

Chapter 57 *AL-HADID (IRON)*

SECTION 1

This chapter, *Al-Hadid* (Iron), was revealed at Madinah. Although it is a Madinan revelation, it was placed just after a Makkan chapter, *A-Waqi'ah* (The Event), because in this chapter man has been divided into three groups on the Day of Resurrection as compensation for deeds:

1. Those who are drawn closest to Allah, Most High;
2. The companions of the right hand, comprising those whose good deeds outweigh their evil deeds; and
3. The companions of the left hand, meaning those whose evil actions far surpass their good ones. The first two groups will enter Paradise whilst the third is destined for the fire of Hell.

In order to belong to the first two groups, man has been commanded to glorify the name of his Lord, but as the word *tasbih* (glorification) covers a wide significance in the Holy Qur'an, it was therefore necessary that further clarification be given to it. For this reason, this command is placed immediately after the chapter *Al-Hadid* (Iron), for here the explanation of the command "*to glorify the name of the Lord*" is given together with the necessary conditions attached to it, for without paying heed to these requirements, man's exaltation of his Lord would remain defective and imperfect and will not lead to noble consequences.

In the last chapter, *Al-Waqi'ah* (The Event), it has been explained that man can glorify the name of his Lord in two main ways: firstly, by means of words. In other words, to believe with the utmost sincerity of heart that Allah's attributes are free of all defects and imperfections and to make a verbal affirmation of this conviction; secondly, by practical means – that is, in order to fulfil the purpose of creation, man should live exactly according to the will of his Creator so that his latent powers and capabilities might be nourished and be manifested with such dazzling clarity that his very conduct would serve as a standing testimony of his Maker, the One Who is free from defect or blemish. In keeping with this, not only man, but all other created objects of Allah, Most High, are included in this kind of glorification. Indeed, every creation of the Almighty is vested by Him with such talents and capacities to fulfil its object of creation and is guided along this path with such solicitude and care that it is impossible to imagine a better system. In fact, everything in the heaven and the earth glorifies the name of its Lord by the very nature of its existence. In other words, the splendour of its creation bespeaks the beauty and perfection of its Creator and this is mentioned right at the beginning of this chapter:

1. *Whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of Allah, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.*

Man is told that he alone is not charged with the glorification of his Lord but, in fact, everything in the heavens and the earth is constantly engaged in doing so. That is, so perfectly are they working towards achieving the purpose of their creation and so faithfully are they employing the Divine powers and capabilities reposed in them for this object, and so impeccably and meticulously are they treading the path laid down for them that it is beyond human intellect to conceive of any arrangement that is more

excellent. In other words, by their very condition they are constantly glorifying their Creator and this is referred to in the Holy Qur'an in another verse:

“The seven heavens and the earth and those in them declare His glory. And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise but you do not understand their glorification ...”
(17:44).

How beautifully is this expressed! We are told that everything in its own sphere is so perfectly created in order to attain the purpose of its creation that merely by witnessing it, it gives rise to a cogent proof that the Creator of all this is immaculately free of fault or blemish. There is one difficulty, though, and that is man's lack of knowledge and understanding of the true purpose of the creation of any object, or his faulty appreciation of its latent talents and abilities which leads him to raise objections. Otherwise, if man had perfect knowledge, or if he could fathom the capacities of each atom and the reason for its creation, then he would be able to hear the glorification of its Creator and his own heart would sing its own praises of the Almighty.

In the days when I was a medical student, doctors were unaware of the utility of the many glands in the human body. It was thought that if these glands were non-existent in the body, no harm would come thereby because no one could see what work they performed. In fact, it was not known in what way they benefited the human body. However, today, with the immense increase in medical knowledge, it has been discovered that it is these glands that hold the reins over the body of man: whether a person is fat or thin, tall or short, sharp-witted or dull, young or old, etc. he is totally dependent on these glands. In other words, as they could not comprehend the glorification of these glands, they raised objections to them. Today, when knowledge of their praise and adulation is well-known, words extolling the Creator involuntarily escape from the lips of a serious-minded thinker. Thus, it is man's paucity of knowledge that causes him to raise objection to something the benefit of which he does not understand. So, how can the limited brain of man comprehend the creation of the vast universe as well as its perfection and purpose?

Thus, it is a self-evident fact that every single thing which exists in the heavens and the earth, each in its own sphere, continuously glorifies the name of its Lord by its very condition, and its beauty and uniqueness point to the fact that its Creator and Controller is Mighty and Wise. That is, He has absolute power and perfect knowledge and wisdom.

A sign of Allah's attribute of total power is that no atom can deviate even an inch from the laws under which it is bound. Even the largest celestial bodies as well as the tiniest earthly specks are all held in control by laws which they assiduously obey without the slightest veering away in performing their functions and fulfilling their objective of creation after which they will all cease to exist. So, consider, therefore, how powerful is the Maker of these laws from the grip of which nothing in the heavens and the earth can ever deviate in the least. Thus, this serves as an indisputable proof that there is a mighty Being Who has absolute power over everything in creation and nothing can escape His control.

2. His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and causes death; and He is Possessor of power over all things.

This verse tells us that there is no partnership in the sovereignty of that Being (Who has already been described in verse 1 as Mighty and Wise) and His dominion extends over everything in the heavens and the earth. The entire Kingdom and Dominion belongs to Him and everything is His handiwork which depends for its existence and sustenance on this very Being Who gives life and causes death.

Today, science, too, has discovered that every single atom in the universe is, every second, going through a process of construction and destruction or, life and death, and this extends also to man's body in which every instant cells are born and die. By means of eating and breathing, there exist in the bloodstream such elements that spark life in the living atoms of the human body to create new cells and dead cells are constantly being expelled from the system through exhalation, urination, excretion and perspiration. In short, the chain of life and death continuously pervades the whole universe. The power to create anew or to cause death does not lie within the power of anyone except the Almighty. Thus, in this weak and dependent world, everything in the universe as well as every human being is held fast by this sequence of life and death from which it is clearly discernible that true sovereignty belongs to this Being from Whose powerful laws and sagacious management nothing is excluded.

On the other hand, there are many kings, no matter how stringent their laws may be and who may desire to effect certain measures, yet they cannot find the power to do so. Contrary to this, Allah's sovereignty is such that it possesses so great power and might that He can do whatever He wishes. His command may be delayed or instant or it may evolve into being by slow degrees in accordance with the system of cause and effect, yet its coming into being is inexorably certain. Thus, as a glorious sign of His perfect dominion, it is stated that He has in His power the ability to bring into existence whatever He so desires.

3. *He is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the Hidden, and He is Knower of all things.*

Al-Awwal – He is the First. That is, there is no one before Him. This is an attribute of Allah, Most High, and this is the meaning given to it in the *Hadith*.

Al-Akhir – He is the Last. That is, there is none after Him. This, too, is an attribute of Allah, Most High, and this also is the meaning attributed to it in the *Hadith*.

Az-Zahir – He is the Manifest and nothing supersedes Him in this regard. This is another attribute of Allah, Most High, and there is another significance attached to it in the *Hadith* meaning that no one is above Him.

Al-Batin – He is the Hidden. That is, no one is more hidden than He. This is another attribute of Allah, Most High, and the *Hadith* gives an additional meaning – that there is none beneath Him. In other words, He encompasses all things.

We can perceive Allah's attributes of Manifest (*Zahir*) and Hidden (*Batin*) in several ways. Firstly, there is none who is more visible than He. That is, there is none above Him, meaning that He is more powerful than all and above everything else. Besides this, He is Manifest in the sense that His attributes or actions are so evident in the pages of nature that any fair-minded person can see Him in whatever object to which he may turn his attention. In other words, He is visible from His multitudinous signs. This is called self-evident knowledge.

Secondly, He, by His very nature is Hidden. He is also Hidden in the sense that for a person with deep insight, behind the veil of everything lies the glorious manifestation of Allah, Most High. This is called true or esoteric knowledge. Further, He is more Hidden than anything else in that for everything there is someone else who knows its reality, that is, He has full knowledge of everything yet no one can fathom, other than Himself, the secret of His reality. It is possible to discern the reality of all things but

it is impossible to grasp the knowledge of Allah's true personality. And since He is the one behind the veil of everything and the Causer of all causes, then besides Him there can be no resort nor sanctuary to which petition may be addressed.

He is Manifest in this regard, too, that He encompasses and comprehends all things and He is Hidden in this way, too, that no one can encompass or comprehend Him.

We must bear in mind also that He is not confined to place and time because He exists before and after all creation. Place and time are used to show relationship between finite things but He is limitless and infinite. Further, He encompasses all things in His power, knowledge and control.

In addition to this, there is another point mentioned in the verse, "*Allah, Most High, has perfect knowledge of all things*", and that is that the reach of His knowledge encompasses everything that exists and nothing is excluded from it. Further, this knowledge could never be complete and perfect unless Allah, Most High, was the Creator of all things, for unless one were the creator, he could not possess that degree of knowledge. In that case, he would be dependent and would have to seek knowledge of it from its Creator. If he had known the full reality of all things, then it must necessarily follow that the next attribute to be mentioned will be that of Creator and so we read in the next verse:

- 4. *He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods (ayyam), and He is established on the Throne of Power. He knows that which goes down into the earth and that which comes out of it, and that which comes down from the heaven and that which goes up to it. And He is with you wherever you are. And Allah is Seer of what you do.***

Ayyam is the plural of *yaum*, which generally means a day which extends from the rising of the sun to its setting. However, it can also refer to any period of time regardless of its duration, that is, whether very short or very long (*Mufradat* of Imam Raghīb). Before the creation of the heavens and the earth, there was no sun nor earth from the mutual relation of which we get our day and night. From this, one can plainly see that in reference to the creation of the heavens and the earth the use of the word *yaum* (day) can never signify our present day and night. Thus, when our existing instrument for computation was not yet in existence, then the word *yaum* (day) will mean time in the abstract, or time alone which is free from all limitations, for knowledge of any division of time is known only to Allah, Most High, and no one else. Science, too, has discovered that before the creation of our heaven and earth the entire universe had to pass through several stages which according to scientific terminology are called ages or periods with each period lasting for hundreds of millions of years. In fact, the true length of an age is not definitely known. It is to this "age" that the word *yaum* (day) is used in the Holy Qur'an. Scientists, in accordance with the extent of their knowledge, have divided the creation of the universe into different ages but Allah, Most High, in His perfect knowledge has divided it into six ages or periods. Whatever the ages may have been, only Allah, Most High, knows. It is possible, however, that these are the stages that have been verified by science, namely, of ether, nebula, electron, mineral, vegetation and animal life or others not known. All that the Almighty has told us here in brief is that He created the heavens and the earth in six periods or six stages. That is, their creation evolved gradually over several ages or periods. Only Allah, Most High, knows what those stages were and how long they lasted.

From reading scientific books we certainly gather this much that countless marvels of creation were manifested in the course of those stages – wonders, the nature of which is beyond the comprehension of man. Thus, it is incumbent on a wise person, conscious of his extreme lack of knowledge, to acknowledge these wonders.

Al-'Arsh – This means the throne on which a king sits. According to Imam Raghīb, it refers also to honour, power, dominion and kingdom. He explains further:

“Allah’s *'Arsh* (Throne) is such that no human knows its reality and it cannot mean what the ordinary folk imagine it to be (that is, similar to the throne of a worldly king) for in that case Allah’s throne would have to be carried about although the Person of Allah is far removed from such a thing.”

One of His attributes is *Al-Qayyum* (the Self-subsisting) through Whom all things subsist. Thus, the expression: “*He established Himself on the Throne*”, cannot mean that Allah, Most High, placed Himself on any throne. We should not be deceived by the use of the word *'arsh* (throne) for we must remember that the same words that are used for Allah, Most High, are also employed in relation to man but the reality between the two uses is as far as the heaven is from the earth. For example, Allah, Most High, too, has hands, and He hears and sees, also. But to imagine that He has hands like a human being or He hears and sees as one will constitute a grave error.

Similarly, the sovereignty of a king is tied up with a throne but Allah’s dominion is free of such constraints. Even in this world when we say that the king is sitting on his throne we do not mean that he is perched there day and night without moving from it at any time. Instead, what is meant is that his power and authority have been established. This is the meaning, too, attached to the verse: “*He is established on the throne*”, that is, His power and authority pervade everything. It can never signify that He is literally sitting on a throne. In the Holy Qur’an, it is a generally accepted fact that when some words are used in relation to Allah’s attributes or actions whatever means or tools that are subsumed by them are never attributed to Allah, Most High. Instead, only the final point in the chain of actions is meant. For example, if we were to say that Allah, Most High, sees, although these words also apply to human beings, yet Allah, Most High, stands in no need of eyes and light which are the means by which man sees. Instead, what we will mean is only the result that is obtained at the end point of seeing. And the same applies to Allah’s act of hearing. Similarly, when man has to construct something, he needs hands and material but when Allah builds or creates such means are not needed.

Similarly, in regard to man, the sentence: “*He established himself on the throne*”, means the promulgation of man’s power and dominion through the medium of sitting on the throne. However, in the case of Allah, Most High, this means is non-existent, and the import is only that He established and wielded His power and complete mastery over everything.

The Holy Qur’an itself makes it clear that this is the intended meaning as we read in 10:3, for example, when it states:

“*He is established on the Throne of Power regulating the Affair... .*”

Here, “*regulating the Affair*”, is the explanation of: “*He is established on the Throne of Power*”.

Again, in 7:54, after saying: “*He created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and He is established on the Throne of Power,*” the verse says towards the end: “*His is the creation and the command.*”

In other words, to create is His work as well as to establish His commands. From this, it is evident that in saying: “*He created the heavens and the earth in six periods,*” Allah’s attribute of Creator is

highlighted whilst in saying: “*He is established on the Throne of Power,*” the promulgation of Divine command is intended and this turn of phrase is entirely appropriate, for creation is one facet of His work whilst the establishment of His authority is another aspect of it. Thus, this power becomes perfect by these two manifestations, that is, by creation and by wielding of command.

For instance, for anything in creation there are two aspects to it. Firstly, creating it and secondly, making it fulfil the function for which it was created. Let us take the case of the sun. First, there was the creation of it. Before bringing it into existence only Allah, Most High, knows how many means He brought together in order to create it. After creation was complete, Allah, Most High, set it to work in accordance with the purpose of its creation.

Not only for the sun but for everything else there are two stages in Allah’s work: first, there is creation and then there is the act of putting it to work under His command and power to fulfil the designated object of its existence.

So, firstly, there is *khalq* (creation) and after that comes the wielding of command (*amr*) or as the Holy Qur’an states: “*Istawa ‘alal ‘arsh,*” which means to set everything in proper order. In this, there is an indication that Allah’s dominion and the exercise of His power are in proper order. That is, they are perfect and that nothing can remain outside of His authority nor can anything deviate from it in the slightest manner.

At this juncture, this point ought to be clarified and that is that dreams and visions belong to the category of the realm of similitude. In them, all things are necessarily seen in a form of likeness. Thus, if Allah, Most High, is seen in a dream or vision, then it is in the form of a likeness so that if He is seen as having eyes and ears like a man, it does not mean that He, too, has physical eyes and ears. In the same way, if He is beheld as sitting on a royal throne, then this would signify that total sovereignty belongs to Him and not that He has a physical body which is seated on a wooden throne.

After this, mention is made of Allah’s knowledge, for kingship without knowledge is imperfect. If a king does not have any knowledge of his subjects, what is the point of His sovereignty? Thus, together with the supreme management of His power and dominion, Allah, Most High, also mentions His perfect knowledge. In the verse prior to this, in stating that He has knowledge of all things (*bi kulli shai’in ‘aleem*), He emphasised His perfect and complete knowledge which resulted in the creation of the heavens and the earth for total knowledge presupposes the ability to create.

Now, in this verse, together with the perfect power behind the wielding of His authority, Allah, Most High, saw it fit to emphasise that His knowledge over the movements and deeds of His creation is also perfect and comprehensive. So the verse: “*He has knowledge of everything,*” refers to His awareness of the nature and essence of all creation, whilst here, He makes mention of His perfect knowledge of its actions and movements.

The verse states that the Divine Being is fully aware of what enters the earth and what comes out of it, as well as what comes down from heaven and what goes up to it. This statement includes the movements and actions of everything in creation except man who is mentioned separately because he is given power to act within a certain limit so that he may choose to act according to Divinely-ordained laws or not. Thus, because of the special power of discretion granted to him, it was therefore necessary for him to be mentioned separately for the sake of special emphasis. The logic behind this is that his future life is based on his deeds (in this world). Thus, it is important for him to display prudence in this matter. Thus, the verse warns: “*He is with you wherever you are and Allah is Seer of what you do.*”

In other words, man is told that he has been given the gift of choice so that he can choose to obey Allah's commands or to disobey, but before contravening the laws of the All-powerful Lord of the Throne, he should bear in mind that wherever he may be, his Lord is with him and whatever he does is witnessed by the All-seeing One. So powerful a lesson of faith is taught by this that if anyone should possess a degree of sincere faith in his heart, he could never violate the laws of the Almighty. Will anyone steal in the presence of the judge or commit fornication for him to see? Certainly not! This is why the *Hadith* says that at the time a thief is engaged in stealing, or at the time of fornication, there is no faith in the transgressor.

5. *His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; and to Allah are (all) affairs returned.*

Allah, Most High, after reminding man that He is Seer of all his deeds, also states that to Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth so that if man is disobedient to Him there is no place of refuge for him either in the heavens or the earth. On the other hand, if he is obedient, he will taste fully of the bounties of the earth and abundantly of the blessings of heaven. If a nation should comply with the commands of the Lord of the two worlds, then for its people is a share of both worlds, that is, they will enjoy earthly gifts as well as a heavenly heritage or, in other words, the inheritance of spiritual blessings will be given to them as we can plainly see in the example of the noble companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). They observed their duty to Allah, Most High, to the best of their ability, so He, in return, fulfilled His promise to them to such an extent that there is no parallel to it in world history as He blessed them with two kingdoms: a material and a spiritual one. In other words, they became recipients of an earthly and heavenly kingdom. On an individual basis also, if a person is perfectly subservient to the Almighty, he, too, will receive, by way of reflection, a share of Divine power in both worlds.

