



Realities of Faith

Umm Muhammad

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

FORWARD

تَبَرَّكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ. الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ
عَمَلًا ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

***"Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent – [He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed."*¹**

* * * * *

Realities of faith have always been reflected in human excellence. Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) stated, *"I have been sent to perfect the noble traits of character."*² There is no shortage of proofs in the Qur'ān and Prophetic Sunnah of the fact that morality, both public and private, is an integral part of faith and worship and will be a deciding factor in determining any individual's destiny in the Hereafter.

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

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

***Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah and what has come down of the truth? And let them not be like those who were given the Scripture before, and a long period passed over them, so their hearts hardened; and many of them are defiantly disobedient.*³**

¹Sūrah al-Mulk, 67:1-2.

²Al-Bukhārī.

³Sūrah al-Hādeed, 57:16.

Awakening (at-Tanbeeh)

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

"Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant."⁴

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

"Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him."⁵

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَآتِيَةٌ

"And We have not created the heavens and earth and that between them except in truth. And indeed, the Hour is coming."⁶

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

"And if Allah were to impose blame on the people for what they have earned, He would not leave upon it [i.e., the earth] any creature. But He defers them for a specified term."⁷

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

"O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow – and fear Allah."⁸

* * * * *

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

The lifetime is a short journey through one aspect of creation. Its length is not our concern, for Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* has determined it according to His own knowledge and will, making it entirely adequate for every soul to establish whatever will be a witness for it on the Day of Judgement.

A further mercy to mankind is that every new beginning nullifies all that preceded it, be it disbelief, sin, or mere failure to make the best use of one's time and resources. The Messenger of

⁴ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:72.

⁵ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:41.

⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥijr, 15:85.

⁷ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:45.

⁸ Sūrah al-Ḥashr, 59:18.

Allah (ﷻ) affirmed, "Islam destroys what was before it, and repentance destroys what was before it."⁹ What greater generosity could there be than that of Allah *ta'ālā*, who, after mentioning the eternal humiliation and punishment of those who commit the gravest sins, adds:

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

"...Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful."¹⁰

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

أَوْ مَن كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَن مَّثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِّنْهَا

"And is one who was dead and We gave him life and made for him light by which to walk among the people like one who is in darkness, never to emerge therefrom?"¹¹

⁹Muslim and Aḥmad.

¹⁰Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:70.

¹¹Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:122.

Taking Account of the Self (al-Muḥāsabah)

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

"Alif, Lām, Meem. Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe' and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars."¹²

* * * * *

The duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is especially difficult when practiced on one's own self. Familiarity takes the edge off of criticism; and the Shayṭān is ever prepared to defend the erring soul with countless excuses, for this is his last stronghold and he will never abandon it willingly. When the Shayṭān loses hope of affecting a believer's deeds or speech, he seeks to invade the heart and strike at the root of righteousness – intention. By corrupting the intention, he will win the soul; by injecting it with *shirk*,¹³ he will make it unacceptable to Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*, because in His sight, "Deeds are only according to intentions."¹⁴ A sensitive believer who knows the weaknesses of the soul can be on guard against whisperings of the Shayṭān and not lose sight of "*aṣ-Ṣīrāt al-Mustaqīm*."

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

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

"And have shown him the two ways."¹⁵

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

1. The light of wisdom – the light by which Allah has enlightened the hearts of those who follow the teachings of the prophets
2. The ability to discern between blessings and trials in what Allah has provided, i.e., one's wealth, time, skills, opportunities, influence, etc. – That which is used in ways pleasing to Allah contains blessings and benefit, but that which is used otherwise will be evidence against the soul on the Day of Judgement.
3. Suspicion of the self, which leads to a more complete inspection – For indeed, none will harbor a negative thought about his own soul except one who knows it well, while one who thinks well of his soul is most ignorant of himself.¹⁶

¹²Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt, 29:1-3.

¹³Associating another with Allah, attributing His characteristics to others beside Him, invoking other than Him or obeying others instead of Him.

¹⁴Part of a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁵Sūrah al-Balad, 90:10.

¹⁶Words of Ibn al-Qayyim in *Madārīj as-Sālikeen*.

Except for the most private forms of worship, most of our deeds are observed by others and judged by them. However, Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* is concerned with what is in the heart. "Allah does not look to your bodies or your faces, but He looks to your hearts and deeds."¹⁷ The quantity of deeds is therefore less important than the quality (how and why). No matter what the impression of our fellow men, the true intention behind every word and action is known only by Allah, and it is He who judges from the position of absolute familiarity with every soul and every circumstance.

