egoistic desires has made him cling to earth. Therefore, if he tries to ascend to spiritual heights by means of the ladder of virtue and purity of heart, then the closer he gets to the Holy Qur'an the more evident will its splendour and grandeur become to him and his eyes will expand as he discerns the spiritual truths and sciences and the knowledge and wisdom of the Holy Book as promised in the verse, ... *And keep your duty to Allah. And Allah teaches you* (2:282).

That is, the more man advances in righteousness, the more will Allah, Most High, teach him. That is the knowledge that comes from Allah like a celestial light to irradiate the heart and intellect of man.

80. *A revelation from the Lord of the worlds.*

We are told that this Qur'an was sent down by the Lord of all the worlds, the Creator of the universe Who has created thousands and thousands of worlds for the perpetuation of man's life. Through His attribute of Providence (*Rububiyyat*), he produced energy. That is, with His own power, He has brought life out of nothingness from the ether and after several stages of evolution and continuous progression through countless worlds, He created man. According to the demand of that same Creator's attribute of Providence, the Holy Qur'an, a perfect book, was sent down to provide for man's future nourishment and progress so that by acting on its teachings he may make himself fit and ready for his future life. In this way, there may be no break in his evolutionary progress and even in the future his advancement may proceed steadily and continuously.

This verse also informs us that through this book provision is made for all the worlds. That is, in every age, every nation in the world will find sustenance from the perfect teachings and eternal verities of this book. In other words, after perfecting their moral and spiritual faculties they will continue to make themselves worthy of acquiring progress and perfection in their future life. In fact, even the most degenerate nation can elevate itself to the most exalted station through the bountiful providence of this book.

It was for this reason that, first of all, this prescription of the Holy Qur'an was tried out on a nation that had descended to the lowest level in point of civilisation and culture, morals and irreligion. Secondly, the People of the Book, that is, the Jews and Christians, were unable to make the least impression on them, not even as much as a ripple when a stone is thrown in water. However, it was that very nation, through the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, that made such miraculous progress that from a wild and unlettered people, they were transformed not only into a civilised and cultured nation, but also a God-fearing and monotheistic people on whose shoulders fell the responsibility for laying the foundation of civilisation and refinement, and cultural and social reformation for future nations of the world. Thus, in the eyes of discerning people, the impact that the Holy Qur'an made on the Arab nation has confirmed it as the most potent and tried and tested prescription for the growth and elevation of mankind.

Thus, it establishes the fact that it is the intended will of the Creator to give everlasting life to man, otherwise He would not have made arrangements for his spiritual permanence. That is, He would not have initiated the chain of revelation and prophethood and would not have sent down consummate guidance through the most perfect of all books, the Holy Qur'an. Yet, even after the truth has become manifest, through heedlessness and obduracy, hatred and obstinacy, man still cannot restrain himself from belying the truth and wisdom of the Holy Book.

Thus, the following verses ask:

81. *Is it this announcement that you disdain (mudhinum)?*

82. *And make your denial your means of subsistence (rizq)?*

Rizq means portion, share or lot; also anything from which benefit is derived.

Dahnun means anointing oil, whilst *mudhinun* refers to one who glosses over and holds in low esteem.

Madahinah signifies making manifest the opposition that is in the heart, or being remiss or slack in religion. It also means belying or showing disdain.

The meaning here is that the arguments in support of the truth of the Holy Qur'an continue to prove to be so cogent that the objectors ought not to take them lightly. Yet, by the way they continue to gloss over the truth and object to it make it appear as if they are deriving a share of good fortune from their outright renunciation of the Qur'anic message. That is, they consider it an honour to repudiate the truth no matter how valid it may be, just as we see happening in this sick world of today.

The minds of Western-educated people are so filled with pride and conceit over their defective and one-dimensional knowledge of physical science that no matter whatever truth from religion is presented to them, they will dismiss it with contempt. This is testimony to their imperfect knowledge and undeserved arrogance.