Ilal-Lahi turja'ul umur means that every affair is returned to Allah, Most High. This is mentioned because in this life the veil of means is so powerful that man fails to see the hand of Allah, Most High, or His power. Instead, he becomes a worshipper of means and in seeking the pleasure of other things besides his Lord, he throws the pleasure of the Almighty behind his back. For this reason, man is advised that he should not fall into this error for in this world power may belong to man or seemingly to others besides Allah, Most High. However, true dominion belongs truly to the Lord of all creation. Ostensibly, in this world, man exercises authority and achieves power and might but there is no need to fear him for the rein is in the hand of the Lord of the Kingdom and unless heaven does not give permission nothing can take place on earth. So it is that the Master of the Kingdom Who must be feared and in comparison with fear for Him, fear for anything besides Him ought to pale into insignificance, and in the face of His pleasure no human being should be given precedence or undue consideration. He gives the kingdom to whom He pleases and takes it away from whom He pleases. He also makes the night to pass into the day and make the day to pass into the night, as the next verse says:

6. *He causes the night to pass into the day, and causes the day to pass into the night. And He is Knower of what is in the hearts.*

'Alimum bi dhatis-sudur means that He is Knower of the secrets of the heart. This is a figurative expression. The store of secrets, hidden and confidential mysteries of man's heart are felt in his breast and it is on the basis of this feeling that this figurative turn of phrase has come about. We are told that it is Allah, Most High, Who turns day into night and night into day. So, the believers are consoled with the promise that however poor and helpless they may be at that point in time, yet if they allow the rule of Allah, Most High, to hold sway over them and make obedience to His laws in their way of life, then

the night of weakness and powerlessness that has shrouded them will be transformed into the day of Allah's success and victory. On the other hand, the unbelievers' bright daylight which was based on their power and predominance will be changed into night. That is, they will taste defeat and disgrace. Accordingly, the noble companions (may Allah be pleased with them) acknowledged the sovereignty of Allah so wholeheartedly and His laws, which had come down to them through the Holy Qur'an, and they obeyed with such sincerity and rigid devotion that in the end, their night was turned into day and the unbelievers' day was transformed into night.

The phrase: "*Knower of what is in the hearts*", has another interpretation, and that is, that intentions play an important role in the commission of deeds. If there is no purity in one's intentions nor any determination to work for Allah's sake, but instead there is a mixture of ostentation and greed for worldly gain in one's mind, then deeds can never bring successful results. Instead, those deeds would come to naught. This is why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is reported to have said: "Deeds are judged by intentions."

Thus, the real meaning of the expression: "*Knower of what is in the hearts*", is that in our affairs we should be cautious of that Omniscient Being Who is fully cognisant of the secrets of our hearts. It is possible for even the most intelligent or pious of men to be deceived (by show) but not Allah, Most High. So, unless He is pleased with us and our intentions are sincere, our actions can never bear good fruit as the Holy Qur'an states in another verse:

"They will swear to you that you may be pleased with them. But if you are pleased with them, yet surely Allah is not pleased with the transgressing people" (9:96).

This is a reference to the hypocrites who were trying to ingratiate themselves with the Muslims by pretending to be pleased with them, but their hearts and intentions were not sincere. This is why Allah, Most High, branded them as transgressors and publicly announced His displeasure with them. Thus, however righteous an action may appear to be on the surface, yet if the doer's intention is not pure, that action can bring no good results. For, in that case, a person gives charity but he is not doing so to seek Allah's pleasure but to gain a good reputation. It is possible that he may get some recognition from people for it, but in Allah's eyes, his act of generosity carries no weight. The success of the noble companions came about because their intentions were extremely noble and pious and their deeds were done with solely the pleasure of Allah, Most High, in mind. This is why their Lord, Who knew the secret of their hearts, gave them victory in this life and the next and made them recipients of two kingdoms – one material and the other spiritual.

Take the example of Abu Bakr (*ra*) and 'Umar (*ra*). Although they were masters of Arabia, Iran, Rome, Syria and Egypt, yet such was the model of simplicity and selflessness of life they left that every wise person has to bow his head in admiration and reverence to them when he reads the account of their single-minded devotion to Allah, Most High. Even when Abu Bakr (*ra*) was *Khalifa*, he still carried on his trading business. People pointed out to him that the running of the government was so time-consuming and demanding an affair that it left little time for him to do his trading. They suggested that he should take an allowance from the Treasury and forgo his trading. Accordingly, he agreed and gave up his business and took a very small sum as his daily allowance and on this small stipend he led a very straitened life. After living like this for some time, he happened to see, one day, his wife wearing a beautiful new head-covering. He asked her how she got it. She replied that from the small daily allowance she used to save two coins until she gathered enough to buy her head-covering. He forthwith took it and deposited it in the Treasury and asked the keepers to deduct two coins from his daily allowance for he could live on two coins less. Such was his devotion for the sake of Allah, Most High,

that he considered it forbidden (*haram*) to spend too much of this world's wealth on himself or family, and whatever he took just allowed him to live a life of extreme simplicity and stringency. And just imagine! He was the king of the Empire of Islam!

The second *Khalifa*, 'Umar (*ra*), was also of the same nature. He was the king of Arabia, Iran, Rome, Syria and Egypt, yet he wore clothes with as many as fifteen patches. When the kingdoms of Iran, Egypt and Syria were subjugated in battle by the Muslim warriors, the Roman Kaiser sent his ambassador to pay respect to *Khalifa* 'Umar (*ra*). Now, this ambassador had seen many a fine regal court and so he thought that the court of the majestic Muslim king would be replete with extraordinary pomp and splendour. However, when he arrived in Madinah, he could see no palace or royal mansion, so he inquired as to the whereabouts of the *Khalifa*. He was told that 'Umar was sitting on a mat in the mosque not too long ago but, as was his wont, he must have gone out towards the jungle to await the arrival of the Muslim courier. The ambassador sought him there, too, but learned that he had just left that location. At last, someone pointed out a man sleeping under an acacia tree and informed him that that was the *Khalifa* of the Muslims. When the ambassador approached closer, he saw a person with seventy patches on his clothes fast asleep very unceremoniously with the bare ground as his bed.

He was struck with consternation. His heart was overcome with such awe that he began to tremble. It was a fear inspired by truth that caused him to shiver and not the dread for a man lying on the ground in tattered clothes, for this kind of awe is not engendered by human beings but instead it is stimulated by Allah, Most High, in the hearts of people for His righteous ones. This was the case with the Holy Prophet's companions. In spite of enjoying power and an abundance of wealth, they never allowed these considerations to tarnish the garment of their perseverance and deep trust and reliance on their Lord. For example, Lady A'isha (*ra*) distributed among the poor and needy almost every penny of the pension she received.

7. Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and spend of that whereof He has made you heirs. So those of you who believe and spend — for them is a great reward.

Mustakhlafina refers to those whom Allah, Most High, has made His vicegerents or those who have become inheritors of other people.

We are told that just as everything in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of its Creator and Master, so, too, man's practical glorification comes through belief in Allah, Most High, and spending in His way. In the verses before this one, in mentioning the sublime attributes of the Almighty, the intention was to highlight the glorious nature of the Supreme Being for Whose pleasure everything we were given by Him should be spent in His way whether it is our wealth or riches, our lives, or talents and knowledge, etc. and it is a fact that the glorious attributes of Allah, Most High, described in the verses above are such that if a servant should return everything to the Possessor of such qualities it would still be negligible. And how should a servant make this return? Whatever a devotee spends for the sake of his Master is all to his benefit, for when every power and action, wealth and energy of a person are employed in the service of Allah, Most High, then that person will become a perfect individual. On his entire being will be stamped the mark of Allah's glorification. This practical and habitual glorification does not redound to the benefit of the Almighty, but instead, man himself profits from it, for this is the process by which he becomes pure and perfect. Further, if we should look deeply, we will see that even the practical glorification of the rest of creation also works towards the advantage of man, for the purpose of creation of everything in the heavens and the earth is to serve man.

Here, the command to believe in Allah, Most High, is general. That is, it applies to all men. By explaining the exalted attributes of Allah, Most High, the purpose is to inform man that it is that Being Who has sent to the world the Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) through whom all mankind is invited to the way of the Almighty. Furthermore, this Messenger who has come was sent by that Being of glory and splendour Whose qualities were already described above. Thus, belief in such a God and His apostle is incumbent on man. However, a mere verbal belief will be of no use, for just to believe that water exists in the world does not quench our thirst. We have to drink of it before our longing for water is satisfied.

The spirit of sacrifice and selflessness is generated in a person according to the degree of faith that exists in his heart because it is through faith that he gives his life or spends his wealth and everything else in the path of Allah, Most High. He knows that nothing he has given will be lost for it has gone into the hands of One Who is always ready and ever willing to give to man more and more and better and better rewards as we read in the following verse:

“The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies (further) for whom He pleases. And Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing” (2:261).

That is, an increase of seven hundred times is guaranteed but Allah’s recompense is not restricted to this amount for He can give even more to whomsoever He chooses, and this is because such a servant’s intentions and sincerity of heart are always under the eyes of the Knower of all things, and so it is not strange if He should increase His reward to someone of His choice.

Once, Madinah was struck by famine. At that time, Uthman (*ra*) was the *Khalifa*. Out of his own pocket, he had ordered a considerable quantity of grain from Syria. When it arrived in Madinah, a merchant approached him with the intention of transacting business and asked the *Khalifa* to name whatever profit he wanted for the grain. The *Khalifa* replied that there was a merchant who was offering a seven hundred percent profit. However, he continued, if there was any merchant who was willing to pay more, he would sell to him. On hearing this, the stranger was very astonished and wanted to know the identity of that merchant who was paying such a high price. The *Khalifa* read the verse quoted above (2:261) and proceeded to distribute all the grain among the needy. Thus, it is faith that motivates a person to display selflessness and sacrifice, for a believer knows that his efforts will not be wasted, but will come to his benefit in the next life.

Once, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) slaughtered a sheep and asked Lady A’isha (*ra*) to distribute the meat among the poor. This she did but retained a shoulder for home consumption. When the Holy Prophet (*sas*) asked if she had complied with his request, she informed him of what she had done, mentioning also that she had left back a shoulder of the meat. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) then replied:

“Everything that you gave away has become ours but not the shoulder which you retained for our home use.”

Thus, the degree of our faith determines the extent of our altruistic and sacrificial acts.

On another occasion, in the face of an imminent battle, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) solicited funds from his companions for this holy war. In response, ‘Umar (*ra*) brought half of his wealth and possessions as his contribution to the cause whilst Abu Bakr (*ra*) gave everything that he possessed. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) asked ‘Umar (*ra*) what he had left behind to which he responded that he had left behind half of his possessions. However, when the same question was posed to Abu Bakr (*ra*), he replied:

“I have left behind (for my family) Allah, Most High, and His Holy Prophet (*sas*).”

This response prompted the Holy Prophet (*sas*) to remark that ‘Umar’s faith was half that of Abu Bakr’s (*ra*). In other words, sacrifice was established as the touchstone by which faith is judged just as temperature is measured by a thermometer and air pressure is gauged by a barometer.

The second meaning of *mustakhlafina* (becoming heirs of other people) is also correct and appropriate, for we become inheritors of others and masters of their property. In other words, just as former people had to ultimately leave their wealth and property and pass into the grave and we became their inheritors, similarly, we, too, will have to depart from this world leaving behind everything which in turn will pass on to the benefit of others. Thus, the wise one is he who uses his wealth profitably and does not just leave it for others to inherit it.

Once, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) remarked that among people there are some who guard their inheritors’ property more assiduously than their own. The companions wondered who such a person could be and he explained that it applied to one who refrains from spending his wealth in the way of Allah, Most High. In effect, he continued, this person is guarding what he has to leave to his heirs who will become owners of it after him. On the other hand, he is not safe-guarding his own wealth which is only what is spent for the sake of his Creator and for which he will be rewarded hundreds of times more in the next life.

Thus, man’s wealth is only what is employed in the path of the Almighty and is carried by him. What he leaves behind is not his but really that of his inheritors.

In short, in this verse, the command is firstly general and pertains to all men whilst secondly, it applies specially to believers. In that case, the injunction to believe in Allah, Most High, and His apostle will mean that we should support our belief with action. In other words, the significance of belief here is to back up our claim and profession of faith with solid action and this can be accomplished by selfless sacrifice in the path of the Almighty.

This is why the next portion of the verse states that those from among us who believe and support their actions with selfless sacrifice in the path of Allah, Most High, will receive a mighty reward. It is a well-accepted fact that the higher the rank of a man, the greater is his standard of measurement compared to others in respect to a particular thing. For example, for a pauper, a sum of a hundred dollars is a large treasure, but not so for a millionaire for whom it will be a small amount. With this in mind, if we try to gauge or imagine the status of Allah, the Lord of honour and glory, we will discover that it is a task beyond our intellect to conceive. Therefore, if the Almighty should say that a particular reward will be a mighty one, then it is clear that in proportion to His greatness the reward would be so grand that we would not be able to envisage its size.

8. *And what reason have you that you believe not in Allah? And the Messenger invites you to believe in your Lord, and He has indeed accepted your covenant (mithaq), if you are believers.*

The commentators of the Holy Qur’an take this verse to refer to unbelievers generally and *mithaq* means the original covenant Allah took with the sons of the Children of Adam as we read in this verse:

“And when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves. Am I not your Lord (Rabb)? They said: Yes, we bear witness ...” (7:172).

In other words, the nature (*fitrah*) of man bears witness to and acknowledges the fact that there is a Lord (*Rabb*) Who has created him and nourished him. Thus, in this verse, a warning is issued to the unbelievers asking them what is wrong with them that they do not believe in the Almighty Who has sent His messenger for the sake of reminding them of the covenant of their souls with their Lord – a covenant which is embedded in the hearts of all human beings and for this reason what the Holy Prophet (*sas*) has brought is in total conformity with man’s nature.

However, the presence of the words: *“If you are believers”*, tells us that it is the believers who are specially addressed here. The statement: *“You do not believe in Allah,”* contains an admonition reprimanding man for not accepting the call of the Almighty by working deeds of righteousness, that is, by spending in Allah’s cause and for not heeding the Holy Prophet’s summons inviting man to believe in his Lord and Creator. In other words, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is removing the veil that screened true reality and is informing man that his nurturing and his elevation from the lowest to the highest stage come as a result of the Providence of his Lord. Money and wealth are not our Lord, but instead they are means of sustenance provided for us by Him and the secret of benefiting from true sustenance is to spend our riches in the way of the Almighty. Even if we have nourished our human body to some extent by spending to satisfy our carnal desires, we should remember that this body has to die and turn into dust. On the other hand, the nourishment that the human soul acquires from spending in the way of Allah, Most High, is real and permanent. Thus, in this case, if the word *mithaq* (covenant) here refers to the verbal confession of the believers at the time when they accepted Islam, then it would mean that if they were sincere believers in Allah, Most High, and His apostle, there was no reason why they should not buttress their faith with the requisite action, especially since the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was inviting them to do so.

The noble companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) accepted his invitation so sincerely that they gave not only their wealth but even their lives for the sake of Allah, Most High, as the Holy Qur’an testifies in the following verse:

“Of the believers there are men who are true to the covenant they made with Allah; so of them is he who has accomplished his vow, and of them is he who yet waits, and they have not changed in the least” (33:23).

That is, some had already fulfilled their oaths and covenants by giving their lives as martyrs in the way of Allah, Most High, and others were anxiously awaiting their opportunity to do the same, neither group allowing any difficulty to tarnish their sacred vows.

Thus, in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) no imperfection in their faith was to be found except in the case of the hypocrites. Today, however, one can find hundreds of Muslims who verbally profess the sincerity of their conviction even to the point of boasting about it, yet when it comes to proving their faith by way of good deeds and sacrifice, they are found totally wanting.

9. *He it is Who sends down clear messages to His servant, that he may bring you forth from darkness (zulumat) into light (nur). And surely Allah is Kind, Merciful to you.*

It is a well-known fact that if a matter is true, a procession of new signs in support of it constantly keeps cropping up and in this way, the darkness of doubts and evil suggestions begins to retreat day by day and the night of ignorance is gradually dispelled by the light of knowledge. For instance, let us consider a specific case – the death of Prophet Jesus (*as*). In our age, belief in this point was a very difficult matter in the beginning. However, as his death was a true occurrence, day after day new light began to be shed on this controversy, and every day proof after proof began to be discovered with the result that now, there is no intelligent person who holds the view that he is alive in heaven.

Here, the word darkness (*zulmat*) is used in the plural form *zulumat* because there are different kinds of darkness like polytheism and innovation, family traditions and national customs, blind following of religious leaders (*taqlid*), slavery to animal passions and carnal desires, all kinds of evil suspicion and misgivings induced by ignorance and the list can go on and on. All these are instances of darkness, liberation from which can only be procured through the light of Divine revelation, that is, man can be rescued only by means of that knowledge which is revealed by Allah, Most High. Thus, man begins to emerge from these disparate kinds of darkness in proportion to the increase of his faith in Divine revelation.

In this context, the word light (*nur*) signifies the phenomenon of Divine revelation which guides a person in his faith and good deeds on to the straight path which, if followed, will enable him to achieve the goal of his creation and win the pleasure of his Lord. It is called “light” because it is a spark from the Divine refulgence. By this spark, man is saved from following misleading paths and is assisted in walking along the straight path which leads him to the cherished destination (that is, Allah, Most High).

10. And what reason have you that you spend not in Allah’s way? And Allah’s is the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. Those of you who spent before the Victory and fought are not on a level (with others). They are greater in rank than those who spent and fought afterwards. And Allah has promised good to all. And Allah is Aware of what you do.