يَعْلَمُ خَائِنَةَ الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَا تُخْفِي الصُّدُورُ

"He knows that which deceives the eyes and what the breasts conceal."¹⁸

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

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ

"And know that Allah knows what is within yourselves, so beware of Him."¹⁹

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

"And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that to Him you will be gathered."²⁰

فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْسِّرَّ وَالْخَفَى

"Indeed, He knows the secret and what is [even] more hidden."²¹

فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَى

"So do not claim yourselves to be pure; He is most knowing of who fears Him."²²

وَإِنْ تُبْدُوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ

"Whether you show what is within yourselves or conceal it, Allah will bring you to account for it."²³

These verses were alarming to the Prophet's companions. Because of their intense devotion and their consciousness of Allah, they often worried about certain thoughts and feelings that came to them, repeatedly asking the Prophet (ﷺ) about them until they were finally reassured, "Allah has overlooked for me in my community that which occurs to their minds as long as they neither speak of it nor act upon it."²⁴ The pious companions and their followers were the most critical of their own souls, always seeking to correct themselves in anticipation of the Judgement; and indeed, they were the best of the community. After the Prophet (ﷺ) had confided to Ḥudhayfah

¹⁷ Muslim.

¹⁸ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:19.

¹⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:235.

²⁰ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:24.

²¹ Sūrah Ṭā Hā, 20:7. More hidden than the secret are man's innermost thoughts and intentions.

²² Sūrah an-Najm, 53:32.

²³ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:284.

²⁴ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.

the names of some of the hypocrites, 'Umar asked him fearfully, "Am I among them?" Thus, when Allah wishes good for His servant, He makes him aware of his own faults.

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

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا

"Indeed, the Shayṭān is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy."²⁵

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

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

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

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

"So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord – let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone."²⁶

3. *Shirk*²⁷ destroys any good deeds a person may have done, no matter how great or numerous. And this also is affirmed clearly:

لَنْ أَشْرَكَتَ لِيَحْبَطَ عَمَلُكَ

"If you should associate [anything] with Allah, your work would surely become worthless."²⁸

A lesser form of *shirk* is showing one's deeds to others or speaking about them in order to gain respect or some other worldly benefit. This kind of "showing off" is called hidden *shirk* because it is not usually evident to others. In fact, the Prophet (ﷺ) described it as "*more hidden*

²⁵ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:6.

²⁶ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:110.

²⁷ Directing worship in the form of good works to other than Allah.

²⁸ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:65.

than the creeping of ants."²⁹ Only the sincere believer recognizes hidden *shirk* and feels pain and sadness if he should succumb to it from time to time; but others practice it continually, without even being aware of it. They are the ones who have forgotten Allah to such an extent that the opinions of people become all-important.

Showing off, when done consciously and purposely, nullifies the deed and can lead to punishment. The Prophet (ﷺ) has stated that the first to be condemned on the Day of Judgement will be a martyr, a *qāri'* (a reciter of the Qur'ān), and a giver of charity. When each of them comes before his Lord declaring that his great work was done for Him, he will be told, "You have lied." Allah will say to the martyr, "You fought to be called brave, and it was said." And He will say to the reciter, "You learned and taught to be called a scholar, and you recited to be called a *qāri'*"; and it was said." And to the charitable one, "You spent to be called generous, and it was said." Then it will be commanded that each be dragged on his face and thrown into the Fire.³⁰ Thus, when a person seeks a worldly result, preferring it to the reward of Allah, he can no longer expect that reward in the Hereafter.

In another ḥadīth it is related: "If someone makes himself heard, Allah will make heard [that which he concealed]; and if someone shows off, Allah will expose him."³¹ This indicates that those who make their deeds known with the intention of being recognized in this world will be exposed by Allah on the Day of Judgement when they are most in need of His acceptance.

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

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

Undoubtedly, there are those who reason that if a deed is done initially with the intention of reward in the Hereafter, then what harm is there in looking for a worldly benefit in it as well? But Allah has disclosed in a ḥadīth *qudsī*, "*I am the most self-sufficient of partners, needing no partnership; so if one does a deed for Me and for another [simultaneously], then I am disassociated from it, and it is [only] for the [other] partner.*"³²

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

- Mentioning one's good works after their completion
- Taking pride inwardly in one's deeds or even in one's sincerity
- Performing righteous works because of pleasure found in them (other than the pleasure of serving Allah)

²⁹ Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim – ṣaḥeeḥ.

³⁰ Abridged from a ḥadīth narrated by Muslim, at-Tirmidhī and an-Nasā'ī.

³¹ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.

³² Muslim and Ibn Mājah. A ḥadīth *qudsī* is a revelation from Allah reported in the words of the Prophet (ﷺ).

- Showing that which reveals much worship on the body or in the voice (other than speech)
- Being unhappy if one's charity or help is not appreciated by the recipient – Appreciation and reward should be expected only from Allah.
- Finding acts of worship easier to perform if others are aware of them and experiencing pleasure in others' observance of these acts

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

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

- Accepting thanks or praise for some good which one has done – The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "That is an immediate sign of good tidings for the believer."³³ It is merely a preview of what awaits him in the Hereafter, but on the condition that it subsequently does not go to his head. There is no harm in fame gained by a person who does not seek it, but he must take care that it does not corrupt his soul.
- Accepting payment for a job done initially seeking reward from Allah – Such is the case of one who chooses a certain vocation for which there is a need in the community while he could just as well earn his living in some other way.
- Wearing good clothes – This is not blameworthy unless it is done in conceit, for the purpose of showing off or involves extravagance and waste. As stated in a ḥadīth: "When Allah blesses His servant with a blessing, He likes to see it upon him."³⁴
- Setting a good example for others (as a means of teaching)