Similar, too, is the case of those people also who are steeped in archaic knowledge. They will never be disposed to accept anything that goes against their stories, however true this new knowledge may be. But the attitude of both these groups is wrong. Man's heart should always be open to the truth. To allow pride in imperfect knowledge or to exhibit blind adherence to old stories make a person persist on the path of renouncing truth without even examining it is not the way of seekers of truth.

It is this mindset that the Holy Qur'an censures in the following verses:

- 83. *Why is it then that when it comes up to the throat* (balaghatil hulqum),
- 84. *And you at that time look on –*
- 85. *And We are nearer to it than you, but you see not –*
- 86. *Why then, if you are not held under authority* (madinin),
- 87. *Do you not send it back if you are truthful?*

Madinun comes from *dana* meaning to be inferior.

Danan-nasa means to subdue a man or bring him under your control.

Madinun means under submission or authority, and *madinin* is its plural.

Balaghatil hulqum, that is, *It comes up to the throat*, does not mean that the soul is dragged out of the body and reaches the throat. Instead, what we are given here is a perfect description of the agony at the time of death. When death begins to come upon a person, life and strength gradually diminish until finally, together with his respiration the only visible movement is in his neck. His whole body is deprived of motion and the only sign of life is seen in the throbbing of his neck. The reason for this is that because of weakness his breathing begins to weaken and to keep it going, the respiratory organ has to work extra hard. As the muscles of the chest have already become still, therefore, only the muscles of the neck begin to twitch and they move only with strenuous effort. The onlookers observe that only the neck and lower jaw are moving whilst the rest of the body is motionless. This is, indeed, the true condition of a person in the final throes of death. In my capacity as a doctor, I have had to witness hundreds of deaths but once a person reaches this point, I have never seen anyone rescued. This is why the verse asks: *Why then ... do you not send it back if you are truthful?*

The connection between those verses and the preceding ones is that the real reason for the continued denial of truth by the objectors is that they forget they have to die and are totally unconcerned and heedless of the fact that they have to give their life to Allah and stand before Him to give account of their deeds. This is why they pay scant regard to the strict adherence to truth and the principles of

justice and reject the truth no matter how clear it is to them. The verses tell us that never mind how long we live we finally have to die one day and come face to face with our Maker. A time will come one day in the existence of man when his life will begin to leave his body and only the breathing in his throat will remain and at that time people will be looking at their most beloved friend passing away but will be helpless to prevent it. At that moment, Allah will be closer to our dying friend than we are but we will not be aware of it. So if people think that they are not under the power of any God and that they are their own Creator and Lord, then they should restore life to the dying one or cause his departing soul to return to his body. If they cannot do this, then it is clear that man is under the authority of some other Being. Otherwise, if he is not subject to the command of someone else and is master of his own life then why does he not save himself from death now, as another verse of the Holy Qur'an challenges the deniers: *Avert death from yourselves if you are truthful* (3:167).

The verse: *And We are nearer to him but you do not see*, also means: "Why talk about death alone? On all other occasions I am nearer to every man than you are but you do not know it." Therefore, wise is the man who appreciates that he is closer to Allah than to man. That is, he fears Allah more than men, and in seeking His pleasure, he cares not a jot what others think for when some calamity comes from Allah or death approaches no man can avail him aught. It is only that Being Who can help him. Every one leaves him except that Lord of his Who never deserts him at the time of death when he is taking leave of this world and no one is with him at that fateful moment. It is this same Lord Who will take care of him in the next life, too. Thus, to become overly engrossed in this worldly life and to forget his Lord for the sake of people and to deny this revealed guidance, or to disobey it, are dangerous to man and quite erroneous.

88. *Then if he is one of those drawn nigh to Allah,*

89. *Then happiness (rauhun) and bounty (raihan) and a Garden of bliss.*

Rauhun has several connotations: mercy, comfort, ease, freedom from pain and forgiveness, whilst *raihan* means everlasting fragrance.