We are informed in this verse that Allah, Most High, has sent down to us two things side by side: firstly, the verities of the Holy Qur’an and secondly, continuous and clear proofs in support of the messengership of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). In addition, He keeps sending sign after heavenly sign so that our faith may be strengthened, for this faith is the spirit that provides the impetus for our good deeds, selflessness and sacrifice.

Thus, after all these free gifts, we have no excuse left to dissuade us from spending our wealth in the way of the Almighty. In fact, if the truth be told, Allah, Most High, is the real Master of everything in the heavens and the earth and we are given only temporary possession of them, for we have to die and leave everything behind. What an irony it is! Wealth is given to us by the Almighty and yet we are niggardly in spending in His way. This is nothing but the height of ingratitude.

In the opinion of some, the “victory” (*fath*) refers to the conquest of Makkah, whilst others hold to the view that the allusion is to the Treaty of Hudaibiyya which has been called by Allah, Most High, Himself “a clear victory” (*fathan mubina* – 48:1). It is true that it is only after this Treaty that the predominance of Islam was initiated and if we read the events of that era we will find that this interpretation is quite correct.

However, if we look at the word “victory” in a wider sense, then it can mean the victory of Islam or, in other words, its predominance as the Holy Qur’an says:

“When Allah’s help and victory comes, and thou seest men entering the religion of Allah in companies” (110:1-2).

In other words, all obstacles had been removed from the path of Islam’s invitation and propagation and now people’s hearts had been won over by the religion. Thus, the meaning of these verses is that Islam was undergoing a period of poverty and straitened circumstances and its defence and propagation called for the expenditure of wealth and lives. As a result, if people should spend their wealth for the dissemination of the religion and should engage the enemy in battle in its defence, and should sacrifice their lives in its cause, then the reward for their wealth and sacrifice of lives in these desperate times would be considerably greater than the recompense people will receive when, by Allah’s grace, Islam has become victorious and the hearts of people have been conquered. And it is a fact that help and sacrifice in the hour of dire necessity carry more value and are rewarded much more than when the need does not exist.

This is what the Holy Prophet (*sas*) explained in a sermon delivered in Madinah. He said:

“Whoever gives today a handful of barley in the path of Allah, Most High, will receive a reward greater than if he should give later on a heap of gold larger than Mt. Uhud.”

The reason was that Islam was experiencing in those days poverty, destitution and terrible hardship. At that time, the promise of the Almighty – a promise that increases the intensity of faith in the hearts of people – was still covered by the veil of the unseen and faith and sacrifice were being put to a stern test. Consider the scene: a handful of Muslims on one side and right around the flames of the fire of enmity and opposition were raging up to the high heavens. A cursory glance could reveal nothing but futility and certain destruction. How wonderful a proof of faith was the giving, at that time, of wealth, lives and sacrifice! In view of this, can sacrifice of lives and wealth, in a later age, ever be on the same level as the sacrifices made in those trying times?

Indeed, in every age when Islam is afflicted by a spell of indigence, hardship, calamity or trial, then whoever makes sacrifice of wealth and lives at that time will be rewarded in proportion to the hardship Islam was undergoing, and he will become more deserving of reward than those who render service to the religion later on when the adversity has passed and Islam is triumphant and easy circumstances prevail.

For example, today, in our age Islam is besieged by hostile religions. All the adherents of false creeds in the world are ranged at the threshold of Islam with one aim: to erase the religion from the face of the globe. Today, Europe with all its forces at its command is bent on exterminating Islam from existence. Thus, those who make any kind of sacrifice of wealth and lives in the way of defence and propagation of Islam will receive a much greater reward than a nation that may do so later at a time when the poisonous stranglehold of the enemy has been broken, and having conquered the hearts of people, the success of Islam stands conspicuously visible to all.

Therefore, Allah, Most High, says:

“And Allah has promised good to all.”

That is, when a servant makes any sacrifice of wealth or life, he is sure to receive a good reward from his Lord. Of course, there is certain to be a difference of rank. Nevertheless, at any time anyone makes

a sincere sacrifice, his recompense is certain and cannot be lost for no deed is hidden from the eyes of the Omniscient, for Allah, Most High, says:

“And Allah is Aware of what you do.”

In other words, one should never entertain the secret anxiety as to whether Allah, Most High, knows about his sacrifices or not, as happens sometimes in this world when rulers are unaware of those who make true sacrifices for them and cunning people, capitalising on this lack of knowledge of the rulers, steal an unmerited recompense for themselves. That is, a certain person may do the good work but others end up receiving the recompense for it from the rulers. So, Allah, Most High, says that He is Aware of every good deed His servant does. Thus we are encouraged to continue working deeds of righteousness and to rest assured that rewards will definitely come to us.

The purpose of saying: *“And Allah is Aware of what you do,”* is that this announcement may stimulate the enthusiasm for sacrifice in the heart of the servant, for it is a fact that when a devotee is sure that his Master is constantly Aware of the piety of his heart and genuine sacrifice, then the zeal for altruistic service and sacrifice becomes agreeably pleasing to him.

SECTION II

In this section all those who make all kinds of sacrifices and spend their wealth in the way of Allah, Most High, are given the glad tidings that whatever wealth the Almighty asks of them, although in our case everything belongs to Him, is requested of by Him as a loan which will be enormously enhanced in this life and the next in recompense. Further, when this reward comes to fruition for the faithful, the hypocrites who could not support their alleged faith with good deeds and could not find it in their hearts to make sacrifices for the sake of their Creator will experience intense regret and will have to suffer extreme pangs of agony and deprivation.

Furthermore, in addition to personal reward and recompense, the spending of wealth for Allah’s sake by the believers redounds to the general good of the nation at large for in this way the nation comes alive and if it is the will of Allah, Most High, that the earth should be resuscitated so indeed it will be. Of course, it is the grace of the Almighty that the opportunity has been provided for believers to earn generous rewards for their expenditure in Allah’s way as well as to attain the exalted rank of martyrs and truthful ones in His eyes. But more than that, they also help thereby to infuse life into their own people.

11. *Who is he that will offer to Allah a good gift (qardhan hasanan) so He will double it for him, and he will have a generous reward.*

The meaning of *qardh* is to cut or separate from. Thus by *yuqridhul-Laha* is meant putting aside wealth in order to spend in the way of Allah, Most High, or separating oneself from it for the sake of Allah, Most High.

Qardh also signifies any deed for which a recompense will be given in the future. In other words, it is a loan which will ultimately be returned to the giver. Here the meaning is that whatever sacrifices we make for our Creator is considered as a loan which will be given back to us but with this difference – Allah, Most High, will increase it manifold.

Hasanan (beautiful) means with a pleasant and pure heart. In other words, just as sincerely and cheerfully a person makes selfless sacrifice for the sake of his Lord, in a similar manner will Allah, Most High, reward a person several times over for his deeds of selflessness and sacrifice in the path of his Creator. And whenever man receives this recompense in this life or the next it will be a reward that is invested with nobility and honour. In other words, besides being rewarded several times over for his good deeds, this recompense will contain the essence of splendour, honour and dignity. Again, not only will such a servant hold an exalted station in the Court of the Almighty in the next life, but also in this life he is guaranteed a position of dignity and high regard.

As proof of this we have the example of the companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*). Abu Bakr (*ra*) was foremost in his acts of devotion and selflessness so much so that the Prophet himself was moved to say to Lady A'isha: "I have profited most, that is the religion of Islam has benefited most from your father's wealth." As a result he was the first to be appointed *Khalifa* after our Holy Prophet (*sas*) and he became the recipient of two kingships – this world and the religion of Islam.

Thus, whatever wealth he spent in the way of Allah, Most High, was rewarded a thousand fold in this life and in addition to this reward who can compute the honour he was bestowed in religion as well as earthly life? Furthermore, who can estimate the recompense he will receive in the next life?

Next to him comes the sacrifice that the *Khalifa* 'Umar (*ra*) made for the religion. After Abu Bakr (*ra*) the mantle of worldly and spiritual kingship fell on him and he occupied a position of great honour in this life and in the Hereafter his reward is separate and beyond computation. Similarly, if we examine the magnitude of the reward of several other companions for their altruistic sacrifices we shall see that in this very life the empires of Rome and Iran and Egypt and Africa all fell one after the other under their sway: the earth opened its treasures to them, knowledge and wisdom were the sentinels of their thresholds and civilisation and culture were the maidservants and slaves of their homes. And over and above this, who can estimate the incalculable reward of the Hereafter which lies in store for them?

12. *On that day thou wilt see the faithful men and the faithful women, their light gleaming before them and on their right hand. Good news for you this day! — Gardens wherein rivers flow, to abide therein! That is the grand achievement.*

This is a description of the condition in the Hereafter of those who had spent all their talents, wealth and lives in the path of Allah, Most High. On that day the special distinction of the believing men and women will be that their light will be seen to gleam in front of them and on their right. This is the light of divine revelation which came to man in this life to help him attain the desired destination of his existence. The first means for achieving this is that of faith in Allah's revealed words the result of which is that the celestial book by its knowledge guides man constantly on the straight path that leads to the cherished goal of life. In other words, it is a light that goes in front of man illuminating the straight path for him.

The second means is that of acting firmly on the teachings of that divine book, or in other words, holding tenaciously to the book of the Almighty. Generally speaking, the grip of the right hand is stronger than that of the left and this explains the figurative expression of man's holding on to the Book of Allah with his right hand to illustrate the tenacity and unwavering adherence to the commands of his Maker. Thus, this is the light which man held in his right hand by means of which he kept to the straight path in all his actions and so in the Hereafter it will be seen to shine on his right.

Thus, by strong faith in the revelation of Allah, Most High, man's way of guidance is lit up for him and this frontal light extends to his left side. On the other hand, by holding on steadfastly to the pure and holy principles of divine guidance man gets light on his right side which spreads behind him and so he ends up getting light on all four sides. In other words, divine light surrounds him on all sides.

By walking along the straight path with the help of this light, man is given the best of all good news and that is he will succeed in gaining the destination for which he is aiming. In other words, he will win the pleasure of his Lord whereby he will enter paradise where, metaphorically speaking, there will be gardens under which rivers flow. This means that faith will take the form of flourishing gardens and good deeds will become like flowing streams. And no one can doubt that the objective of a faithful believer is to gain the pleasure of his Lord as the Holy Qur'an says in 48:29: "*Thou seest them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking Allah's grace and pleasure.*"

He does not seek paradise for paradise sake for heaven is only a measure of the hospitality which the Almighty has Himself prepared for His faithful servants as He says in the Holy Qur'an: "*As for those who believe and do good deeds, for them are gardens of Paradise, an entertainment (nuzulan)*" (18:109).

Indeed the burning desire of the true devotee is not just paradise but really the attaining of his Lord's pleasure as is embodied in the *Kalimah, La ilaha illal-Lah* – There is no object worthy of love, adoration and servitude except Allah, Most High.

Abu Bakr Shibli, a revered saint of former times, was totally immersed in the love of his Lord. Once he was seen running with two pieces of burning charcoal, one in each hand. Someone asked him where he was going, to which he replied: "I am going to hell with one ember and with the other one I am going to set fire to heaven for people do good deeds only because they fear hell and crave paradise. They never think of acting righteously merely for the sake of Allah's pleasure."

This is the pinnacle of belief in the Unity of Allah which the Holy Qur'an desires man to achieve. Hell and heaven are the names ascribed to a life of sorrow or happiness which we will experience in the next life according to our individual merits. Heaven will be the result of the actions we performed solely to win the pleasure of our Lord. Thus, the goal of the sincere believer is really the pleasure of Allah, Most High, and not paradise *per se* and that is the real meaning of the *Kalimah, La ilaha illal-Lah*. This confession negates any other love except that for the Almighty. The Holy Qur'an never states of the believers that they seek paradise. On the contrary, it describes the faithful thus: "*(they are) seeking Allah's grace and pleasure ...*" (48:29).

The truth is that achieving the pleasure of Allah, Most High, is really paradise and the blessings of paradise are its result.

13. *On the day when the hypocrites, men and women, will say to those who believe: Wait for us, that we may borrow from your light. It will be said: Turn back and seek a light. Then a wall, with a door in it, will be raised between them. Within it shall be mercy, and outside of it chastisement.*

This verse delineates the condition in the Hereafter of those people who either professed faith in words but in whose hearts there was no trace of sincere conviction, or of those who claimed verbally to be believers yet whose deeds did not live up to this declaration. These people are called hypocrites and are classified into two categories: firstly, those whose tongues profess faith but their hearts are not sincere

are regarded as hypocrites in relation to faith whilst secondly, those who confess faith but in whose hearts it makes so little an impression that their deeds cannot conform to their faith are considered hypocrites in relation to practice. These people will find themselves in darkness in the next life because they did not benefit from the light of divine revelation for they did not believe in it or fashioned their lives according to it.

Even if the tongue should profess faith but this faith is not transferred into the realm of practical living no benefit can accrue from such mere verbal pronouncement. Thus there will be no light in front of them nor on their right side. Instead they will be engulfed in total darkness.

In the *Hadith* it is written of those whose hearts had some belief but whose faith was so weak that it was not supported by action, so in the Hereafter they will be given light at first but when they reach the bridge that extends over hell that light will be extinguished. This conforms squarely with the Qur'anic expression, *jaza'an wifaaqa* (requitil corresponding) – (78: 26), for in the beginning they had some faith but when the time for action on the straight path came, they fell short and did not act in the right manner. So they got the light their faith deserved. But just as their light was extinguished when it called for good deeds in this life, so, too, will it go out in the next life when they approach the straight and narrow bridge which is the same straight path (*sirat mustaqim*) that Allah, Most High, mentions in the Holy Qur'an and which man is obliged to follow. On the day of Resurrection, this path will be finer than a strand of hair and sharper than the edge of a sword and under this bridge lies hell. In other words, this is the name for man's high morals and the strict control of his passions. If he should slip a little from the path of moderation either in excess or deficiency then, as it were, he would fall into hell. On the other hand if he were to walk constantly according to the measure of temperance he would finally reach his destination of heaven.

In short, when the hypocrites did not avail themselves of this divine light in this life it would be fruitless to seek it in the hereafter. When they see the believers they will ask them to wait and lend them some of their light to enable them to travel along the way. But they will be refused and will be asked to go back and seek their own light. What is meant by going back behind them (*irji'u wara'akum*) is that this light can only be procured in this life by means of virtuous actions so that if the hypocrites deserve this light they should return to earth and work deeds of righteousness. And, of course, this is impossible. So as regards this light they will be left in total hopelessness and they will be surrounded on all sides by intense darkness and it would be an absolute impossibility to travel along such a narrow and delicate path in that kind of pitch darkness. This, too, is the path along which man cannot walk in this life without the assistance of divine revelation. This is why Allah, Most High, came to man's help by sending His revelation to man. So whoever refused to make use of this light to tread the straight and narrow path of rectitude will not be able to find this light in the Hereafter.

So how will he be able to embark on the narrow bridge which leads to heaven – a bridge which is analogous to the straight path of this life? Thus his foot is sure to slip and the result of his tottering will be his toppling over into hell. In this life we encounter people who refrain from good deeds but who live with the conviction that if they become the followers of some living or deceased religious leader or imam they will thereby gain access to paradise in the next life and so it is not incumbent on them to live a righteous life. In other words, just being disciples of their leaders is sufficient for success.

This is clearly an erroneous conception. The verse under discussion clearly states that no one will be given permission to borrow another's light. Instead, one should bring one's own light and walk in it. When there is no light of faith in a person's heart and no righteous actions, to depend on the light of another person's faith and good deeds whilst living a life of sin is absolute misguidance. Apparently,

such people pay lip service to faith but between these hypocrites and sincere believers there exists a barrier of repugnance and segregation in this life and in the next life it will be manifested by a wall being raised between them. In other words, the hypocrites of whatever hue will be absolutely debarred from sharing the company of the believers. Instead, as a sign of demarcation, a wall will be drawn between them and inside of it will be mercy, that is, the side on which the pure devotees are, and outside of it there will be punishment and this is the side where the hypocrites will be found.

The presence of the believers within the wall where Allah's mercy abounds is a sure indication that the light of Allah's revelation fully penetrates the heart of man thus generating perfect faith, which inspires good deeds, acts of selflessness and sacrifice. And believers who are outside the wall will never be blessed with deliverance from punishment and will never partake of the mercy of their Lord.

This is the meaning of the *hadith* in which it is written that in the last age people will recite the Holy Qur'an but it will not go beyond their throats. That is, it will have no effect on their hearts. Thus, until the inner self of man is touched by the Holy Qur'an, then perfect faith which inspires the performance of good deeds and acts of sacrifice cannot be born. Thus, to read the Holy Qur'an in the manner related in the *hadith* can never ever be of benefit to man and such people will find themselves on the other side of the wall where punishment is meted out.

On the other hand, those whose hearts had already been illuminated by the light of divine revelation which generated true faith in them by which they were able to perform overt acts of righteousness and sacrifice will be inside the wall which is the place of Allah's mercy and there will be a wall separating the two groups who will be prevented from intermingling.

Of course, there will be a door in the wall which is called *bab-i taubah* (door of repentance), that is, the door of repentance. If these unfortunate ones had repented of their misdeeds in this life and had wrought a change in their condition then they would have been able to join the righteous ones by passing through this door. However, since they never made use of the blessing of repentance in this life, they will therefore find the door closed to them in the next life and that door will never be opened for them until they have served a period of punishment for the evils they had committed in this world's life. This segregation from the believers will prompt the hypocrites to scream out as is related in the following verse:

14. *They will cry out to them: Were we not with you? They will say: Yea, but you caused yourselves to fall into temptation, and you waited and doubted, and vain desires deceived you, till the threatened punishment of Allah came, and the arch-deceiver deceived you about Allah.*

The verse says that the hypocrites will cry out to believers saying that in the world they were all together so why this separation now. It will then be said to them that their hypocritical actions (given below) gave rise to this barrier being erected between them. These hypocritical actions are then explained according to the degree of their intensity:

1. First of all the deepest point of their hypocrisy is mentioned when the Holy Qur'an says *tarab-bastum*, that is, you waited. In other words, deep in your hearts you were waiting for the destruction of the Muslim community all the while wishing them evil and anxiously awaiting the time when the enemies of the religion would exterminate them whilst you could assist the enemy in destroying the believers. Otherwise, you were waiting for the Muslims to gradually die a natural death and so you could fulfil your hidden desires.