One should remember the following two points as well:

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

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

- Remember the greatness of Allah and then the insignificance of the world and its impermanent state. Remember that the ultimate source of all benefit and harm to yourself and all beings is Allah. If you fear blame, fear the blame of Allah; and if you seek praise, hope for the praise of Allah. Remember that Allah looks into your heart. Imagine your state if you should die while committing a sin, either openly or secretly – just imagine the humiliation of exposure before all creation on the Day of Judgement. Remember the certainty of death and the shortness of life. Remember the punishment of the grave and that of the Hellfire. Hope for the blessings of Paradise and the pleasure of Allah.
- Once you are aware of your mistake, turn to Allah in earnest repentance, asking forgiveness and correcting yourself thereafter. Always be on guard and ask Allah to help you to avoid

³³ Muslim.

³⁴ Aṭ-Ṭabarānī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

falling into such errors in the future. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught his companions this supplication.

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

*"O Allah, we seek refuge in You from associating with You anything we know of, and we ask Your forgiveness for that which we do not know."*³⁵

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

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

"Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us and grant us from Yourself mercy. Indeed, You are the Bestower."³⁶

³⁵ Aḥmad.

³⁶ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:8.

Repentance (at-Tawbah)

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

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

"And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed."³⁷

يَتَّيِبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا

"O you who have believed, repent to Allah with sincere repentance."³⁸

And He warns:

وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

"And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers."³⁹

And He affirms:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

"Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."⁴⁰

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

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

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

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

"...And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sin. And who can forgive sins except Allah?"⁴¹

A prerequisite to repentance is the knowledge and admission of sin, for ignorance and denial are barriers, preventing return. Knowledge of the consequences of sin, both in this world and in the next, will make one most anxious to escape the result of his carelessness. And where can he find refuge and protection from that except with Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā*? Therefore, one

³⁷ Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:31.

³⁸ Sūrah at-Taḥreem, 66:8.

³⁹ Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:11.

⁴⁰ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:222.

⁴¹ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:135.

should consider the reason he fell into sin, which is that he, at least temporarily, forgot Allah. And when a servant forgets Him and drifts away, Allah removes His protection from that soul, leaving him to depend only upon himself. Thus he becomes prey to his own desires and to the Shayṭān. If he had remembered his Lord at the time of temptation, he would have retained Allah's protection from sin. Indeed, every moment of his life, man is in one of two states: either that of remembrance, holding fast to Allah and thereby placing his soul under His custody, or that of forgetfulness, breaking away from the protective custody of Allah.

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

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

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

"No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning."⁴²

Concerning this, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained, "When the servant commits a sin, a black mark is etched onto his heart, but if he ceases and asks Allah's forgiveness, then his heart is wiped clean. If, however, he repeats it, then it [i.e., the black stain] increases until it eventually envelops the heart. This is the stain which Allah has mentioned in His Book."⁴³ Qur'ānic commentators describe the stain as sin upon sin, which finally blackens the heart until no light of truth can penetrate into it and until the soul subsequently rejects truth and guidance altogether. The greatest sins, however, are those done publicly. It is then that the offending soul is either in open rebellion against Allah or complete disbelief.

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

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

"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.'"⁴⁴

Since repentance is accepted only from a Muslim submitting himself to Allah, the repentance of a nonbeliever or one who has committed *shirk* is accomplished by his entry or re-entry into Islam. Moreover, since it is, in fact, a return to Allah, repentance requires a knowledge of Him and the knowledge that the erring soul has been very distant from Him. Such a soul has been a prisoner of its enemy, Shayṭān, due to its unawareness of Allah and its own insolence. Thus, it requires an extensive search into how and why that came about and an acceptance of the

⁴² Sūrah al-Muṭaffifeen, 83:14.

⁴³ Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhī and an-Nasā'ī – ḥasan.

⁴⁴ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:53.

knowledge that there can be no excuse for disobedience after an order or prohibition is known.⁴⁵ It also requires a realization that true repentance is a difficult task, demanding great effort and consciousness, and that the effort must be in direct proportion to the distance of one's deviation from the Straight Path.

Repentance is subject to certain conditions: regret, cessation, apology and rectification. When all of them are met, the servant is considered to have returned to Allah and to the state of worship for which he was created.⁴⁶ Each condition will be examined briefly:

1. Regret and remorse must replace the acceptance and satisfaction which allow the continuation of a sin. It is pain felt in the heart at a loss for which there is personal responsibility – a loss that could have been prevented. In this case, it refers to the loss of Allah's protection and the nearness to Him which gives peace of mind. In addition, there is fear following the realization of the seriousness of that offense that has damaged the soul and of the severe penalty of the Hereafter, which can only be avoided through Allah's mercy. As with the loss of a dear one or of a valuable friendship, pain is evident in prolonged sorrow and weeping. The offender wishes intensely that he had never committed such an error and desperately seeks some means to amend the situation.