The style of the Holy Qur'an is such that it reverts to the same topic that it broached in the beginning of the chapter. This chapter began by dividing mankind into three groups on the day of Resurrection in respect of their deeds in this life. It was therefore appropriate that in the middle of the chapter it should provide convincing proof of a life after death. It is also a distinctive characteristic of the Holy Qur'an that it never makes a claim without producing supporting evidence. That is a standing demonstration of the excellence of this Holy Book.

In short, since mankind will be divided into three classes on the day of Resurrection as a consequence of their actions, it was a necessary precondition that proofs of a life after death should also be furnished.

After this, the subject is then directed to reminding man that death is indeed an inevitable event which man is helpless to avoid. Every human being has to pass through this door and at that time no other name besides that of Allah, Most High, is of any avail. Thus, blessed is he who is mindful of the next life and gives precedence to pleasing his Lord above everything else, for whoever gains perfection in this affair achieves proximity to this Lord and Cherisher and besides this, what greater contentment, satisfaction and blessing can there be?

In this world's life, to gain closeness to temporal rulers is considered a mighty good fortune even though their largesse is imperfect and transitory. So how can we estimate the priceless value of being

close to the Greatest of all Rulers Whose bounties are beyond the power of man's conception? We ought to consider that station as a garden of blessings where man will enjoy tranquillity and sustenance forever and ever. By sustenance (*rizq*) is meant a share in every kind of blessing.

So, extremely fortunate are those who are a part of this blessed group of the foremost. But even if we cannot attain that height, then at least man should try to make himself become one of the companions of the right hand for they, too, enjoy immunity from all pain as is promised in the following verses:

90. *And if he is one of those on the right hand*
91. *Then peace to thee from those on the right hand.*

That is, although the companions of the right hand will not attain that lofty rank that the foremost will achieve, nevertheless, they will be safe and secure from all distress and grief and will share in the blessings that their Lord will apportion them. These bounties and blessings of the above two classes have already been described in the first section of this chapter.

92. *And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones,*
93. *He has an entertainment of boiling water,*
94. *And burning in hell.*

This is a description of the condition of those on the left hand. If they persisted in disdainning the truth in this life with the result that they unfortunately lost the straight path and ended up straying from it; and if they spent their whole life in a blazing fire of haughtiness of spirit, egoistic desires and animal passions; and if they never found any coolness or comfort from the searing thirst of these passions, but instead day by day they fell deeper and deeper into this furnace, then, if in the life after death this insatiable thirst of their debased passions assumes the form of boiling water which neither satisfies thirst nor affords coolness; and if the fire of their passions in which they spent their entire life should take the form of the fire of hell in which they will burn, is this not a representation of their own deeds in a palpable form?

In reality, those will be the very things which they were secretly preparing for themselves with their own hands in this world. The only difference is that they could not be fully perceived in this life but on the day of Resurrection they will be experienced completely and perfectly.

It is one of the special features of the Holy Qur'an that it has painted such a clear and detailed picture of the day of Resurrection that no other heavenly scripture has equalled. The purpose is that if specific details of the consequences of deeds are presented to man with total clarity and fulsome light, then in accordance with human nature, man's attention will be caught by the causes of these repercussions and he may become more circumspect in his actions.

For example, we try to instil caution in children who are unaware of harmful objects by drawing their attention to the detrimental effects of these things. For instance, if we see a child holding a sharp knife in his hand we try to make him understand the danger by advising him gently: "Look, son, you may cut your hand with that knife. It will bleed and cause you great pain." If this child has the slightest bit of understanding he will let go of the knife.

Similarly, as man, too, is heedless of the consequences of his actions, or even unconcerned, this is why in giving minute details of the consequences of actions, the intention is to make him guard himself

against those actions that bring evil results, and happily, if his eyes are closed to the certainty of requital, then through this they may be opened even a little.

In addition, as regards the connection between hell and heaven this detailed explanation discloses an important piece of knowledge through which learned people gain an insight into the extremely subtle relation between deeds and their consequences. In the Hereafter, this knowledge will become more perfectly understood and then the wisdom of these Qur'anic verses will become more manifest.