2. The second point of their hypocrisy is given in the word *ar-tab-tum*, that is, you doubted. That is, you never took a stand between truth and falsehood nor tried to search out and verify what was true and what was false. Thus you fell into a pit of doubt and made no effort to extricate yourselves from it. The result was that you missed the opportunity to inculcate faith in your hearts and to follow it up with good deeds until death came and seized you. This is a lesser degree of hypocrisy than the first but both can be classified under the category of hypocrisy in point of faith.
3. The third part of their hypocrisy is described thus: *gharra-kumul amaniyyu*, that is, vain desires deceived you. In other words, they are told that day and night you were engrossed in the desires of this world and paid no heed to the commands of Allah, Most High. You showed your disregard in two ways: either you did not entertain true faith in your hearts or you professed faith with the tongue but so absorbed were you in worldly desires that you had no time for obeying Allah's commands much less supporting your faith by performing acts of sacrifice in the way of the Almighty. This point of hypocrisy is less culpable than the first two and by committing it, one is guilty of both kinds of hypocrisy – that pertaining to faith and that relating to practice. In other words, practical hypocrisy is included in this third category.

The Holy Qur'an tells us that the hypocrites can never see the face of success and they will leave this world whilst engrossed in their unachievable hopes and unquenchable carnal desires. The path of hypocrisy never ever leads to success. Deceivers, whether from among human beings or by satanic whisperings instigate all kinds of desires and ambitions in the hearts of people which keep them constantly absorbed in trying to achieve them. They also instil fear in men's hearts by raising the bogey of baseless dangers in order to dissuade people from accepting the truth. In addition, they make the path of falsehood, hypocrisy and deceit look attractive and beautiful with the result that they seem like luxuriant gardens so that guileless individuals forget their responsibility for their actions and the fact that they have to account to Allah, Most High, for them and so they fall prey to these blandishments and end up on the wrong path. As a result, having fallen into the low and debased life of hypocrisy, they finally depart this world having lived a totally useless, meaningless and unproductive life and thus they even ruin their life in the Hereafter.

Al gharur means a great deceiver, that is, Satan. It also refers to this worldly life or the people who seduce others from the straight path.

Amrul-Lah means Allah's command, that is, death.

At the time when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) made his *Hijrah* to Madinah, besides the Jews, there were two Arab tribes, the Aus and the Khazraj, who were living there. Both tribes had accepted Islam and regarded the Holy Prophet as the authentic chief of Madinah – all except Abdullah bin Ubayy and his supporters who, although they ostensibly posed as followers of Islam yet they harboured in their hearts a deep hatred for the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and the Muslims. This came about because just prior to the Holy Prophet's entry into Madinah the inhabitants of the city were on the verge of appointing Abdullah bin Ubayy as their chieftain. However, as they accepted the Holy Prophet (*sas*) as the Messenger of Allah, Most High, everyone paid homage to him as their king. As a result, Abdullah's most cherished desires died in his heart. However, he was a very politically-minded person and his thoughts ran like this: "This is a very new religion that has emerged and the people of Makkah and the whole of Arabia are inimical to it. How can this religion survive in the midst of so many formidable enemies? It is only a matter of time before this little band is wiped out. We, too, overtly will join them but we will strike

from within at their root and if the unbelievers should launch an assault against them from the outside, then we, in the guise of friendship, will wreak havoc on them from the inside.”

Such were his calculations and he and his followers spared no effort in trying to undermine the Muslims. Thus, these were people who were hypocrites in point of faith. That is, in their hearts they were outright rejecters but outwardly they called one another Muslims. Besides these, generally speaking, there are also those people whose hearts are not opposed to faith but so weak is that faith that it never motivates them to perform good deeds and to sacrifice for the sake of Allah. These are called hypocrites in point of practice.

15. *So this day no ransom will be accepted from you, nor from those who disbelieved. Your abode is the Fire; it is your patron and evil is the resort.*

The hypocrites are told that there can be no ransom for them on that day (of resurrection). In other words, nothing can compensate for their past negligence and sins for the time for compensation had already passed. Thus no ransom nor compensation will be taken from them whereby they can be saved from the punishment and that the resting place of both parties, that is, the hypocrites and the unbelievers will be the fire which will serve as their patron. In other words, the fire of hell can be their only means of remedy for their past sins and deficiencies although it is such a cure that will bring pain and sorrow to them. However, it is their own sins and transgressions that have brought them to such a low level that unless their dirtiness and pollution are burnt away by fire until they become cleansed, they will not qualify to enter Paradise nor to stand in the holy presence of their Lord.

It is made clear here that the punishment of hell is destined for both the hypocrites and the unbelievers. In short, whether a person is an outright rejecter of the truth or whether he outwardly professes faith yet denies it in his heart, or whether he is a hypocrite whose actions are inconsistent with his verbal affirmation of belief, the fire of hell will be the remedy for all such parties. Thus, the believer should take a lesson from this that unless his faith is supported by good deeds and acts of selfless sacrifice, there is a lurking danger that he may fall into the category of a hypocrite and so end up in hell.

It is for this reason that in inviting the believers to perform deeds of self-abnegation and sacrifice in His path, Allah, Most High, cites the case of the hypocrites only as a form of caution and warning that the believer should always be taking stock of his faith and sacrifice and should always be ready and willing to perform any selfless sacrifice that Allah, Most High, and His apostle should ask of him. And this is so especially when Allah’s messenger is present in the world or any follower of his who is a *mujaddid* (reformer) or a commissioned one through whom Allah, Most High, desires to initiate a mighty spiritual revolution in the world. Thus, through the instrumentality of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) the Divine will had determined that there would be such a revolution and so the time had come for the believers to prove their faith by righteous deeds and acts of self-denial and sacrifice as the following verses remind us:

16. *Has not the time yet come for the believers that their hearts should be humble for the remembrance of Allah and the Truth that is revealed, and (that) they should not be like those who were given the Book before, but time was prolonged for them, so their hearts hardened. And most of them are transgressors.*

17. *Know that Allah gives life to the earth after its death. Indeed, We have made the signs clear for you that you may understand.*

The verse asks whether the time has not yet come for the hearts of the believers to soften at the remembrance of Allah, Most High, and to fall into obeisance to His commands which were revealed in the Holy Qur'an and to be ready to make all kinds of selfless sacrifices for His sake. In other words, the advent of this spiritual rain as well as the innumerable kinds of trials and calamities that were imminent demanded of the believers that they should bow their heads at the threshold of the Almighty and make heart-wrenching supplications to Him with meek and humble hearts. Their hearts should also submit to the Qur'anic injunctions that were being revealed or were already revealed and their souls should sink down in obedience to the divine revelation. In addition, they should be prepared to make any kind of sacrifice that was expected of them. And this is exactly what the companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) did. They kept awake at night praying to Allah, Most High, with utmost humility of heart, and during the day they would sacrifice their wealth and their lives for His sake. Once, when the Muslims were engaged in battle against the forces of the Roman Emperor, an ambassador from that army visited the Muslim army and happened to stay overnight in the Muslim camp. When he saw the brotherly love and equality amongst the Muslims and their staying awake at night for the *tahajjud* (after midnight prayer), he was so deeply impressed that when he returned to his own army he addressed his commander thus: "How can you expect to defeat a people who spend the nights in humble supplication to their Lord and who sacrifice their wealth and lives during the day?"

Allah, Most High, then warns the believers that they should not become like those who were given the Book before them and who after a long period of time had elapsed became hard of heart and one sign of their hardness of heart was that most of them became transgressors. In other words, they showed disobedience to the commands of Allah, Most High. This eventuality without doubt seems to refer to a future time for after mentioning the Jews and Christians and countless other nations who were given the Book before the Muslims, the verse states that after time had been prolonged for them they became stone-hearted and threw the Book of the Almighty behind their backs.

Accordingly, in the Holy Prophet's time the actual condition of the age was crying out for the pressing need for an extraordinary reformer who would come to the world and re-inaugurate a reformation in the People of the Book who had already fallen victim to all kinds of false beliefs and evil actions. After drawing the attention of Muslims to this state of affairs, the Holy Qur'an cautions them lest the same thing should happen to them after the passing of a long period of time. For just as we observe in the physical world, after the rains have come and a long time has passed, the earth becomes hard and dead and to become alive again new showers are needed.

The same divine principle operates in the spiritual world also. That is, spiritual rain descends from heaven, and after a long period of time has passed, like the earth, human hearts also become hard thus necessitating fresh showers to soften the hard earth of people's hearts once again. And this is the eternal law of Allah, Most High, that He always gives life to the dead earth, whether physical or spiritual.

Before the Holy Prophet's time, prophets used to come one after the other bringing with them regular heavenly rain. However, as the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is the *khatimun-nabiyyin*, that is, the perfection of all the excellences of prophethood, and the objective of prophethood, which is to provide man with guidance, had been completed as the Holy Qur'an states, "... *This day have I perfected for you your religion ...*" (5:3), and the work of prophethood had come to an end, then prophetic revelation was also terminated. It is for this reason, in order to remove the death and hard-heartedness of people after a long time had elapsed, that Allah, Most High, instituted the chain of reformers (*mujaddids*) who come at the head of every century with the blessings of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and bring with them such celestial showers that would soften the hearts of people and bring them back to life after the passing of

a long period of time and they thus launch a new spiritual revolution. This is why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) prophesied the coming of a *mujaddid* (reformer) at the head of every century – one who would renew the love of religion in the hearts of the people of the Holy Prophet’s *ummah* (community).

It is true that one of the ways of Allah, Most High, as He has been explained in these verses is that Allah revives the religion when, after a long time has passed, hardness overtakes the heart of man leading him to abandon the teachings of the Book of Allah and most people become transgressors as we witness today the pitiable condition of Muslims – and presently we see unfolding before our very eyes the truth of the Holy Prophet’s words that in the Last Age Muslims would resemble the Jews and Christians so closely that if one of them had crawled into a lizard’s hole, a Muslim would do the same, meaning that the resemblance would become absolute. As it is also true that Allah, Most High, revives the dead earth as He says in the verse above, “*Know that Allah gives life to the earth after its death.*” Similarly, a well-known *hadith* foretells the coming of *mujaddids* (reformers) who will rekindle faith in the hardened hearts of people and this is in total conformity with the Holy Qur’an. In fact, the Holy Qur’an has clearly established the necessity of reformers (*mujaddids*) squarely under the laws of Allah, Most High.

Thus, how could our century be bereft of the presence of a reformer especially since stone-heartedness had reached its zenith and the condition of many Muslims had fallen under the influence of the Jews and the Christians? As a result, Allah, Most High, in accordance with His custom and in consonance with the prophesy of His apostle, the Holy Prophet (*sas*), appointed and sent Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the fourteenth century *Hijrah* and through his efforts such a beautiful celestial rain descended on earth that the propagation of Islam, which had formerly grounded to a halt, was totally revived and the triumph of this religion over all false ideologies in point of knowledge and wisdom became so visibly conspicuous that no fair-minded researcher can deny this truth..

By saying, “*Indeed We have made the signs clear for you that you may understand,*” Allah, Most High, is telling us that He is continuously sending to us sign after sign which day by day is disclosing the truth of His messages so that we may use our intellect and think deeply over what He has revealed. Furthermore, we should know that this system of spiritual rainfall is a fixed law of the Almighty. As a result, the Lord of creation has in His plan a mighty spiritual revolution but we should know that such a colossal spiritual transformation can only take place if it is matched by an equally tremendous effort of sacrifice of both property and person on our part. Therefore, in these critical and grave circumstances we are facing today, whoever displays self-denial and makes sacrifices in the way of Allah, Most High, will become worthy of an enormous and honourable reward as the next verse promises:

18. *The men who give in charity and the women who give in charity and set apart for Allah a goodly portion, it will be doubled for them, and theirs is a generous reward.*

There is a *hadith* of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) which says: “*Sadaqah* (charity) cools the anger of the Lord.” That is, because whenever we deny ourselves and whatever charity we give for Allah’s sake by means of wealth to the poor and needy, or in any other way they need our assistance, are immensely pleasing to our Lord and Cherisher (*Rabb*) so much so that in the *Hadith* it is reported that on the Day of Resurrection Allah, Most High, will say to people: “I was hungry and came to you for food, but you did not feed Me; I came to you thirsty, but you did not give Me to drink; I came naked to you, but you did not clothe Me.”

Then people will exclaim in surprise: “Dear Lord! You are so mighty that You do not stand in need of such things!”

Then He will reply: “Do you remember when needy folk came to you hungry, thirsty and naked and you denied them their requests? When they came to you, it was I Who came.”

Whatever deeds of goodness we do to help Allah’s creatures or to show compassion to them are all acts of charity. For example, if we give good advice to someone, that, too, is charity. In short, Allah, Most High, loves charity very much. This falls under the category of general charity (*sadaqah*) but over and above this, there is also a special kind of charity and that is to do righteous deeds and to make selfless sacrifices for the defence and propagation of Allah’s religion, especially in these times when Islam is under siege and nations of the world are bent on eradicating it from the face of the earth as happened in the time of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and what we see taking place right before our eyes in this age. To deny oneself as well as to make sacrifice of wealth and lives in such times is deserving in Allah’s eyes of an honourable and majestic reward.

The verse then assures us that we must not consider any wealth spent in the way of Allah, Most High, as lost. In reality, it is a loan which Allah, Most High, will increase manifold and return to us either in this life or the next or in both worlds. The blessed companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) passed this test with flying colours. They made such stupendous sacrifices the like of which was never witnessed in world history. It is for this reason that Allah, Most High, enhanced their reward thousands of times over and gave them in this very life a reward of wealth, riches, power and authority and no one except the Almighty knows the magnitude and the honour and majesty of the recompense that is destined for them in the next life.

19. *And those who believe in Allah and His messengers, they are the truthful (siddiqun) and the faithful ones (shuhada) with their Lord. They have their reward and their light. And those who disbelieve and reject Our messages, they are the inmates of hell.*

Siddiqun (truthful ones) is the plural of *siddiq* which conveys an emphatic significance in Arabic. The real meaning of it is to attain perfection in truth and righteousness. In the terminology of Islamic Law such a person has so high a level of truthfulness that not only do his lips never utter a falsehood but also when he is confronted with truth, then as a result of his close affinity with truthfulness, he immediately recognises this truth without standing in need of proof. According to Islamic Law the perfect example of a *siddiq* (very truthful person) is reflected in the knowledge and personality of a prophet of the Almighty. In addition, in his love and recognition of truth and righteous people, he has been blessed with an extraordinary degree of insight and spiritual acumen so that his perception is immediate.

Shuhada is the plural of *shahid* (witness or martyr) which according to the dictionary means one who witnesses or sees. However, in Islamic phraseology the *shahid* (witness) finds its fulfilment in the person of a prophet who, as it were, has seen Allah, Most High, and this has given him such superhuman power and perseverance that no force in the world can turn him away from his Beloved. It is for this reason, too, that people who have given their lives in the way of Allah, Most High, are called *shuhada* or martyrs for it seems that not even the sight of the enemy’s sword can make them swerve an inch from their single-minded devotion to their Lord. They give up their lives for Allah’s sake but they do not yield even an inch to the opponents and by their actions they prove that their faith and steadfastness are so powerful as if they have seen their Lord with their own eyes.

By reverting to the topic of sacrifice of property and person in the way of Allah, Most High, the Holy Qur'an is again bringing to the fore what was mentioned in the first section of the chapter in the following words: “*Believe in Allah and His Messenger and spend of that whereof He has made you heirs. So those of you who believe and spend – for them is a great reward*” (v. 7).

The reason for repeating this exhortation here is that when man proves his faith in Allah, Most High, and His apostle by righteous deeds he is included first of all in the category of the *salihin*, that is, the righteous ones, so that his faith and actions all become beautiful as if decorated by the Hand of his Lord.

After this, when he advances and makes further progress in faith and good deeds, his rectitude makes him soar aloft towards the rank of the *shuhada* (witnesses or martyrs). In other words, he becomes so deeply dyed in virtue that it appears as if he is seeing Allah, Most High, with his own eyes with the result that no power in the world can dissuade him from following the straight path, and thus he becomes a living example of the prophet. This is the station of the *shahid* (witness).

After this station, when he progresses further in rectitude, his faith, which is an attribute of truthfulness and fidelity, then becomes part of his nature (*fitrah*) and just as from the nature of a prophet a fountain of righteousness flows over continuously, so, too, the nature of the *shahid* (witness) develops such an affinity with truth that nothing but truth emanates from the depths of his inner self without need of any external proof or sign. When he reaches this level of righteousness, it then becomes evident that good deeds become second nature to him. He thus becomes a perfect example of his prophet in terms of knowledge and virtue and this is the rank of the *siddiq* (the truthful). This is the ultimate point of man's spiritual excellences and though he seems to be dyed in the colours of prophethood, yet he does not actually become a prophet for prophethood is not the result of any acquired excellence but is, in fact, a divinely gifted rank which Allah, Most High, confers as a gift on whomsoever He chooses of His servants. It is from the prophet that mankind receives guidance and whatever guidance is revealed to him is called a Book.

Thus, as all the excellences of prophethood have been perfected in the person of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and whatever revealed guidance was destined for mankind has been completed with the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, there is, therefore, no further necessity for the coming of any prophet whether new or old.

The verse continues by saying that those who not only do not believe in Allah, Most High, and His messengers but who go further by denying them and trying to prove them false are inhabitants of hell. Included in this group are those people who from the very beginning have no faith in Allah, Most High, and His apostles and the result of not accepting the truth drives them further into making them bold and hostile enough to belie the truth. As a result, they gradually begin to deteriorate in morals and conduct and so with their own hands they build a hell for themselves.