2. Cessation is imperative. Repentance is not possible while one is still committing the sin. In fact, persistence in a small sin increases it until it carries the weight of a great sin. The offender must desist immediately, determining not to return to that offense ever again. If, however, through human weakness and in spite of earnest effort one should again fall into the same sin, he must repent again and renew his resolve to avoid that error, for Allah never refuses sincere repentance.

3. Apology to Allah is in order. Sin acts as a barrier between man and his Lord; therefore, one must seek forgiveness through repeated prayer and supplication, humbly admitting to Allah his weakness, his need for His mercy and protection, and the gravity of what he has done. Begging Allah to accept his repentance and to return him to His grace through His generosity, the servant is most acutely aware of his dependence and fallibility. After having been seduced into disobedience by Shayṭān, our father and prophet, Ādam, was taught words of repentance by Allah:

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

"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers."⁴⁷

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

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim points out that one who neglects the right of his Lord, blaming his sin on divine decree to absolve himself of responsibility, has committed an additional offense. Would he himself accept this argument from a disobedient wife or from someone who had cheated him? On the contrary, his anger would be further increased by such an excuse so obviously out of place. Yet, he readily uses the same reasoning against Allah *ta'ālā*, who is far above any injustice. See *Tah-dheeb Madārij as-Sālikeen*, page 127.

⁴⁶ Allah says: "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (Adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56)

⁴⁷ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:23.

short, any lawful means of worship. And always, an excellent deed in the sight of Allah is one which benefits others in some way. Indeed, such acts are expiation for sins:

إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ

"Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds."⁴⁸

As for injury done to another party (which is disobedience to Allah as well), the damage must be restored or adequately compensated for whenever possible, or the forgiveness of the other party must be obtained.⁴⁹ For example, if property has been taken in an unlawful manner or damaged, it must be returned or replaced (even if this might involve a long search for someone wronged years ago, or if he has died, for his heirs). In the case of harm done by word of mouth (as through false witness or slander), one must make the utmost effort to right this wrong by confessing openly and asking forgiveness of the victim. If it is thought that (as in some cases of backbiting and gossip of which the victim is unaware) admission might lead to further problems, one should certainly take care to speak well of that person on future occasions and ask forgiveness from Allah. Sometimes it is not possible to restore a right completely, due to the enormity of the offense or the inaccessibility of the victim. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the offender to do good deeds which will benefit the injured party or his heirs. If that, too, is impossible, then he can at least continue to make supplication for the injured party, asking Allah to benefit him (or them) where he himself has failed.

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

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

"Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy: that any of you who does wrong out of ignorance⁵⁰ and then repents after that and corrects himself – indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful."⁵¹

Yet how easy is repentance of the tongue alone! It would therefore be suspect if sadness is fleeting and quickly forgotten, if pleasure is felt upon remembering the sin, if determination to reform is weak, and if one is immediately satisfied that he has repented and does not increase in righteousness as a result. Repentance is unacceptable if done for any reason other than the fear of Allah, such as outward appearance, avoidance of blame by others, lack of means to continue the sin, or loss of desire due to contentment, illness or age. In truth, one should beware lest his repentance be defaulted.

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

⁴⁸Sūrah Hūd, 11:114.

⁴⁹Legal punishments for certain crimes serve not only to benefit society but to completely purify a soul which has repented for that sin to Allah. But for an unrepentant soul (or one who regrets only from fear of worldly punishment), legal retribution will not lessen the extreme punishments of the Hereafter.

⁵⁰A believer would not commit wrong deliberately – only through unawareness or forgetfulness.

⁵¹Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:54.

This is a state which is loved by Allah – the intense longing of His servant for Him and for His acceptance after he has experienced its loss, the need of the servant to return to Him. The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, *"Indeed Allah is happier with the repentance of His servant than one of you would be if he came across his camel after he had lost it in a wide, open land."*⁵² And he (ﷺ) affirmed, *"Allah, the Exalted, extends His hand by night for the repentance of he who has sinned by day; and He extends His hand by day for the repentance of he who has sinned by night – until the sun rises from the west."*⁵³

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

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

"And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have been pure, ever, but Allah purifies whom He wills."⁵⁴

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

وَإِنِّي لَغَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدَىٰ

"But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents and believes and does righteousness and then continues in guidance."⁵⁵

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

We must remember that the Shayṭān is persistent and slow to give up. If he cannot keep a servant in disbelief, he will make deviation and innovation in religion seem pleasing to him. If he fails in that, then he will try to lead him into a major or a minor sin. If this, too, is futile, then he will seek to occupy one with that which is lawful and permissible in order to keep him from that which is more pleasing to Allah. And finally, when all else fails, he will content himself with leading the servant to the lesser of two good deeds. Yet, for one alert to them, Shayṭān's strategies can be easily recognized and defeated.

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

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

"Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."⁵⁶

Taking account of one's self is consistently required in all things, whether apparent or hidden. While ordinary people might regard certain sins as unimportant, the believer, when

⁵² Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others. Allah's happiness is because of His grace, as He is free of need.