In short, the Holy Qur'an did not bring precious knowledge to man for this world alone but it also furnished him with knowledge of greater consequence for the Hereafter, too.

95. *Surely this is the certain truth* (haqq-ul-yaqin).

Haqq-ul-yaqin means the ultimate limit of truth. The Holy Qur'an has described three degrees of certainty:

1. The knowledge of certainty (*'ilm-ul-yaqin*); that is, evidence that comes from arguments and signs or inference.
2. The eye of certainty (*'ain-ul-yaqin*); that is, eye-witness evidence.
3. The ultimate limit of certainty or certain truth (*haqq-ul-yaqin*). This grade of certainty surpasses by far the first two kinds and this can be further sub-divided into two classes: firstly, something that exists as such (in its own right), or secondly, something that a person himself creates.

A few examples can make us understand this matter quite clearly. For example, if we see smoke rising somewhere then we draw the conclusion that there is a fire there although we have not yet seen the fire. As smoke is evidence of fire, we, therefore, on seeing the smoke conclude that there is a fire. This is called certainty by way of inference.

A higher degree of certainty arises when we actually see the fire with our own eyes and this is called eye-witness evidence (*'ain-ul-yaqin*). A greater degree of certainty than this comes about if we enter the fire and feel its heat and this is called certain truth (*haqq-ul-yaqin*). Another measure of certain truth arises if we ourselves kindle the fire.

Thus the fire is not for the Creator of it but everything is in the category of certain truth for He is the Creator of all things. So, as regards the life after death, whatever the Almighty has said is true since everything comes from the Creator of the Hereafter. Therefore, what greater certainty of truth can there be than what the Almighty has enunciated?

This is why, after mentioning the life after death Allah, Most High, finally warns man that all these things are true beyond the shadow of a doubt. That is, so conclusive is this truth that nothing can surpass it in certitude. Man is advised that a time will come when everything will assume the rank of certain truth. That is, they will all actually befall him, but at that time it will be too late for good deeds.

Thus, blessed is the one who accepts everything his Creator says as certain truth and makes obedience to his Creator a spontaneous habit. Allah, Most High, is his witness concerning the reality of a life after death and no other testimony can excel this in certitude. *Wa kafa bil-Lahi shahida* (And Allah is enough for a witness) – (48:28).

96. *So glorify the name of thy Lord, the Incomparably Great.*

This informs believers in the Holy Qur'an that since all these statements above are true, they should rise and proclaim to the world the glory of their Lord and depending on the strength of their efforts, their souls may be delivered from sins and the consequences of evil deeds. Not only will they be saved, but through glorification of their Lord they will gain entry to Paradise. That is, by considering His attributes to be free from all blemish and imperfection and proclaiming it publicly will result in man himself steadily increasing in purity.

It sometimes happens in this world that man's worldly interests begin to clash with divine commands and in complying with his spiritual obligations his worldly interests become jeopardised. However, if that person should truly magnify his Lord, that is, from the depths of his heart he does not attribute any fault or defect to his Creator, then he will certainly act in accordance with the Divine commands and this obedience will lead him to sacrifice his worldly gains to such an extent that he will not display the slightest hesitation in accepting worldly loss for Allah's sake. For the true meaning of Divine glorification is that man should entertain good thoughts of Allah and realise that true benefits come from obedience to the injunctions of his Lord. Further, no command of Allah is tinged with the slightest deficiency. Instead, if the true servant complies with the command he will derive benefit from that same affair whether he suffers loss in this world or not.