However, besides the above group, there are other people who are content with just professing faith in Allah, Most High, and His messengers with their lips but whose actions do not support their alleged belief. In fact, their evil actions contradict their verbal claims of faith with the result that their mere lip-profession of belief profits them naught and day by day their deeds and morals deteriorate until they finally end up in hell. Such people are called hypocrites and comprise those whose hypocrisy is related to faith as well as those whose duplicity pertains to deeds.

SECTION III

The impediment to making selfless sacrifice in the way of Allah, Most High, is the love for the wealth and provisions and property of this world's life. In this section we are reminded that the life of this world together with all its wealth and provisions, children and property is not permanent. Instead, these things serve as the cultivation field of the Hereafter. As a result, we should beautify our next life by sacrificing our wealth and all that we cherish in Allah's path and should thus purchase Paradise in exchange. This world's life is not worth the price that we should be so consumed with love for its riches and valuables that it makes us neglect spending in the way of Allah, Most High. This worldly life is only a small measure of His hospitality and generosity to us and He asks it of us only as a loan which He has promised to return to us after increasing it immensely. If He so desires, He can take everything away from us and we cannot do anything about it. In fact, everything is a gift to us.

The need for sacrificing life, wealth and provisions is to firmly establish the teachings of Allah's Book on earth and to propagate it far and wide for these efforts are extremely important in maintaining peace and justice and promoting man's spiritual advancement. The dissemination of truth and its preservation demand heavy sacrifice from us. Thus, we should not attach our hearts to this world to such an extent that it becomes a hindrance in the way of our sacrifice for Allah's sake. The Hereafter is indeed the permanent place of abode. This life, on the other hand, is a fleeting one as the following verse elucidates:

20. *Know that this world's life is only sport and play and gaiety and boasting among yourselves and a vying in the multiplication of wealth and children. It is as rain, whose causing the vegetation to grow pleases the husbandmen, then it withers away so that thou seest it turning yellow, then it becomes chaff. And in the Hereafter is a severe chastisement, and (also) forgiveness from Allah and (His) pleasure. And this world's life is naught but a source of vanity.*

We are told that we should always keep in mind that this world's life is something insubstantial and a form of sport. That is, in its comforts, luxuries, riches and wealth there is no stability for everything in it is transitory and ephemeral. What it does is only to encourage us to embellish our homes and garments and to boast over one another about our children and our adornment and decorations and our whole life is spent in trying to fulfil our desires for more wealth and children. However, this is only for a short time for one day we have to depart this world leaving everything behind, regardless of how many possessions of finery and adornment we may have amassed in this short life and irrespective of how much honour, children and opulence we may have acquired. All of these things like the above as well as pomp and glory and renown are not permanent possessions but are really means for man to do good deeds for nothing in reality belongs to him.

To illustrate this point more fully, an example is furnished from the world of agriculture – a farmer ploughs his field and prepares it thoroughly for sowing, after which rain falls from the heavens and soon the land becomes verdant and begins bearing fruit in abundance. This makes the farmer very happy but not for long; for after a short while the same flourishing field becomes yellow and then turns into powder leaving the cultivator with nothing in his possession except for the fruits or grain he has reaped as a result of his labour.

Similar to this is the life of man – in due course of time he grows in strength until he reaches the pinnacle of his powers in youth. He makes all kinds of efforts to acquire wealth and riches and children and honour and in addition he is blessed with bounty from the Almighty for without His grace no effort

of man can succeed. His endeavours begin to flourish and when he contemplates the abundance of his opulence and provisions and the power of his youth he is hardly able to contain himself for joy.

However, old age sets in and banishes the power of youth until death overtakes him and all his prized and valuable possessions are taken away from him together with his life. All that remains from the vast field of his life are the deeds that he has reaped like grain from the field and which is all that he carries with him. Thus, from all the play and sport of this worldly existence, the only real and substantial things are the deeds of man whether good or bad. This is why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is reported to have said, “This world’s life is the cultivation field of the Hereafter.” There is no stability nor durability in its wealth or poverty or its pleasure or pain. The true reality that resides in this worldly life is its deeds. That is, the gratitude a person shows for the bounties of Allah, Most High, and the value he places on these favours which translate into how much he spends in the way of his Lord, how much sympathy and compassion he extends to his fellow beings and how much patience and perseverance (*sabr*) he exercises in poverty and sorrow and the example of steadfastness he displays to the world. For example, in an examination a particular student may be given a hundred pieces of diamond and another a hundred pebbles for the sake of computation. Now, it would be the height of folly for the first student to boast over the other student because he was given diamonds and not stones in order to calculate; for the sole purpose of the examination was to discover which student would make the correct calculations. It is quite possible that the one who was given the diamonds may get all his sums wrong and fail his examination whilst the one who was given pebbles may be quite correct in his counting and so pass his test.

This example serves to explain the diversity which Allah, Most High, has created in the world: there are males and females and rich and poor for it is only in this way with people of disparate talents and possessions that society can function efficaciously. For example, if everyone were a king, who would be the subjects? Or if all people were carpenters or blacksmiths then there could be no progress in the world. Thus, diversity is an imperative for growth and advancement and so Allah, Most High, has created man in different conditions. Of course, to everyone is assigned a domain in which he can perform his duties; for it is the Creator’s intention to see what each person will do in the environment in which he is placed. The exalted or lowly station of an individual in his worldly life carries no special value nor substance in His eyes.

Thus, the only thing that is of genuine and lasting significance is man’s actions which he carries with him. The diversity of rank or possession is of no worth, for this is only a temporary and transitory condition. Indeed, this world is a field in which for his own good in the next life, man should cultivate good deeds which would bear good deeds so that he may reap a rich harvest for himself in the Hereafter.

The verse continues by stating that in the Hereafter there will be two conditions – one of severe punishment and the other of forgiveness and the pleasure of the Lord. In other words, whoever carried across with him the seed and fruit of evil deeds will have bought grievous chastisement for himself whilst he whose seed bore the fruits of good deeds will gain forgiveness (*maghfirah*), which is Allah’s protection from punishment and His pleasure. In other words, he will have attained a state of joy and ecstasy.

The verse then concludes with this caution: “*And this world’s life is naught but a source of vanity.*” That is, not only are wealth and opulence temporary and perishable and their allurements and attractions are nothing but deceit, but man’s life itself is a potent cause of deception for what knowledge does he have of when death will strike and thus put an end to all his opportunities to do good? So, blessed is

the one who values time and considers every second of his life as priceless so that he tries to use every moment of his God-given life in doing good.

21. *Vie one with another for forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden the extensiveness of which is as the extensiveness of the heaven and the earth— it is prepared for those who believe in Allah and His messengers. That is the grace of Allah; He gives it to whom He pleases. And Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.*

Maghfiraturun is derived from *ghafara* which means to cover or protect. Thus *maghfiraturun* (forgiveness) refers to Allah's protection of man from the evil consequences of all the sins he may have already committed. It is also extended to protection from all future sins man is liable to commit in the future on account of human weakness. A sinner is included in these two kinds of protection. However, when this word, *maghfirah* (forgiveness or protection), is used in relation to the prophets of the Almighty, then only the second significance (protection from human weakness) is applicable because prophets are by nature sinless. Thus when an ordinary person makes petition for forgiveness his intention is to seek pardon from Allah, Most High, for two things: firstly, protection from the dreadful results of all the sins he may have been guilty of and secondly beseeching Allah, Most High, for protection from possible wrongdoing in the future because of his inherent human weakness. However, when a prophet makes a supplication for *maghfirah* he is seeking Allah's protection from all wrongs a person is liable to commit in the future because of human weakness. Thus, the one who resorts to *istighfar* the most, that is, seeking protection from doing wrong, is the one who is most qualified to receive such protection. Accordingly, the fact that prophets of the Almighty made petition for forgiveness is no proof that they were sinners. Rather it is evidence of their protection from wrongdoing. With regard to the Hereafter, *maghfirah* (forgiveness) has added significance: protection from every kind of pain and sorrow and freedom from punishment.

In the last verse (20), the reward for good deeds was given as: *forgiveness (maghfirah) from Allah and (His) pleasure*, whilst in this verse (21) *forgiveness (maghfirah) from your Lord and a Garden* are mentioned as the recompense. In other words, *(His) pleasure* is replaced by *a Garden* in this verse. In my explanation given in the last section I had mentioned that the real goal of a true believer is Allah's *ridwan*, that is, His goodly pleasure and that paradise is the result of it. In other words, when a servant has won the approval of his Lord then there is no end to his joy and pleasure, for he has arrived at the true Source of all these bounties. In another verse the Holy Qur'an states, "*As for those who believe and do good deeds, for them are Gardens of Paradise (firdaus), an entertainment (nuzulaa)*" (18:107). *Nuzul* means the entertainment a person receives when he first arrives at his host's residence. For example, when he alights at his host's door, he is welcomed inside and given some sweet beverage or some tea etc. as a mark of hospitality. The best food and most comfortable room are prepared for him afterwards. For this reason paradise is mentioned as the entertainment a person receives when he first enters that domain. What his Lord has prepared for him afterwards of bounties and favours is beyond his conception as the *Hadith* clearly states: "No eye has seen those bounties, nor has any ear heard them nor has the heart of any man conceived of them."

Thus the true pursuit is the Lord's pleasure which should be the goal of every believer. The Garden of Paradise is only the consequence of this pleasure. Thus, when a servant has earned the approbation of his Lord, what more does he need? For such a person, the entire earth and all the heavens become a heaven for him. This is why the verse affirms and exhorts: "*Vie with one another for forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden the extensiveness of which is as the extensiveness of the heaven and the earth.*" That is, not only will our Lord shield us from all kinds of punishment but when we win His approval He will make us inheritors of a Garden which is as extensive as the heavens and the earth.

Thus, we should not be so enthralled over seeking short-lived progress, wealth and power in this world and become oblivious of striving towards winning our Lord's forgiveness and His pleasure. We should also not squander thereby the opportunity to be blessed in the next life with peace and happiness – a state which is called Heaven – and instead find ourselves immersed in the agony of chastisement. The verse then goes on to say that forgiveness from our Lord as well as the acquisition of His pleasure is a mighty favour of Allah, which He gives to whom He pleases, for He is the Lord of extreme bounty.

Here we should not be deceived by the expression, *Yu'tihi many-yashaa'u* (He gives it to whom He pleases), into believing that Allah, Most High, whimsically gives His favours to whom He pleases and withholds them capriciously from others for we must remember that with Allah, Most High, there is no loss, nor injustice, nor oppression as the following verse of the Holy Qur'an emphasises: "*And thy Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants*" (41:46).

Thus whatever Allah, Most High, intends for His servants He does so with total equality and justice. So whoever is given to disobedience will be recompensed with evil. Why should obedient servants be given punishment? If any servant of the Lord should strive hard and is foremost in seeking his Master's approval, then it would be his Lord's pleasure to screen him from punishment and make him partake of the joys and delights of Paradise. The expression, "*He gives it to whom He pleases*", is used only to underscore the inherent power and majesty of Allah, Most High, to bestow His gifts.

For example, if we should say of a High Court judge that he has the power to hang whom he pleases and to set free whom he pleases, it would be quite erroneous of us to take that statement to mean that if took his fancy he would sentence an innocent man to hang. The true meaning would be that the judge has the authority to weigh the evidence before him on the scale of justice and fairness and thus pass the sentence of death on a guilty murderer and also to liberate a blameless person. The same meaning is applicable when the statement is used in relation to Allah, Most High, for the intention is really to demonstrate the fact that He holds every grace and bounty under His absolute control. Whomsoever He sees is deserving He gives bountifully to him and whoever is unworthy gets nothing from Him. The question arises: Who are those whom Allah, Most High, considers deserving of His favours? The Holy Qur'an answers thus: "*U'iddat lil-ladhina amanu bil-Lahi wa rusulihi,*" that is, Allah's bounties are prepared for those who *believe* in Him and His apostles. Here the word *believe* is used in the sense in which it is specially employed in this chapter, that is, it refers to those who prove their verbal affirmation of faith in Allah and His messengers with good deeds and selfless sacrifice in the path of the Almighty.

22. *No disaster befalls in the earth, or in yourselves, but it is in a book before We bring it into existence — surely that is easy to Allah —*

Kitab (book) can refer either to the Holy Qur'an or to the all-encompassing knowledge of Allah, Most High. In the Holy Qur'an the knowledge of the Almighty is always compared to a book. Man's knowledge is bound by time and he has no information of the future. He knows something either of present time or past time and this up to a certain point only. However, when he concentrates on what is going on at the moment his mind is cast off from the past and conversely when his mind is directed to the past he tends to be unaware of the present. On the other hand, Allah's knowledge is free from all such constraints and resembles a book in which everything is recorded – from the very beginning until the furthest limit of the future. Just as whatever is written in a book has no past, present or future, for everything is present in it all the time, so, too, Allah's knowledge envelops everything at all times. When a reader is reading a book, the section he has already read becomes part of his knowledge of the

past, and what he is reading at the moment becomes what he knows of the present and so, too, with the future. In similar fashion, in the knowledge of the Almighty concerning His creation, events that have already taken place are considered past, and what is happening at the moment is deemed present and what will take place later is regarded as future time.

The verse tells us that what calamity befalls whether on some part of the earth or on man himself does not happen by chance but everything is recorded in a book before its occurrence. Before commenting further on these verses, I wish to proffer a short explanation of what is meant by “already written in a book” or “predestined.”

Allah, Most High, has written in the Holy Qur’an: “*He created everything and ordained for it a measure (taqdiraa)*” (25:2). This fixed measure is called *taqdir* or predestination. In other words, everything in the universe is created according to a predetermined measure, works according to it and dies according to it. The same law also extends to man himself but he has been blessed with the gift of limited free choice, so that he may operate according to his discretion. Therefore, in his case it is essential that difference in actions should lead to differing results for action is a cause and recompense is its consequence. Thus, if the action is bad, the repercussion will be bad, and conversely, if the deed is good, the result will be good. This is an example of *taqdir* (predestination).

Let us now examine another aspect of *taqdir*: if an evil doer should immediately desist from his bad behaviour and reforms himself, then the evil consequences of his former errant ways will also be averted from him and the influence they would have had on his life will also be changed. Take the case of a drinker. He has committed a sin by imbibing alcoholic beverages and in addition to this, his health has been adversely affected. If he had continued in this manner, he would soon have met a quick death, even though, originally, his God-given health was so sound that if he had not taken to drinking he would have enjoyed a longer life. However, if he suddenly repents, takes care of his health and becomes strong again, then that death which was destined for him because of his drinking will be averted from him just as the Holy Qur’an tells us of the Prophet Noah (*as*) when he preached to his people promising them that if they forsook their evil ways, “*He (Allah) will forgive you some of your sins and grant you respite to an appointed term...*” (71:4).

From this we can infer that a particular life span was appointed by Allah, Most High, for these people but because of their sinful conduct they had shortened their term on earth. If they had amended their behaviour then that destruction (or predestined end) would have been warded off. This type of *taqdir* is called *taqdir mu’allaq*, that is, conditional predestination, whilst the kind of decree that cannot be avoided despite all man’s endeavours and entreaties is called *taqdir mubram* or absolute decree. Of course, it is not within the province of man to decide which decree is conditional or absolute for that knowledge resides only with Allah, Most High. However, in order for us to spend our lives on this earth, it was necessary that Allah, Most High, should furnish us with some rules and regulations so that the believer could determine in what circumstances he could consider a decree to be pending or totally conclusive.

With this in mind we shall take a look at several cases from which we can make this determination.

1. The first rule given is: “*And that man can have nothing but what he strives for*” (53:39).

That is, everything for which man can make effort should be understood as operating under the principle of conditional decree for it is through this method of striving that we operate and achieve success in the world.

2. The second principle is that if we make strenuous efforts and offer deep supplication in a particular endeavour and we are nevertheless unsuccessful, then we should always regard that failure as an absolute decree and should accept it cheerfully. For example, if we have tried every form of remedy for a sick person and have also made fervent petition to Allah, Most High, and still the person dies, then we should take it as an absolute decree of the Almighty and consider it as a test or trial from Him and thus resign ourselves to His will without complaint. In regard to this the Holy Qur'an says: *"And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient"* (2:155).

In these circumstances we should not become disheartened and despondent for it is because of such occurrences that we are given the opportunity to develop the noble qualities of patience and perseverance by means of which we become successful in this life and the next.

3. The third rule is that the punishment of Allah, Most High, should always be considered as conditional for punishment is the result of bad deeds and if a person should give up his evil ways, then the impending chastisement will be deflected from him. That is why if we are given an intimation in a dream of imminent retribution then as believers we should repent sincerely, effect a change in our character through virtuous deeds, resort to *istighfar* (prayer for forgiveness) and give alms and charity to the needy. If we perform these pious acts, then the threatened punishment will be averted as the verse quoted above (71:4) promises us.
4. The fourth principle given to us is that if death overtakes a believer whilst he is engaged in some good act, or if he suffers any calamity in the process, he should always accept it as an irrevocable decree. That is, he should understand that such a decree was inevitable. Whilst a believer is in the process of doing something good, Allah, Most High, does not afflict him with death or tribulation unless that calamity was definitely preordained. This is supported by the Holy Qur'an itself in Chapter 3, Al Imran, where after strongly emphasising the need to fulfil the important duty of *jihad* (struggle in the way of Allah, Most High) the words of those who had evaded this outstanding obligation have been recorded, *"They say: Had we any hand in the affair, we would not have been slain here ..."* (3:153), and then the Almighty warns them thus: *"Say: Had you remained in your houses, those for whom slaughter was ordained would have gone forth to the places where they would be slain ..."* (3:154).