⁵³ Signaling the imminence of the Day of Judgement. Narrated by Muslim.

⁵⁴ Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:21.

⁵⁵ Sūrah Ṭā Hā, 20:82.

⁵⁶ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:222.

acknowledging the right of Allah over him and his indebtedness to Him, sees them as ugly and dangerous. As a result, he cannot but see his good deeds as insignificant in this light, and therefore, he strives continuously to increase them. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught the best supplication for forgiveness:

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

*"O Allah, You are my Lord – there is no god but You. You created me, and I am Your servant; and I uphold Your covenant and [my] promise to You as much as I am able. I seek refuge in You from the evil I have done. I acknowledge before You Your favor upon me, and I acknowledge my sin, so forgive me. Indeed, there is none who can forgive sins except You."*⁵⁷

Repentance is a new beginning, as illustrated in the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ): "Islam destroys what came before it, and repentance destroys what came before it."⁵⁸ Therefore, no soul should ever despair – no matter how great its sin – for Allah is near, ever-ready to receive repentance, willing to forgive, inviting all to forgiveness with His words:

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

"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.'"⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Al-Bukhārī.

⁵⁸ Al-Bukhārī.

⁵⁹ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:53.

Patience (aṣ-Ṣabr)

إِنَّمَا يُؤْتَى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

***"Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without enumeration."*⁶⁰**

* * * * *

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

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

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

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

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ

***"And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His face [i.e., acceptance]."*⁶¹**

⁶⁰ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:10.

⁶¹ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:28.

2. Patience to refrain from disobedience – The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, "The world is the believer's prison and the non-believer's paradise."⁶² For those who have been accustomed to living a lifestyle far from the Straight Path, patience is required after repentance in order to keep the Shayṭān at bay. Indeed, each new temptation must be resisted vigorously. The most difficult in this category is the avoidance of those sins – such as backbiting – which are committed easily and not always deplored by others, as well as those sins which are usually committed secretly.

3. Patience in the face of problems or afflictions – This category includes all that happens to one against his own will, such as the loss of property, the death of loved ones, illness, or harm done to him by others – the most difficult of all to bear gracefully! Allah *ta'ālā* tells us:

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

"And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided."⁶³

Such trials from Allah – no matter how distasteful to the servant – are, in reality, opportunities for him. The Prophet (ﷺ) reported, "There is no disaster which befalls the Muslim by which Allah does not remove sins from him – even [as little as] the thorn that pricks him."⁶⁴

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

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

"We have certainly created man into hardship."⁶⁵

It is imperative to remember that although feelings will not be judged, reactions will be. In the words of the Prophet (ﷺ): "Allah will not punish for tears in the eyes nor for sadness in the heart; but He will punish for this [and he pointed to his tongue] or grant mercy."⁶⁶ At the death of his son, Ibrāheem, he (ﷺ) said, "The eye weeps and the heart is sad, but we will not say except what pleases our Lord."⁶⁷

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

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

⁶² Muslim.

⁶³ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:155-157.

⁶⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁶⁵ Sūrah al-Balad, 90:4.

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁶⁷ Al-Bukhārī.

"And of the people is he who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to unbelief]. He has lost [this] world and the Hereafter."⁶⁸

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

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

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَنِي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ

"I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah."⁶⁹

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

قُلْ لَّنْ يُصِيبَنَا إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَنَا

"Say, 'Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us.'"⁷⁰

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

Not only does a servant obtain additional reward through his afflictions, but upon being disabled either temporarily or permanently, one continues to gain that which he was accustomed to earning through his usual righteous deeds and actions previous to the disability. For the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that Allah commands the recording angels, *"Register for My servant during every day and night whatever good he used to do for as long as he is confined in My restriction."*⁷¹

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

When one acknowledges the right of Allah to manage His creation, perceiving the benefit of His divine decree, he will always be prepared for the possibility of a trial through distressing occurrences. In fact, this expectation helps him to retain control in the crucial period specified by the Prophet (ﷺ) in the ḥadīth: *"Patience is [necessary] at the first shock."*⁷²

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

⁶⁸ Sūrah al-Ḥajj, 22:11.

⁶⁹ Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:86.

⁷⁰ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:51.

⁷¹ Al-Ḥākim – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷² Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

said as the Messenger of Allah had ordered, and Allah followed that up with what was better for me than him – the Messenger of Allah [himself]."⁷³

One of the Prophet's companions, Sa'd bin Abi Waqqāṣ, once asked, "O Messenger of Allah, which people are most severely tried?" The Prophet (ﷺ) answered, "The prophets, then the righteous, then those following them in degree. A man is tried according to his religion. So, if there is firmness in his religion, then his trial is increased; but if there is weakness in his religion, then it is lightened. Verily, tribulations remain with the servant until he walks upon the earth having no sin left upon him."⁷⁴

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

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

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا. إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease [i.e., relief]. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease."⁷⁵

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

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

"But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not."⁷⁶

4. Counting the blessings which Allah has bestowed – great and small, obvious and subtle – When one finds himself unable to account for all of them, the difficulty is lightened in his eyes. Reward is gained by praising Allah in every circumstance, especially when realizing that the blessings retained after a loss are still far greater than those of which one was deprived. Indeed, one appreciates his own condition more when comparing it with others whose afflictions are greater than his own. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught that upon seeing the suffering of others, one should say to himself, "Praise be to Allah, who has exempted me from that by which He has tested you, and who has favored me with preference over many of those whom He has created."⁷⁷ He (ﷺ) further advised, "Look to those below you [i.e., those with less than you] and do not look to those above you [i.e., those with more than you], for this makes you less likely to underestimate Allah's blessings upon you."⁷⁸

⁷³ Aḥmad and Muslim.