Thus, in regard to the commands ordained by Allah, if any prescribed decree seems to go against the will of the devotee, and some sorrow or injury befalls him in the process, he will still cheerfully accept what his Lord has imposed on him. This is because he exalts the majesty of his Lord with a sincere heart which, in other words, means that he cherishes beautiful thoughts of his Lord. He knows with total certainty of heart that whatever comes from his Master, whether happiness or sorrow, is all meant for his own improvement. This is the meaning of the glorious verse of the Holy Qur'an: *La ilaha illa Anta, Subhanaka, inni kuntu minaz-zalimin* (There is no God but Thou, glory be to Thee! Surely I am of the sufferers of loss) – (21:87) - (prayer of Prophet Jonah).

In other words, the servant is saying: "If I suffer any difficulty or injury, then, my dear Lord, it is because of some fault or wrong-doing of mine. You, my beloved Master, are not to blame for it, for You do not send any undeserving calamity or loss on anyone. It is the servant's own fault that brings this affliction on himself, or it is because of some defect in the devotee which You intend to correct by ordaining a trial for him. Thus, my Lord, You are Holy and Pure. You are the only One I worship; You are my Beloved; You are the goal of my life and the only One I seek. If I leave Your door, where else shall I go?"

A similar kind of glorification was made by the Caliph Ali (*ra*) in poetic form in the following words:

For me there is no other resort but to knock at Your door.
If I am debarred from this door, at which other door shall I knock?

There is a proverb in Urdu that goes like this: "The mother may beat the child yet the child may cry out: 'Ma! Ma!'"

When the mother scolds the child, does he ever harbour the suspicion that his mother is an enemy to him? Instead, in spite of the blows he still cries out pleadingly: "Ma! Ma!" That is because he knows instinctively that there is no greater well-wisher for him than his mother and none to safeguard him like her. When this same idea is planted in the heart of the servant concerning his Maker, then his glorification reaches the stage of perfection.

In the *Hadith*, it is recorded that Allah, Most High, says that whatever a servant thinks of Him, He, too, responds in like manner. Thus, fortunate indeed is the devotee who treasures beautiful thoughts of his Lord not only in words but also glorifies Him from the deepest recesses of his heart.

This signals the arrival of a true servant at that eminent station where he is pleased with his Lord and in trying to please Him in return, he becomes perfect in obedience and acquires the kinds of excellences and progress in moral and spiritual splendour through which the nobility of humanity is unveiled. This is testimony of man's tangible glorification of his Lord for by dint of achieving perfection, the effulgence of humanity becomes visible just as every creature's beauty is a proof of the glory and perfection of his Lord. When the example of such a perfect man is witnessed then the onlookers involuntarily cry out: "Glory be to Allah! How holy is that Pure Being, Allah, Who created man with such sublime attributes!"

There is another point worthy of consideration here and that is both sections two and three end with the identical words: *Fa sabbih bismi Rabbikal 'Azim* (Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Incomparably Great). The difference between the two is that in section two mention is made of the arrangements provided by Allah, Most High, for the durability of man's physical life and man was exhorted thus: "O man, for the sake of perpetuating your physical body, We created this whole material region which is called the world. Therefore, ponder over the grandeur and wisdom of this world and glorify your Lord for having blessed you with favours of such magnificence and appropriate wisdom. In other words, acknowledge the glory and honour of your Lord and Cherisher."

Here, in section three, an account is given of the provisions made for the permanent existence of man's soul and mention is made of that life called the Hereafter and that is the life where man lives forever. Thus, here, attention is drawn to man's real permanence and the other kinds of means provided for his future life and he is advised: "O man, cast your glance on the majesty and consummate wisdom of the world of the Hereafter and magnify the name of your Lord. In short, admit His splendour and perfection and bow your head in submission and say: 'Glory to my Lord, the Incomparably Great'."

In the bowing posture (*ruku'*) in formal prayer (*salah*), the recital of these words: *Subhana Rabbiyal 'Azim* (Glory to my Lord, the Inconceivably Great) is intended to instil in man's heart this same humble feeling so that when he bows before his Lord of this life and the next with full appreciation of the countless physical and spiritual favours and the provisions arranged for him in this life and the next, he submits and bows with utmost humility and glorifies his Lord to the limit of his capacity.

Ameen.