The intention behind this warning is to prevent believers from becoming weak of heart when they are fulfilling their obligatory duties. For example, if someone is drowning it is incumbent on us to help him without hesitating, or, if a fire breaks out and a person is burning in it, then a believer should not delay in rushing to his assistance. Again, if for the sake of Truth, a servant has to go to war, then he should not dilly dally in fighting for the sake of his Lord. However, he should be sure in his heart that if, in so doing, he suffers death or disaster, then that was something definitely decreed beforehand for him and which he could never have eluded. Death, whilst a believer is fulfilling an obligatory duty, can never be a conditional decree from which he can save himself. This is a principle which inspires in the heart of a true servant the highest degree of bravery and valour and prepares him to assist a fellow human-being in the toils of sorrow and adversity regardless of whatever personal danger or pain he may have to experience himself. In fact, even if he has to go to war in the way of his Lord, he is not in the least perturbed. Of course, in the performance of his duty, the believer should not neglect to take every precaution possible for it is also a command of the Almighty that we should not cast ourselves to perdition with our own hands. The meaning is that in war we should be fully equipped with armour and other equipment of battle; if a drowning person is to be saved the rescuer should be certain that he can

swim; again, if one has to administer treatment to an ill person who is afflicted by an infectious disease, then he should do so without the slightest apprehension. Of course, he should take every care to protect himself from the dangerously contagious disease of the sick person. And if after all precautions have been taken, and the healer dies, then that should be construed as an absolute decree from which it was impossible to escape. In short, these are the principles concerning the question of predestination which the Holy Qur'an has taught Muslims and for the Christians and the Arya Samaj people to cavil at such tenets is only to expose their own utter ignorance of the subject.

There can be no doubt about predestination. After all, whatever is created ought to be created according to a certain measure and to be governed by specific rules and regulations and this is called predestination or pre-measurement, that is, *taqdir*. Further, to teach man such principles by which he could benefit in the best way from the question of predestination and can thus gain success in this life and the next is the blessing of the Holy Qur'an which is the only Book that has brought perfect guidance for all mankind.

I issue a challenge to all and sundry to produce in regard to the issue of predestination better teachings which can be of the greatest benefit to man in directing his deeds and shaping his life in such a way that he can reap success in this life and the next – better teachings (than those elucidated in the Holy Qur'an) which can assist him to develop excellent moral qualities and make him the recipient of true peace and tranquillity of mind. (See Note at end of this section.)

To summarise, the verse under discussion discloses to us one of the ways of Allah, Most High, and that is, whatever disaster befalls, whether on the earth or in ourselves, comes from Him. One of the most beneficial conclusions we can draw from this verse is that those people who consider certain days of the week, like Monday or Saturday for example, as auspicious days for performing certain types of work will certainly be displeased. So, too, will Europeans who consider the number 13 to be ill-omened while some others who regard certain animals as bringing bad luck to people are indeed in clear error.

In the *Hadith* of Imam Ahmad it is recorded that two people visited Lady A'isha (*ra*) and told her that Abu Hurairah used to quote the Holy Prophet (*sas*) as saying that there was ill-luck in women, quadrupeds and horses. She refuted this assertion by pointing out that what the Holy Prophet (*sas*) really used to say was that ignorant people held that view and then she recited the verse under discussion (22).

Once I enquired of a Hindu gentleman, whose habit was to diligently consult astrologers before commencing any task, whether he ever suffered any setbacks or difficulties or whether anyone fell ill in his home or whether anyone died there. To all of these he answered in the affirmative. I then asked him: "What has it benefited you to religiously consult all your astrologers and Brahmans to determine which time was good or bad for any work?"

Similarly, Englishmen who pride themselves on their superior wisdom have attributed bad luck to the number 13. Once a provincial governor was invited to dinner at a person's home. Quite by chance, of the fourteen invited guests, one was not able to attend and thus the number of guests dropped to thirteen. On seeing this, the governor got up and left the table. However, after many entreaties and pleadings, he agreed to remain but his secretary had to leave so as to reduce the number of invitees to twelve. Such then was the behaviour of these wise and cultured guests!

Thus, Allah, Most High, in His desire to banish such kinds of foolish ideas from the minds of Muslims, revealed through the Holy Qur'an that whatever calamity befalls us comes from Him and is written in a

Book before it happens. Now, whose knowledge is so vast that it can encompass the Book of Allah, Most High, that is, His knowledge? Of course, when it comes to calamities a portion of whatever is written from the beginning in Allah's Book which is also called a "guarded tablet" or His knowledge, has of necessity been revealed to us by the Holy Qur'an so that the believer now has the benefit of an illuminated pathway to traverse in his journey through life.

We are told in the Holy Qur'an that there are two kinds of trials and tribulations that befall man:

1. The first type is given to us in the following verse: "*And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought and He pardons much*" (42:30).

This refers to the disasters that befall man because of his sins or shortcomings or errors. In other words, they are the consequences of his own actions. Under this heading falls the punishment that is meted out to a person or a nation because of transgressions against the laws of the Almighty.

2. The second kind comes as a trial or test and this is given to us by Allah, Most High, Himself as the Holy Qur'an tells us: "*And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient*" (2:155).

We are told that the above categories of trials are given to man by Allah, Most High, to test and develop the noble quality of patience in him, as well as to nurture him spiritually and to make him qualified for a reward that is earmarked for him. When a servant exercises patience and perseverance under these circumstances, his Lord is pleased with him and showers enormous reward on him.

In the *Hadith*, it is recorded that if a believer should suffer some loss or damage and he bears it patiently then that is a form of *sadqah* (charity) on his part. What an exquisite explanation of charity is taught to us here! Giving money to a friend can take two forms: firstly, we can give him some of our money with a happy mind, and secondly, if that friend himself should take some of our money, we should refrain from thinking ill of him and should cheerfully let him keep it. Similarly, one method of sacrificing for Allah's sake is to spend our lives and property willingly in His path and the second method is that if Allah, Most High, Himself should take some wealth or life from us, we should not feel aggrieved, but should accept it in a pleasant way. Thus, these two means of spending in Allah's way are given the rank of charity and sacrifice.

It is for this reason that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) said that on the day of Resurrection when a believer receives the reward for those supplications that went unanswered in this life so magnificent will be his recompense that he will wish that none of his petitions on earth had been accepted. The reason is that to sacrifice one's own cherished desires and to bow to the decrees of the Almighty are indeed lofty and sublime acts of charity and sacrifice. Thus a vast treasury of Allah's mercy is hidden in these trials and tribulations.

As a result, a believer should strive to protect himself from the first category of calamities which come as a punishment from Allah, Most High, as retribution for his misdeeds. He should do so by strictly adhering to the commands of the Almighty, by also establishing regular *salah* (prayer) in his life and by making *istighfar* abundantly. As mentioned before, *istighfar* is a supplication to the Almighty seeking His protection from the evil repercussions of sins already committed by us as well as beseeching Him for protection from performing sinful acts in the future because of our inherent human weakness. In *salah* (formal prayer) we repeat from the depths of our hearts the petition given to us in the opening chapter (*Al-Fatihah*) of the Holy Qur'an: "*Guide us on the straight path, the path of those on whom*

Thou hast bestowed Thy favours, not those upon whom wrath is brought down nor those who go astray.”

Thus, prayer, *istighfar*, charity and obedience to the commands of Allah, Most High, should be the means to which we should resort in striving to save ourselves from the first kind of disasters which are, in reality, a punishment from the Creator. If, in spite of all these remedies and our righteous ways of living (*taqwa*), some calamity still overtakes us, then we should bear it patiently and deem it a result of our sins, or as an opportunity to reform ourselves. Instead of bewailing our misfortune we should be pleased with the decree of our Lord, telling ourselves that if He has intended some disaster for us, we should be happy, for He is our Master and perhaps there may be something excellent for us in this seemingly adverse occurrence. If we display this kind of attitude, then Allah, Most High, will place this calamity in the second category (of test and trial) and reward us beyond measure and the door of His mercy and His grace will be opened unto us as the Holy Qur’an affirms: “*And give good news to the patient, who, when a misfortune befalls them say: Surely we belong to Allah, and to Him we shall return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are followers of the right course*” (2:155-157).

The verse concludes with this statement: “*Surely that is easy to Allah.*” That is, in the twinkling of an eye many mighty kingdoms are destroyed, huge royal courts and palaces are devastated brick by brick; the assemblies where luxury and comfort reign are turned into places of mourning – neither do good deeds have any effect, nor does position of command, nor ownership of wealth, kingdom or authority. Thus, disasters will and do take place on earth, and no one can escape them whether prophet or saint, king or subject, ruler or ruled, rich or poor. If some calamity is predestined, it must occur. Thus, before tribulations visit us, it is incumbent on the believer to take beforehand such steps as would help him to avoid the causes that usually lead to afflictions and the tools he possesses at hand for that are obedience to Allah’s command to the utmost limit of his capability, as well as giving alms and charity, performing regular prayer and making *istighfar*. In addition, he should give the most meticulous thought to every task and should perform it with wisdom and promptitude; he should also shun laziness and sloth for that, too, is part of Allah’s command and obedience to it is obligatory. If, however, in spite of all these precautions, a disaster should still strike, the servant should still bow cheerfully to the will of the Almighty. This is why, therefore, that the following verses advise us:

23. *So that you grieve not for what has escaped you, nor exult in that which He has given you. And Allah loves not any arrogant boaster:*

24. *Such as are niggardly and enjoin niggardliness on men. And whoever turns back, then surely Allah is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.*

In other words it is the responsibility of the believer to preserve himself from all those causes which result in grief and difficulties which afflict man on account of his erring ways. If, despite all his safeguards, there still comes upon him a calamity which, try as he may, he cannot evade and through this he loses some possessions of his, like, for example, suffering a loss in wealth or property or losing a loved one, then he should not grieve over what he has lost and should be pleased with whatever pleases his Lord. On the other hand, if Allah, Most High, should bless him with some good fortune, he must not put on airs. That is, he should not be exultant over it and so become proud and arrogant, for what he has been given is only a gift from his Creator.

The verse tells us that Allah, Most High, is Self-sufficient, without need of anything and He grants us His bounties out of His Own grace. He stands in need of no one’s wealth nor anything else. Whatever

He asks of us is for our own good, for, in reality, this is the way for us to prosper in this life and also the way to embellish our life in the Hereafter.

We now turn to the manner in which His praiseworthy qualities are manifested in the world. We are told that praising Him also works to our benefit for it is a source of free gifts to us and a means of beautifying our morals. If Allah, Most High, so desires, nothing but praise will issue from the tongue of man. However, He does not operate that way for He is in need of nothing for He is praised in His person and His attributes. If someone refrains from extolling Him, Allah, Most High, loses nothing for He is still *Al-Hamid* (the Praised One). That is, His intrinsic attribute is the Praiseworthy One. Since this is His attribute He does not require anyone to laud Him. Of course, magnifying Him brings benefit to the one who extols His glory for he thereby receives free gifts and adorns his life both in this world and the next. If Allah, Most High, needed praise, He would have created man in such a way that he could do nothing but praise his Lord. However, He did not do so for then man would not have done anything of his own free will and would thus not have qualified himself for rewards. Whoever spends in the way of the Almighty and also spends so that His praise may spread throughout the world does so only for his own gain for Allah, Most High, is above need of anything.

In the first section of this chapter, after emphasising the insubstantial and fleeting nature of this world's wealth and property, the Holy Qur'an wished to impress deeply in our minds the warning that we should not be so enthralled with the material possessions of this life that we cast aside the virtue of spending in the way of Allah, Most High. Instead, we should use the good things of this life to build a better one in the Hereafter, which is the true destination of man. It then continued by disclosing to us that it is a part of the Almighty's merciful dealing with man that whatever He asks of us – things which He, Himself, has graciously bestowed on us – He asks only as a loan which He has promised to return to us after having enhanced it many times over. Otherwise we should ask ourselves, "Is it not possible for the Almighty to snatch away from us all our bounties and wealth and opulence if He so wishes and thus leave us wringing our hands in despair?" Indeed, it is a customary experience in this world's life that Allah, Most High, continues to take away everything from man and he can do nothing about it. Thus, blessed is the one who obeys the voice of his Creator and glorifies Him and decides of his own accord to make selfless sacrifice in His path.

The reason for stressing the importance in this chapter of self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of Allah, Most High, is now given and that is whenever the Almighty sends messengers, the teachings they bring are geared towards establishing balance and moderation in the world. However, those who are given to falsehood and love evil always oppose and relentlessly strive to eliminate them. On the other hand, Allah, Most High, through His apostles and His Books desires to institute justice and equity and peace and freedom of conscience among men. In this struggle between truth and falsehood, the Almighty provides the believers with the opportunity to establish His law on earth by means of sacrifice of wealth and life so that His Own creation will benefit from what is destined for them and also receive from their Lord the reward for their good deeds.

Thus, those messengers who sometimes were forced into taking up the sword and waging wars never did so with the same motive of the lovers of this world's life. In other words, they did not do so for the accumulation of wealth or the aggrandisement of their power but instead their sole intention was directed towards laying the foundation of justice and equity and the revival and preservation of peace and freedom in the world. Accordingly, this was the position of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). He was forbidden from even uttering the name of the Almighty, whilst those believers in Allah, Most High, were persecuted, beaten and even killed. Instead of justice, equity, peace and freedom of conscience, unjustified brutality and oppression held sway over the land. This situation, so fraught with danger for

the believers, demanded that Allah, Most High, should send down His help from Heaven. But the descent of that assistance required the believers to attract the aid of Allah, Most High, through self-abnegation and sacrifice and to make themselves worthy in the eyes of the Almighty for honour and reward. With this in view, the next verse informs us:

25. *Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the measure, that men may conduct themselves with equity. And We sent down iron, wherein is great violence and advantages to men, and that Allah may know who helps Him and His messengers, unseen. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.*

In the expression, *ya‘lamul-Lahu*, if the root word of *ya‘lamu* is ‘*alima* (to know) then it would pertain to the knowledge of the Almighty and so it will mean that Allah, Most High, knows everything. This “knowing” signifies Allah’s knowledge after the fact, that is, knowledge after the event has taken place. However, another aspect of Allah’s knowledge is that He is aware of every event even before it happens. Nevertheless, He does not predetermine the commission or consequences of the action, but, when it does take place then His knowledge before the fact is changed into knowledge after the event. That is, it unfolds according to laws laid down by Allah, Most High, in regard to the consequences of an action. At this point, no heart should entertain the wrong suspicion that because Allah, Most High, knows beforehand what will take place, man, therefore, lives under compulsion (with no freedom of choice). Allah’s prior knowledge of an event in no way forces man to act in a manner predetermined by Him. The reason is that Allah’s knowledge of something before it occurs is only in comparison with man’s limited knowledge. Otherwise, His knowledge is always after the event has taken place, for whatever will take place in the future as far as we are concerned, is all the time present before Him, for when it comes to the Almighty, we human beings can never attribute past, present and future tense to Him. For example, Zaid killed Bakr. The whole incident was all the time before Allah’s eyes – before it happened, when it occurred and after it took place. Thus, when Allah, Most High, revealed through a prophecy that one day Zaid would kill Bakr, in reality He spoke whilst seeing the whole incident in front of Him even before it occurred. As regards the future, our eyes are covered by a veil and we cannot see future events, but Allah’s eye is not so constrained. His eye is always seeing. He sees future events and prophesies them to us just as if we are reporting some event which is taking place in the present or has already taken place.

The second significance of *li ya‘lamal-Lahu* will be different if the root word is ‘*alama*, meaning to show a sign or to indicate, for then the expression “*that Allah may know*” will signify that Allah may make manifest or that He may make a distinction and this expression is more explicit than the first.

The verse uses the word *mizan* (measure). Here it means justice (‘*adl*). Thus, Allah’s teaching is intrinsically well-balanced and this conduces to the establishment of justice. That is, if man observes his duty to Allah, Most High, and also to his fellow-men, each in its correct place and time and both are fulfilled justly and faithfully, then this, indeed, constitutes absolute beauty of conduct. In other words, true beauty resides in maintaining balance in the fulfilment of our duties to our Creator and those we own to our fellow men. To be so absorbed in observing the rights of our fellow beings that we forget Allah’s rights over us is not proper. Similarly, to be so engaged in performing our duties to Allah, Most High, that we neglect our fellow-men (this is called monasticism) is unlawful in Islam as the following incident illustrates.

Once a lady came to visit Lady A‘isha (*ra*). She was recently married but her clothes were shabby and untidy. Lady A‘isha (*ra*) asked how it was that before her marriage the situation was the reverse. She

replied: “For whose sake shall I adorn myself? My husband fasts every day and spends the whole night in prayer. At no time does he pay any attention to me.”

Lady A‘isha (*ra*) reported the matter to the Holy Prophet (*sas*), who immediately sent for the companion and very angrily asked him what kind of behaviour was that. He further told him: “I pray also, and I sleep, too, and sometimes I fast and sometimes I do not.” In other words, he was asking the husband whether he was adopting the strange behaviour of monks. He then ordered him to go home and pay attention to the needs of his wife. When the husband replied that he was fasting at the time, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) commanded him to break the fast.

In short, monkery was born of this absence of balance. Instead, we must accord to Allah, Most High, the rights that are due to Him and do the same to His servants. Further, there must also be harmony in performing our obligations to our fellow human beings. For example, in ministering to the needs of our parents we must not forget our wives and children and vice-versa. Also, we must not be so taken up in giving our friends their due that we forget strangers and vice-versa. Similarly, even within himself, it is extremely important for man to maintain harmony in his moral attributes. For instance, when the time is right for the exercise of love and tenderness, we must do so. However, when circumstance call for harshness, we must exhibit that quality. These are examples of sublime moral behaviour. To be always harsh or always soft-hearted, regardless of the circumstance, cannot be considered high morals.

Thus, the teachings that Allah’s perfect Book brings to us contain an inherent harmony. That is, it embodies a perfect balance between man’s duty to Allah, Most High, and to His servants, as well as in all the mutual social obligations of man in addition to maintaining a balance in the morals of every individual so that justice and equity may be instituted on earth. This is why the verse tells us that Allah, Most High, has sent His apostles with *bayyinaat*, that is, clear arguments and signs, together with the Book and the *mizan*, that is, measure and balance, in order to effect harmony so that justice and equity may reign supreme amongst the peoples of the world.