⁷⁴ At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan-ṣaḥeeḥ.

⁷⁵ Sūrah ash-Sharḥ, 94:5-6.

⁷⁶ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:216.

⁷⁷ At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

⁷⁸ Muslim and others.

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

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ

"And few of My servants are grateful."⁷⁹

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

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

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

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

"If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Sūrah Saba', 34:13.

⁸⁰ Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:7.

The Feeling of Alienation (al-Ghurbah)

فَلَا يَغُرُّكَ تَقَلُّبُهُمْ فِي الْبِلَدِ

"...so be not deceived by their [uninhibited] movement throughout the land."⁸¹

* * * * *

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

وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

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

بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

"But most of them do not reason."⁸³

أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

"But most of the people do not believe."⁸⁴

إِنَّهُمْ إِلَّا إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

"They are not except like livestock. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way."⁸⁵

The degree of alienation varies from time to time, place to place, people to people – for Muslims are a minority among the inhabitants of this earth, and believers are a minority among Muslims. Those of knowledge are few among believers, and those defending the Prophet's *sunnah* are even fewer. In respect to this, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Verily, my community among communities is like a white hair on a black bull."⁸⁶

Although they may find comfort in solitude and suffer isolation in the company of those who seek only to socialize, these servants cannot neglect their duties because the Prophet (ﷺ) declared, "The believer who mixes with people and is patient in the face of their offense is preferable to the believer who does not mix with people and is not patient with their offense."⁸⁷ And Allah reminds them:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

"The believers are but brothers."⁸⁸

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

⁸¹ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:4. Activities not disciplined by fear of Allah may appear impressive but are, in fact, void of blessing in this life and the next.

⁸² Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:21.

⁸³ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:63.

⁸⁴ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:59.

⁸⁵ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:44.

⁸⁶ Al-Bukhārī.

⁸⁷ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

⁸⁸ Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:10.

Always aware of Allah's presence, however, such souls seldom seek companionship elsewhere, knowing that He alone can comprehend their concerns, appreciate their efforts and relieve their sorrows. And knowing that whatever the people might think, Allah enumerates and rewards that which is unnoticed – sincerity of intention, conscientiousness in deed, and pain born patiently in the heart. So these servants of Allah are careful to avoid what is doubtful or might possibly lead to *ḥarām* (that which is unlawful) and are indifferent to that which is of no benefit in the Hereafter. They fear Allah when dealing with others and even more so when dealing with the subtle affairs of their own hearts. They refuse to compromise *tawḥeed*, and seek opportunities for *jihād*. They cling to the Sunnah when people have abandoned it and avoid innovation in religion while people find it good. They know the gravity of their sins and strive for forgiveness from their Lord. They are the ones whom the Prophet (ﷺ) praised when he said, "Certainly Islam began as [something] alien, and it will become alien once again as it began. So, blessed are the aliens."⁸⁹

Yet, human souls were created as social beings with a natural enjoyment of companionship and feelings of loneliness during periods of isolation. Therefore, Allah assures those who travel on His Path that, in spite of temporary alienation from contemporaries, they do belong to the best company of mankind – none other than the prophets, their truthful supporters, the martyrs and the righteous.⁹⁰ Such is the reason for the supplication: "O Allah, guide me among those You have guided."⁹¹ Remembering one's companions removes sadness from the heart. Although they may be rare throughout the servant's lifetime, he can certainly look forward to a joyful reception in the Hereafter. Ibn al-Qayyim said, "Every time you feel the loneliness of isolation, remember your companions who have preceded you and be eager to join them; and do not be concerned with others, for they will not avail you at all before Allah. And if they call out to you during your journey, do not turn to them, for whenever you respond to them, they will take you and set you in another direction." Some early scholars used to advise, "Keep fast to the path of truth, and do not succumb to loneliness because of the few who tread it; and beware of the path of falsehood, and do not be deceived by the many headed on it to destruction." In the words of Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*:

قُلْ لَا يَسْتَوِي الْخَبِيثُ وَالطَّيِّبُ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ كَثْرَةُ الْخَبِيثِ

"Say, 'Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you.'"⁹²

وَإِنْ تُطِيعْ أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ

"And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah. They follow not except assumption, and they are not but misjudging."⁹³

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

⁸⁹ Muslim and Aḥmad.

⁹⁰ See Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:69.

⁹¹ From *du'aa' ul-qunūt* taught by the Prophet (ﷺ). Related by an-Nasā'ī - ḥasan.

⁹² Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:100.

⁹³ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:116.

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allah."⁹⁴

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

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

"And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting."⁹⁵

Finally, and above all, Allah Himself is with the righteous servant,⁹⁶ supporting his efforts and reassuring him.⁹⁷ So while the Shayṭān will attempt to infect him with loneliness and despair, his plan is frustrated and defeated by the realization that the believer is in harmony with the entire universe in submission to the will of Allah, whereas those who vainly try to oppose Him are but a small minority that will surely be overcome.

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

⁹⁴ Sūrah 59:1, 61:1, 62:1 and 64:1.

⁹⁵ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:44.

⁹⁶ See Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:128.

⁹⁷ "So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you will be superior." (Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:139) "If you should be suffering – so are they suffering as you are suffering, but you expect from Allah that which they expect not." (Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:104)

Worship (al-'Ibādah)

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

*"O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous."*⁹⁸

* * * * *

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

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

Although the concept of worship has been gradually reduced in common usage to mean little more than the performance of certain religious rites and rituals, the original and true definition is comprehensive. It encompasses all actions and intentions motivated by a recognition of greatness – that combination of love and fear, producing efforts to please the worshipped one and to avoid his displeasure. An object of worship continually occupies the mind of the worshipper and consequently governs his behavior, both consciously and unconsciously.

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

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

*"I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me."*⁹⁹

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

⁹⁸Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:21.

⁹⁹Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56.

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

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

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

A true believer lives to obtain the approval of his Lord, to become close to Him and earn His reward. He is one who earnestly and actively enters diverse fields of life, excelling in production, precision and skill in order to obtain the multiple reward of assisting others. Thus, the Muslim becomes a source of benefit, blessing and mercy within his society. He practices good work, promotes it and directs others to it. His charitable deeds are not limited to humanity alone but include creation in general. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated, "For every living creature is a reward."¹⁰⁰ And he said, "There is no Muslim who plants a sprout or a seed from which a person, animal or bird will eat but that it is registered for him as a charity."¹⁰¹

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

Worship must be done sincerely for Allah alone. In addition, it must be done precisely according to the method ordained and within the limits set by Him.¹⁰² There is a consensus of scholars based upon the texts of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, that an act of worship is not acceptable to Allah and will not be rewarded by Him unless these two conditions are met.

A Muslim's worship is of two levels, obligatory and voluntary. It is never permissible to neglect obligatory acts of worship, and any who do so are deserving of punishment in the Hereafter. The Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed¹⁰³ that the best and most beloved deeds to Allah are the religious obligations ordained by Him, so they must always be given priority. Fulfillment of these obligations earns the greatest reward, and they can never be replaced by any quantity of other righteous deeds or

¹⁰⁰ Al-Bukhārī.

¹⁰¹ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁰² This means the correct way prescribed by the Islamic Sharī'ah and not as formulated by people according to their own preferences.

¹⁰³ In a *ḥadīth qudsi* narrated by al-Bukhārī.

voluntary worship. After their completion, however, one may go on to draw nearer to Allah and obtain further rewards through the supplementary worship of his choice.

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

1. The best worship is the most difficult – Some presume that the most excellent types of worship are those which are most demanding and difficult for the person since they are the farthest away from his own desire and inclination, and that this is the essence of worship. They contend that the amount of reward is in proportion to the difficulty, based on a narration which has no basis in the Sunnah: "The best deeds are the most arduous."¹⁰⁴ These people strive to subjugate their souls, saying, "It is the only way to make the soul upright since its nature is to be lazy, seek ease and become attached to the world. It must therefore be disciplined by fears and hardships."

2. The best worship is disengagement from the world – Others assert that the best kind of worship is self-sufficiency and indifference to the world, getting by on the least provision and being unconcerned about worldly pleasures. These are of two types:

- ♦ The common people, who see it as an end in itself, working determinedly at it and calling others to practice it, claiming that it is preferable to scholarship and other acts of worship. In fact, they see it as the object of all worship.

- ♦ The educated, who consider it a means of devoting oneself to Allah and making Him the only concern, of clearing the heart of everything but love for Him, turning back to Him, relying on Him and seeking His approval. They see the best deeds as attendance of assemblies for the mention of Allah, constantly remembering Him in the heart and with the tongue, being conscious of His perfect observation and awareness, and avoiding all that distracts the heart from that.

3. The best worship is that which benefits others – The advocates of this view declare that any form of worship that benefits another is superior to that which benefits the worshipper alone. They consider helping the poor, working for the interests of other people and fulfilling their needs, assisting them through their wealth, influence or other means is better than solitary worship, so they exert their efforts toward that.