It is true that the books of all the prophets contain the above characteristic teachings. However, according to the dictates of the age, there was too much harshness in some books whilst in some too much compassion. For example, in response to the demands of the time, we find too much severity in the teachings of Prophet Moses (*as*), whereas the opposite hold good in the age of Prophet Jesus (*as*). However, if there is a Book that can lay claim to inculcating perfect harmony in every age and under any condition or circumstance, that credit can only be given to one Book – the Holy Qur’an – in which the principles of harmony, balance and measure between the Almighty and man, between man and man and within man himself can never be exceeded in excellence. Severity in its proper place and tenderness in the correct setting are so beautifully expounded that it is impossible to find surpassing justice and harmony anywhere else. In addition, every principle is propounded with such wisdom and amplitude that whatever the circumstance of any age or nation, justice can still be established. Thus, according to the true meanings of the word *mizan* (balance and measure) if any Book deserves that title, it is the Holy Qur’an.

In the view of some people, *mizan* refers to the example (*sunnah*) of a prophet. This is an entirely correct interpretation for just as Allah’s Book is the *mizan*, in the same way the prophet who patterns his behaviour according to this Book and so becomes a model for all is indeed an ever-loving, ever-present *mizan*. By his very example he presents to the world a true picture of the harmony and moderation which Allah, Most High, wishes to establish among mankind through His Books. This is why Lady A‘isha in reply to a person who asked her to tell him something of the Holy Prophet’s life and morals said: “His life was the Holy Qur’an.” In other words, what she meant in effect was that if

anyone wanted to discover the sublime morals of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) he should study the Holy Qur'an for whatever equilibrium, harmony and measure the Holy Qur'an intended to imprint in the morals of man are all found in the character of the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

In short, in every attribute and in every circumstance, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) stands out as the perfect example and in every facet of his life the same moderation and harmony that Allah's Book, the Holy Qur'an, wished to institute, are conspicuously present. Thus, it is by means of this Book and this exemplar *par excellence* that justice and equity, peace and freedom of conscience can be established. This is why Bernard Shaw, the famous English writer, was quite correct when he said that if the Holy Prophet (*sas*) were to return to earth, then under his dictatorship all the ills of the world could be solved.

The verse then states, “*And We sent down iron wherein there is great strength and advantages for men.*” After mentioning together the Book and the measure (*mizan*), meaning the Holy Qur'an and the example of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) respectively, the verse immediately mentions the sending down of iron. This close proximity of the Book and iron can raise the question or can cause some anxiety in our minds as to whether there is any mutual relationship between the sending down of the Book and the sending down of iron, that is, whether they both of necessity go together. In attempting to unravel this puzzle, many *maulvis* (religious leaders) have confined the meaning of iron to the sword only because the latter is made of iron. From this, a criterion has been set, namely that to establish Allah's laws on earth the sword is a necessary concomitant. To some extent, in certain circumstances, we can accept the use of the sword, for when there are serious impediments in instituting the Divine laws on earth and the sword is raised to eradicate the religion of Allah, Most High, the believers are forced to resort to the sword as a last resort and only in self-defence. However, the Holy Qur'an has nowhere raised the sword to this level of importance as to make it such a powerful and indispensable means for propagating Allah's religion that wherever there is mention of the sending down of the Book, we are bound to find the sending down of the sword also mentioned. Would this not be a flagrant contradiction of the decisive principle laid down in the Holy Qur'an, “*There is no compulsion in religion*” (2:256)?

In my opinion, when Allah, Most High, says, “*We sent down iron,*” the reference is solely to the Holy Qur'an for in reality this Book is figuratively called *iron*. It is a well-known fact that when two things bear a strong resemblance, then the name of one is given to the other and this is called a metaphorical expression. For example, if we have to praise a person for his bravery we say that that person is as brave as a lion. This is an example of a simile. However, when the intention is to further emphasise the quality of bravery we make a direct comparison and say that that man is a lion. In other words, the name *lion* has been metaphorically attributed to the person and this is known as figurative language. Thus, the aim here is to focus on and make manifest the extraordinary likeness of the Holy Qur'an to iron and so it is metaphorically called iron, and this resemblance has been explained thus: “*In it there is great strength and advantage for men.*”

Let us now turn our attention to the characteristics of iron from the two angles mentioned above.

1. Firstly, the verse refers to this metal's strength which people should fear. Now, every deep-thinking person will realise that the phenomenal power that resides in iron is found in nothing else in the world. It is this very metal from which guns, pistols, cannons, cannon-balls, etc. are all manufactured, and if these are used against an individual it would spell instant death to him. It is also from iron that tanks, warships and warplanes are made and if these are let loose in battle against a nation, they would cause widespread death and destruction. Therefore, whichever nation or individual possesses the above instruments of war, poses a severe danger to an enemy.

2. Secondly, we will now examine the advantages for men that iron possesses. Firstly, if man should consume iron as part of his diet, he will see that there is no other medicine that can give as much vigour and vitality to his body and mind as iron does – not even gold or silver, pearl or ruby. If we consider the diverse types of work for which iron is employed, we will notice that in regard to transportation there is nothing else that can assist in carrying people from one place to the other as conveniences made from iron – railways, and railway engines, motorcars and motorcar engines, aeroplanes and steamships and their engines, bridges, railway lines – in short, whatever useful and beneficial means that exist to give comfort and ease to man in his travel as well as to remove difficulties from his way and afford swift transportation from one destination to the other are all acquired by man by means of iron. In addition, all the machines and factories in the world in which work that formerly took years to accomplish can now be performed in days, and that which took days can now be achieved in minutes. Again, the best and most precious devices on which the world depends for its rest and comfort all come into existence because of iron.

The reason for comparing the Holy Qur'an to iron is to bring into focus the fact that just as in the physical world iron has dangers and benefits for men, similar is the case of the Holy Qur'an in the spiritual realm. This has been made clear before in the expression, "*that men may conduct themselves with equity*", when it was pointed out that this was the purpose of the Holy Qur'an and all other revealed Books with one important difference – the Holy Qur'an, more than any other Book, is the one most perfectly suited to disseminate justice and equity, peace and freedom of conscience throughout the entire world. In addition, more than in any other Book, there are in the Holy Qur'an many distinctive excellences which are compared to iron.

1. Firstly, whatever threatens the implementation of the above-mentioned principles and is bent on making itself an impediment in the propagation of truth and justice in the world will discover that the Holy Qur'an is a dangerous weapon against it as is mentioned in the following verse: "*Nay, We hurl the Truth against falsehood, so it knocks out its brains, and lo! it vanishes*" (21:18).

In other words, there are so many clear arguments in the Holy Qur'an and so many distinctive proofs to counteract falsehood that dishonesty cannot stand up against the Holy Qur'an and it is eventually utterly destroyed. This same point is alluded to in 8:42 of the Holy Qur'an, "*that he who perished by clear argument might perish, and he who lived by clear argument might live ...*".

This is the peculiar distinction of the Holy Qur'an that is referred to in the verse under discussion as *ba'sun shadidun* (great danger), which the Holy Qur'an possesses more than any other heavenly Book: whatever claims it makes, it supports with its own evidence and furnishes inconvertible proofs which substantiate truth and refute and demolish falsehood. This is the unique excellence of the Holy Qur'an which the *Mujaddid* of the Age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad presented to the world with exceeding force and vigour. Thus, when the debate with Father Abdullah Atham in regard to Islam and Christianity took place in Amritsar, he put forward the proposition that he would support whatever arguments he presented from the Holy Qur'an with proofs from the Holy Qur'an itself and he requested that Abdullah Atham should do the same in respect to the Gospels. However, the latter was unable to do so and for fifteen straight days during the debate whatever arguments Hazrat Mirza Sahib produced from the Holy Qur'an were all corroborated by proofs from the Holy Book alone.

2. Secondly, the next distinctive characteristic of the Holy Qur'an is that whoever internalises the teachings of the Holy Qur'an like iron will find it the most efficacious of all tonics he can possibly discover for his spiritual nourishment. The person who imbibes this tonic will develop the strength of

steel to traverse the different stages of spiritual progress as well as the power to confront his enemies. When the late Khwajah Kamal-ud-Din went to England to spread Islam, the pure and holy tenets of this religion aroused such a consternation in the minds of the people of that country that the Christian priests raised a big uproar. Particularly affected was Father Zwemer who was a very hostile enemy of Islam and as a result, with great pomp and flourish, he went to confront the Khwajah in a debate. Just at that time, Khwajah Kamal-ud-Din had a vision in which he saw pieces of iron falling from heaven and entering his body. Simultaneously, he heard a voice announcing, “We sent down iron wherein is great danger and advantages to men” After this, the Khwajah received such profound knowledge and insight from the Holy Qur’an that Father Zwemer had to flee from the debate in disappointment and total disarray. This is the just one aspect of the Holy Qur’an’s advantages to men (*manaafi’u lin-nas*).

The second aspect is that just as a person can travel swiftly in railways, cars and airplanes made from iron, so, too, by means of the Holy Qur’an the spiritual pilgrim can traverse all the stages of spiritual advancement with ease and rapidity. Again, just as machines and factories are made of iron and from them man acquires peace and comfort as well as many useful things with ease and abundance, similarly, through the Holy Qur’an man obtains spiritual fruits and spiritual progress in profusion and with great facility and were he to seek these benefits in any other religion he will find his search futile.

Thus, whoever absorbs the teachings of the Holy Qur’an within his heart and lives according to the principles enunciated therein will definitely acquire spiritual power and strength and will quickly traverse all the stations of his spiritual journey and will also rapidly and copiously enjoy all spiritual fruits and spiritual progress. In addition, whoever uses the Holy Qur’an as a weapon in his confrontation with the enemy of Islam will be sure to triumph over falsehood.

The verse concludes by stating that Allah, Most High, is indeed Strong and Mighty. When He asks believers to make selfless sacrifice so as to help Him and His messengers He has sent to the world, it does not mean that He has any need or necessity. How can He stand in need of anything when His Power and Might are perfect and His overwhelming power over all things is part of His attributes? Instead, His intention is to exalt from amongst the believers those who prove their faith by performing deeds of self-abnegation and sacrifice so that they will become deserving of enormous rewards and gifts from Him in this world and the next.

NOTE

The True Meaning of the Story of Prophet Moses (*as*) and Khidhr

The question of predestination (*taqdir*) is addressed elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an (18:60-82) by means of the story of Prophet Moses (*as*) and Khidhr in which, from one point of view, light is shed on the subject so as to dispel thoughts that sometimes arise in the minds of people because of a lack of understanding of how Allah’s predestined actions operate. For example, we see a poor but noble person suffer losses to his property; we also observe upright and righteous parents lose not only a son, but an only son; or at times we notice evildoers and immoral transgressors benefiting from good fortune. Man is unable to comprehend the reason for these puzzles and thus he falls prey to all kinds of unworthy thoughts concerning Allah, Most High. So, in order to enlighten us on these occurrences the Almighty has narrated the story of Prophet Moses (*as*) and Khidhr in the Holy Qur’an.

Before dealing with the substantive issue itself, there are a few introductory points that must be understood: firstly, what Allah, Most High, has created in the world has been brought into being for a definite purpose and in order to attain this objective, certain rules and regulations have been laid down in advance by following which each organism fulfils the purpose of its creation. In the same way, man himself has to fall under the constraints of laws and regulations if he were to achieve the object of his existence. However, there are some rules and laws in which he cannot interfere in the least, whereas in others he can act according to his will or desire and this is what he actually does in life. The latter is referred to as *tadbir* or planning. Now, since whatever action man performs lies within his capability and also entails the use of his intentions as well, it was incumbent upon Allah, Most High, to provide guidance to man so that he can observe these laws in the correct manner and so avoid the baneful consequences of them if he uses them in the wrong way. This guidance is called *Shari'ah* or Law. On the other hand, those laws and actions on which man's will has no control or influence are referred to as *Taqdir* or Predestination. However, as day and night man has to come into contact with predestined laws, wherever the Holy Qur'an has emphasised strict adherence to the *Shari'ah* (Law) it has also demonstrated to man how to bow to the will of the Almighty or in other words, how to submit to the predestined decrees (*taqdir*) of Allah, Most High. In short, that person is the one who bows patiently to the decrees (*taqdir*) of Allah, Most High, and also walks along the path of the Law (*Shari'ah*) to the best of his ability. Thus, it is incumbent on a Muslim to obey the commands and the prohibitions of the Law as well as reconcile himself to the edicts of the Almighty.

There is no doubt that in order to implement the *Shari'ah* law-bearing prophets have been endowed by Allah, Most High, with a very high degree of knowledge. However, it was not mandatory for them to be aware of the wisdom and sagacity behind certain predetermined actions of the Creator. Instead, in regard to these matters, they have only as much knowledge as Allah, Most High, may choose to vouchsafe to them. That is why even a law-bearing prophet many a time remains as nonplussed as an ordinary individual in the face of certain Divine actions. Generally speaking, as the true reason and wisdom behind Allah's decrees remain hidden from man's eyes, all kinds of doubts and objections begin to arise in his heart. As a result of this behaviour many times even high-ranking people fall into error when confronted with Divine decrees so much so that even Prophet Moses (*as*), a law-bearing prophet, could not escape from displaying amazement and consternation which ultimately led him to raise objections to Khidhr's actions. The reason was that he was looking at those Divine decrees through the spectacles of the Law given to him. So, although Khidhr's actions were correct, yet because the real reason and wisdom underlying them were concealed from Prophet Moses' eyes, every action prompted an objection in his heart. When the reality was disclosed to him, the scales fell from his eyes.

The *Hadith* confirms the fact that when Prophet Moses (*as*) was informed by Allah, Most High, that the most knowledgeable person was the one who sought knowledge from others, he could not contain his enthusiasm to increase his knowledge. Allah, Most High, also desired that in addition to his expertise in the Law, he should be given some deeper understanding of the wisdom behind Divine decrees so that there should be true peace and acceptance in the human heart in regard to Divine actions for that is the description of a true Muslim. Thus, in order to achieve this goal, Allah, Most High, commanded him to proceed to the "junction of two seas" (*majma-ul-bahrain*) where he would meet his teacher. This name "junction of the two seas" was given to this location because it was the confluence of two rivers. However, there was a special purpose for choosing this name for it seems that it was an indication from Allah, Most High, that that place was marked out for Prophet Moses (*as*) to receive insight from two seas: the sea of the knowledge of the *Shari'ah* (law) and the sea of the knowledge of *Taqdir* (Predestination). Thus, when he encountered this latter sea, also known as *Khidhr*, Prophet Moses (*as*)

was told by him in the words of the Holy Qur'an: "*Thou canst not have patience with me. And how canst thou have patience in that whereof thou hast not a comprehensive knowledge?*" (18:67-68).

From this speech we can clearly perceive that these were questions relating to Divine decrees which Khidhr was commanded by Allah, Most High, to perform. As Prophet Moses (*as*) was unaware of the wisdom and intrinsic goodness that permeated those actions, he was consequently unable to exhibit patience during the experience. If we peruse the later verses we shall discover that these were issues pertaining to Divine decrees. To suggest that it was a kind of *Shari'ah* (Law) is false in this commentator's view for no Law gives a person freedom to damage another's boat with the excuse of preventing it from being appropriated by someone else, neither does it give anyone the right to kill a young man under the pretext that when he grew up he would be a wrongdoer, nor does any Law prohibit a person from taking wages for any construction or repairs. So what then is the reason that for a simple little query from Prophet Moses (*as*) about not taking compensation for raising a wall, Khidhr should fly into a rage and take abrupt leave of Prophet Moses (*as*)? There is a reference in the *Hadith* in which it is reported that Khidhr spoke to Prophet Moses (*as*) saying, "O Moses, Allah, Most High, has given me from Himself a type of knowledge that you know nothing of whilst you have received from Him knowledge of which I am ignorant."

This statement makes it clear that Prophet Moses' knowledge was based on a different foundation from that of Khidhr: Prophet Moses' knowledge was based on the *Shari'ah* (Law) whilst Khidhr's was founded on *Taqdir* (Predestination), as a result of which each was bound to be different from the other. As a matter of fact, so mutually contradictory were they that Prophet Moses (*as*) could not restrain his impatience.

Thus, the truth is that it was the Divine will to impart to Prophet Moses (*as*) some understanding of *Taqdir* (Divine decrees) for which, according to age-old practice, he was ordered to cut himself from all affairs and observe complete solitude. Thus, the "*junction of the two seas*" was the place designated for him. There, in a vision, he met a particular angel named Khidhr who was appointed to bring this plan into fruition. It is for this reason that in the Jewish Scriptures this incident is accepted as the *mi'raj* (ascension) of Prophet Moses (*as*) and this interpretation is indeed correct. If this was not a vision, how was it possible for Khidhr to damage a boat in the presence of other travellers and the owner of the vessel and they all witnessed this outrage in complete silence without trying to prevent him or even remonstrating with him? Again, how could he murder a young man and move about as he pleased without even a question being raised by anyone? If one should make the objection that it is not specifically written that this was a vision, then it can be pointed out that the Holy Qur'an also did not state that the *mi'raj* (ascension) of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was a vision. All that is written in the verse is the following: "*Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque whose precincts We blessed, that We might show him Our signs! Surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing*" (17:1).

In addition, when Lady Maryam was visited by an angel with the good news that she would give birth to a son, it is not stated there also that it was a vision. In short, Allah, Most High, did not wish to make the brain of man so ineffective that he would abandon the habit of engaging in deep thinking and meditation.

In this vision some information on the subject of Divine knowledge was given to Prophet Moses (*as*). Divine actions, which man on most occasions is unable to comprehend, were divided into three segments and were shown to him. In the first segment, the question as to why a poor but virtuous man should suffer damage to his property is expounded. (He had to sustain a small loss to forestall a much

greater privation in the future.) Under this same category can be classed all those losses of property and wealth which an innocent man has to endure. In fact, on many occasions, a very indigent person is afflicted by severe losses to his property and one is at a loss to discern why the Almighty places so great a trial on such a poor person.

The second episode explains why even righteous people sometimes have to endure pain and agony without any apparent cause. For example, pious parents lose not only a son, but an only one. (Allah, Most High, knows the future and so He knew what pain this son would have caused his virtuous parents. As a result of their patient resignation to the will of their Creator, He compensated them with a huge reward in the gift of a righteous son.)

The third event reveals the reason why sometimes even wicked and transgressing people enjoy benefits from Allah, Most High, and more so, even unseen help falls to their lot so much so that a wise man, too, is at a loss to understand why these evil people are given all this hidden assistance. (This help was not intended for the wicked ones but for some of their poor but righteous relations of whom Allah, Most High, alone knew. These innocent ones were the real object of the hidden assistance for sinful ones do not profit from the assistance of the Almighty. So, whenever evil ones are seen to get help, it is really not for them but for some deserving ones among them. These are known only by Allah, Most High, and at first sight, ordinary people cannot perceive the wisdom of the Creator's actions. As proof of this, the Holy Qur'an repeatedly asks us to compare the end of the wicked with that of the righteous – the good end is only for the God-conscious.)

The three sections of this subject encompass all those Divine decrees which regularly beset man and cause him such puzzlement that many a time he falls into error and thinks ill of the Almighty. All these events were shown to Prophet Moses (*as*) in a vision and all those objections and doubts that are apt to arise in the heart of man also sprang up in his mind. Then the wisdom and the true reality of each occurrence were disclosed to him so that man, in general, would realise that when it comes to Divine actions, nothing that the Almighty does is devoid of good reason or wisdom. Of course, it is true that human beings are ignorant of this fact and thus this lack of understanding generates all kinds of objections and doubts in their hearts. Consequently, the true servant should keep in mind his own limited knowledge in the face of Allah's perfect and all-encompassing knowledge and refrain from entertaining evil thoughts about his Creator. Instead, he should develop beautiful thoughts of the Almighty and should know that every Divine action is based on the highest level of wisdom. To reconcile oneself and submit to the decrees of Allah, Most High, helps a servant to perfect his religion. Just as to accept and obey what is permissible and to reject what is prohibited constitute a major branch of Islam, so, too, to reconcile oneself and bow in patient resignation to the decrees of the Almighty form another very great branch of the religion. When these two branches are combined, the result is the perfection of Islam as we are told in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an: "*Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others), he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve*" (2:112).

SECTION IV

In the concluding verses of the last section, it has clearly been pointed out that whatever Book a messenger of Allah, Most High, brought to the world was intended to entrench the principles of justice and moderation among people. These ideals are called the straight path (*sirat-ul-mustaqim*) which will lead man to his desired destination if he walks steadily along it.

This section now warns us that if we deviate from the teachings of this Book by going to extremes, it will lead us away from the straight path and whoever is guilty of this can never reach his goal. Thus, if we disobey the guidance given to us in Allah's Book or we fall short (*tafrit*) in our observance of it, we stand accused of a very serious blunder. Similarly, if we go beyond the limits set for us by Allah's Book and commit excesses (*ifrat*) so that we upset the tenets of equity and balance in our lives, we will become guilty of a very grave error. Thus, it is the example of Allah's Messengers that provides us with the true criterion of justice and harmony. Therefore, if we imitate them closely and obey their exhortations to sacrifice selflessly in Allah's way, we shall become worthy recipients of His bounties and favours in this world and the next.

26. *And certainly We sent Noah and Abraham, and We gave prophethood and the Book to their offspring; so among them is he who goes aright, but most of them are transgressors.*

The Children of Israel and the family of Prophet Ishmael (*as*) have a common ancestor. Their most illustrious predecessor was Prophet Noah (*as*) who was an extremely eminent and glorious prophet of centuries past. Prophet Abraham (*as*) was a descendant of his family and in grandeur and dignity he ranked very high among all prophets. As a matter of fact, during his ascension (*mi'raj*) the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) saw Prophet Abraham (*as*) in the sixth heaven – higher than all the other prophets. With the advent of Prophet Abraham (*as*), this single family line that came down straight from Prophet Noah (*as*) was split into two groups. This came about because he had two sons, Prophet Isaac (*as*) and Prophet Ishmael (*as*). From Prophet Isaac (*as*) came Prophet Jacob (*as*), who was given the nickname of Israel which means soldier or servant of the Almighty and he was the progenitor of the Israelites. On the other side, the Ishmaelites were descended from Prophet Ishmael (*as*). Although many prophets arose from among the Children of Israel, they were all national prophets. However, the family of Ishmael was gifted with only one prophet – the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) – who was the last prophet of Allah, Most High, and who was also sent to all the nations of the world as the Holy Qur'an states, "*And We have not sent thee but as a bearer of good news and as a warner to all mankind, but most men know not*" (34:28).

Every nation in the world had its own prophet as the Holy Qur'an testifies, "... *And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them*" (35:24).

However, although the focus here is to emphasise the fact by way of analogy that the Book of Allah, Most High, is the *mizan* (balance and measure), and also to warn mankind about this truth; and although it is also stressed that to go to extremes in following the Book is to court disappointment and loss, yet to drive home this point only those prophets whose historical authenticity is not veiled by doubt or ambiguity are chosen. In fact, those messengers spent their lives in the presence of all the people and it is a generally accepted fact that unless an example is self-evident and transparent it cannot exert influence over others. This is why after mentioning Prophet Noah (*as*) and Prophet Abraham (*as*) and the chain of prophethood and Books among their posterity, the verse calls to attention the consequence that all those who conducted themselves according to the Divine teachings they brought and completely fulfilled and instilled the principles of justice and moderation enshrined in the Books of Allah, Most High, received guidance and so enjoyed success and prosperity and also attained their cherished goal. On the other hand, those who rejected these teachings or fell short in their observance of them with the result that they could not fulfil the Divinely-designated measure of equity and harmony were deemed to be transgressors. In other words, as their morals and actions ran contrary to the pleasure and will of the Almighty and were not based on justice and moderation, they were called evil ones or transgressors.

Human beings all share the same passions and emotions. However, when these emotions are manifested according to the laws of equity and temperance and in the proper time and place, they are called high morals and righteousness. On the contrary, when they are practised in contravention to the above principles, they fall into the category of evil deeds. For example, anger, when used on the proper occasion is transformed into bravery, courage and honour which are all noble qualities. If the same anger, though, is employed inappropriately, it can very well result in evils like murder, brutality and bloodshed. Also, if gentleness is exhibited in the right time and place, it will be considered as forbearance, politeness, humility and meekness. On the contrary, if it is displayed on the wrong occasion, it will be regarded as something dishonourable, shameless, cowardly and weak-hearted.

Once, a person addressed the *Khalifah* ‘Umar (*ra*) thus: “O *Khalifah*, in the days of Ignorance, you possessed a fiery temper. What is the situation now?”

To this ‘Umar replied: “In those days my temper was used inappropriately. Now, I employ it in the right time and place.”

Thus, today, there are many people who are negligent of the principles of equity and harmony and become transgressors whilst there are many, too, who fear the Almighty and act in conformity with the guidance He has sent down for man. Let us now consider the case of those who take pride and exult in their abundance of worldly possession.

27. Then We made Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We made Jesus son of Mary to follow, and We gave him the Gospel. And We put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. And (as for) monkery, they innovated it — We did not prescribe it to them — only to seek Allah’s pleasure, but they did not observe it with its due observance. So We gave those of them who believed their reward, but most of them are transgressors.

In the expression ‘*ala athaarihim* – in their footsteps – the personal pronoun *him* meaning “them” is used in reference to Prophet Noah (*as*) and Prophet Abraham (*as*) but instead of the dual form, the plural is used in order to indicate that besides them, there were many other contemporaneous messengers. The meaning is that in that age, Prophet Noah (*as*) and Prophet Abraham (*as*) were not the only messengers. Instead, there were many messengers in various regions of the world. In this context, the Children of Israel are mentioned and the verse says that Allah, Most High, raised many prophets from the family of Prophet Abraham (*as*) and sent them to the Israelites until, with the advent of Prophet Jesus (*as*), son of Mary, this chain of Israelite prophethood came to an end.

After this, the teachings of Prophet Jesus (*as*) are specially mentioned here so as to emphasise the point that just as to be deficient in following the path ordained by the Almighty constitutes a sin, so, too, to go to excess and to deviate from the straight path makes a person a transgressor. According to the demand of that particular age, that is, taking into consideration the stone-heartedness of the Jews, Prophet Jesus (*as*) was given teachings that were geared towards fostering deep feelings of tenderness and compassion in the hearts of people. The purpose was to counteract and reform the attitude of hard-heartedness amongst the Jews and their penchant towards harshness and callousness. From the point of view of the circumstances prevailing in his time, the teachings of Prophet Jesus (*as*) were required to restore the measure of balance and justice in the society. Unfortunately, later on, when his followers exaggerated in carrying out these precepts of softness of heart and mercy, the inevitable result was the institution of monkery, or, in other words, the abandonment of the world. This was indeed an innovation which was non-existent in the message of the Almighty.

Nevertheless, they took this path of monasticism and thought to themselves that they were doing a wonderful thing by forsaking every luxury and even the basic comforts of the world for the sake of the Almighty. The consequence of this was entirely predictable in that except for a few among them, the majority were unable to fulfil this onerous task and thus all kinds of dark and sinful actions sprang up in their midst with the result that many of them became transgressors.

To observe the teachings of the Book of Allah, Most High, is not difficult for these teachings are given to suit the constitution and requirements of human nature. They do not aim at the eradication of man's inborn passions and desires, but are intended to help him to use these emotions in the correct manner.

Thus, monkery can never be a part of Allah's guidance to man for how can He give teachings that contradict the nature in which He, Himself, created man? For example, if abstaining from marriage were such a magnificent virtue why, then, did the Almighty create the genital organs of men and women and place in their hearts mutual attraction? Further, if working for a livelihood and spending one's life in families and national communities were alien to the Divine will, what is the purpose for reposing all these instincts and capabilities in the nature of man? Thus, if one were to belie human nature and refrain from training man to use his emotions in the right manner and instead offer teachings that amount to the eradication of the natural passions of man, then only a few isolated people will be able to comply. The majority will be unable to do so and under the pressing demands of their nature they will make efforts to satisfy them in surreptitious and unlawful ways. That is why sinful habits have seeped into the behaviour of many monks and nuns. To this effect, the verse states that from among them those who have faith, that is, who prove their faith by doing righteous deeds, will surely receive their reward, for Allah, Most High, does not waste the reward of anyone – whether male or female. However, the inescapable concomitant of this excess and exaggeration is that many from among them become transgressors. That is, they are embroiled in evil deeds.

By saying, “*We did not prescribe it to them,*” Allah, Most High, wishes to point out that He never enjoined the institution of monkery. Of course, what He really ordained for man was that he should always keep in mind the imperative to seek the pleasure and approbation of the Almighty, and this can be accomplished only if he conducts himself according to the Divinely-revealed teachings of balance, justice and moderation in his life, for this is the straight path which will enable him to win the pleasure of his Lord. This is also called heaven which can be attained if he walks along the prescribed path. Man should also remember that just as deficiency in good deeds is a sin, so, too, is excess or exaggeration and that it is his duty to employ all his passions and emotions with justice and equity and in the right time and place for only by doing so will he gain the pleasure of his Lord.

At this juncture, we must take into consideration an important point, and that is the term *innovation* (*bid'at*). It cannot be ascribed to every single thing that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) might not have done. Indeed, innovation refers to the introduction into the religion or the institution of any custom that is not supported by the Holy Qur'an or the *Sunnah* (way of life) of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). Every day, there are continuous changes relating to food, drink and clothing. These cannot be called innovations. Similarly, every day there are hundreds of inventions in the world. These, too, cannot be regarded as innovations. Instead, innovation is the introduction into the religion or the establishment of any tradition that goes counter to the Holy Qur'an or the practice of the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

28. O you who believe, keep your duty to Allah and believe in His Messenger — He will give you two portions of His mercy, and give you a light in which you shall walk, and forgive you. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful —

By *kiflaini* – two portions – is meant a portion in this life and one in the next. That is, true believers are promised success and prosperity in the two worlds and this is in keeping with the supplication which the Holy Qur'an has taught the believers, “*Our Lord, grant us good in this world and the Hereafter and save us from the chastisement of the Fire*” (2:201).

Wherever failure rears its ugly head, whether in this life or the hereafter, it brings in its wake a fire that covers the heart of man. Therefore, in this prayer, we are advised to make petition to Allah, Most High, for success and happiness in this world and the next.

Taqwa (righteousness or keeping one's duty) means to guard the rights of others. That is, to save oneself from being remiss in fulfilling our Divinely-ordained duties to Allah, Most High, and His servants.

In the last two verses, particular emphasis was laid on upholding the principles of justice and moderation prescribed by the Almighty as well as avoiding extremes in our conduct – either of deficiency or excess. Now, the spotlight is on the believers who are exhorted to develop *taqwa*, that is, to keep our duty to Allah, Most High, and to His creation according to the laws He has laid down in the Holy Qur'an. We are also urged to believe in the Holy Prophet (*sas*). That is, we must never forget the example of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and just as he patterned his life on the Holy Qur'an we must do the same for these are the two methods by means of which we can institute the right measure of justice and harmony in our lives and also protect ourselves from extremes in our conduct. In short, obedience to the Holy Qur'an and imitation of the *sunnah* (practice) of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) are the two ways which can assist us to walk steadfastly on the straight path and so gain the pleasure of our Lord.

In short, we are reminded that the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (practice) of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) help us not only to keep on the straight path but in so doing also protect us from indulging in excesses or falling short in our duties to Allah, Most High and His servants for they impress in our hearts and our behaviour the proper measure, balance and moderation. We should, therefore, heed the call of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) to sacrifice for the sake of Allah, Most High, and verify our faith by righteous deeds. This will attract the mercy of the Almighty to ourselves and He will give us a share of prosperity and success in this life and the next for the Holy Qur'an comprises two kinds of teachings: it does not like us to violate the laws of the Almighty, neither does it consider going to extremes either of deficiency (*tafrit*) or exaggeration (*ifrat*) like monasticism, for instance, as acts worthy of praise and commendation.

At this point, I cannot refrain from citing the evidence of people gifted with spiritual insight whose experiences prove that Allah, Most High, certainly comes to the assistance of any servant who wishes to lead a virtuous life with one precondition: there must be no insincerity in the heart of the person for it has never been the case that Allah, Most High, has refused to assist a servant who sincerely desires to do good deeds. Wherever the help and support of the Almighty are not forthcoming to a would-be doer of good, it is because purity of intention is non-existent in that person's heart.

29. *That the People of the Book may know that they control naught of the grace of Allah, and that grace is in Allah's hand. He gives it to whom He pleases. And Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.*

The People of the Book, that is, the Jews, entertained the idea that prophethood would remain forever in the lineage of Prophet Jacob (*as*) but Allah, Most High, desired otherwise – His will was that the last

prophet should come from the family of Prophet Ishmael (*as*). This is why the Jews were unwilling to abandon their scriptures and accept the Holy Prophet (*sas*). To furnish them with comprehensive proofs, it was essential to prove that the Holy Qur'an was really needed and also to demonstrate without the shadow of doubt the excellence and superiority of this Book over all other heavenly scriptures. Although the grandeur, beauty and perfection of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, together with the sending down of celestial signs and irrefutable arguments in its support all bespoke for themselves the veracity of this last Divine Book, yet these proofs were not enough. Instead, the necessity for any newly revealed Book and the most perspicuous proof of its truth and the most convincing influence it can exert on others are derived from the impression it creates in the hearts and behaviour of its followers. However, that impression can never be generated until they model their life on the teachings of this Book.

This is why, as believers, we are instructed to develop *taqwa* (righteousness and observance of duty). That is, we should act according to the Divinely-revealed guidance of the Holy Qur'an and we should believe in Allah's Messenger by following his example and by obeying his exhortations to do deeds of goodness and to perform acts of selfless sacrifice so that we could reap success in this life and the next. We are also promised that if we do so we will become possessors of kingship in both worlds as well as inheritors of unlimited progress and success. But more than that, we are promised a light that will illuminate the world and through this resplendent impact, the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (practice) of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) will serve as the definitive proof for the People of the Book so that they will be forced to admit that true grace lies not in their power and so they cannot withhold it from other nations. Instead, grace lies in the hand of Allah, Most High, and He gives it to whom He pleases.

Thus, by Allah's favour, prophethood was not confined to the Children of Israel but was also given to the family of Prophet Ishmael (*as*) and the Book that was vouchsafed to them created a revolution of such magnitude that leaving aside heavenly teachings, no other teaching had been able to inspire the like. As a matter of fact, the teachings of that book worked such a miraculous change in the behaviour of people that all the previously revealed scriptures could not match its grandeur. Proof of this comes from Sir William Muir, a hostile critic of Islam, who was forced to admit in writing, "From time beyond memory, Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steeped in spiritual torpor. The slight transient influences of Judaism, Christianity, or philosophical inquiry upon the Arab mind had been as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice ... Their religion was a gross idolatry; and their faith the dark superstitious dread of useless things ..." (*Life of Mahomet*, ch. vii).

On the other hand, the teachings of the Holy Qur'an raised such a wondrous wind of change that in the short space of twenty-three years a people who were sunk in idolatry, ignorance and bestiality were transformed not only into a civilised and cultured nation, but more than that, they became a God-fearing and Unitarian people. The British Encyclopaedia pays tribute to this fact when it states that of all the religious personalities that came to the world, the most successful was the Arab Prophet, Muhammad (*sas*).

All this success hinged on acting according to the commands of the Holy Qur'an and imitating the example of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) as well as making selfless sacrifice for the defence and propagation of this way of life. All of the Companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) performed so faithfully that when we behold the incalculable material and spiritual advancement, success and prosperity they enjoyed in this life and the boons they will most certainly enjoy, if Allah wills, in the next life, the following confession bursts involuntarily from our lips: *Wal-Lahu dhul-fadlil-'azim* (And Allah is the Lord of Mighty grace).