They contend that while the benefit of private individual worship is limited to the worshipper alone, assisting someone for the acceptance of Allah benefits both the worshipper and his recipient. And that, they say, is why the scholar is considered superior to one who spends his time in prayer, fasting and remembrance of Allah.¹⁰⁵ They cite such statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) as: "That Allah guides one man through you is better for you than having red camels."¹⁰⁶ "Whoever invites to right guidance will have reward equal to the rewards of all those who follow it without it decreasing anything of their rewards."¹⁰⁷ "Indeed, Allah and His angels, even the ant in its hole and the fish in the sea, bless those who teach good to the people."¹⁰⁸

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

¹⁰⁴ However, in an authentic ḥadīth narrated by Aḥmad, the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "Indeed, Allah likes that His concessions be utilized."

¹⁰⁵ There is a ḥadīth which states: "The merit of a scholar over a ritual worshipper is like that of a full moon over other planets." (Narrated by Abū Nu'aym in *Al-Hilyah - ṣaḥeeḥ*.)

¹⁰⁶ Al-Bukhārī. Red camels were considered a particularly precious and valuable property at that time.

¹⁰⁷ Aḥmad and Muslim.

¹⁰⁸ At-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

people in this life and the next, not to withdraw from society and become ascetics. Hence, their example should be followed.¹⁰⁹

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

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

The total worshipper has no reason to restrict himself to a particular kind of worship or prefer it over others. His aim is to pursue the acceptance of Allah wherever it might be and he worships accordingly. So when you see scholars convened you find him with them, and when you see people in prayer you find him with them, and when you see those engaged in jihād you find him with them, and when you see social workers you find him with them, and when you see assemblies of devotees you find him with them. He is not subject to limits or restrictions; yet he does not follow personal preferences when choosing his method of worship, but seeks the preferences of his Lord, even though he might find other kinds of worship easier."¹¹⁰

We are aware that the *kalimah* (word) of *tawḥeed*, "*Lā ilāha ill-Allah*" came to correct human belief and worship – not only that of the ancient polytheists, but of all men up until the end of time. It states that there is no divinity except Allah – none is similar to Him, none creates and sustains except Him, and none has the right to govern creation but Him. It necessarily overflows into all aspects of faith and all aspects of life.¹¹¹

إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Legislation is only for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know."¹¹²

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

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ

"Obey Allah and the Messenger."¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ And this is why Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) did not approve of those who wished to devote themselves to worship in seclusion rather than mixing with the people.

¹¹⁰ *Tahdheeb Madārij as-Sālikeen*, pp. 70-72.

¹¹¹ *Shirk*, in contrast, is the opposite of *tawḥeed*. Refer to Footnote 11.

¹¹² Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:40.

¹¹³ Sūrahs 3:32, 3:132, 4:59, 8:1, 8:20, 8:46, 24:54, 47:33, 58:13 and 64:12. Other verses carry a similar meaning.

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

وَأِنْ تُطِيعُوا أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

***"And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah."*¹¹⁴**

وَأِنَّ كَثِيرًا لَّيُضِلُّونَ بِأَهْوَاءِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ

***"And indeed do many lead [others] astray through their [own] inclinations without knowledge."*¹¹⁵**

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

***"And do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect."*¹¹⁶**

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

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

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

¹¹⁴ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:116.

¹¹⁵ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:119.

¹¹⁶ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:28.

Supplication (ad-Du'aa')

أَمَّنْ تَجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ

"Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil?"¹¹⁷

* * * * *

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

أَدْعُونِي أَجِبْ لَكُمْ

"Call upon Me; I will respond to you."¹¹⁸

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ

"And when My servants ask you, concerning Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me."¹¹⁹

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

وَالذَّكِرِينَ اللَّهُ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ

"...the men and women who remember Allah often."¹²⁰

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Whoever would be pleased to have Allah respond to him during hardship and disaster should make much du'aa' in times of ease."¹²¹ He also said, "Supplication is [true] worship."¹²²

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

Facing the *qiblah* when possible, beginning with praise of Allah, raising the hands to the shoulder level and stretching them out when there is urgency are all part of the *sunnah* of *du'aa'*. One should try to take advantage of the times and conditions when response is most likely.¹²³ Indeed, the best manner of making *du'aa'* is for the servant to concentrate with all of his heart, show

¹¹⁷ Sūrah an-Naml, 27:62.

¹¹⁸ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:60.

¹¹⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:186.

¹²⁰ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:35.

¹²¹ At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

¹²² Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī and others – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹²³ These include the month of Ramadhān, the day of 'Arafah, Fridays, the last portion of the night, between the adhān and the iqāmah, during prostration in prayer, immediately after obligatory prayers, and at times of urgency.

humility to Allah and pray in a lowered voice, as Allah orders:

أَدْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

"Call upon your Lord in humility and privately; indeed, He does not like transgressors."¹²⁴

Aggression in *du'aa'* was explained by scholars as shouting or showing off one's skill in the use of words.¹²⁵ Upon hearing people raising their voices in *du'aa'*, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "O people, return to yourselves. You do not call upon someone who is deaf or absent but rather, One who is Hearing and Seeing. The One you call upon is nearer to one of you than the neck of the beast he rides."¹²⁶

Be certain that Allah responds willingly, and ask Him accordingly, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Let not one of you say, 'O Allah, forgive me, if You will' because there is no unwillingness."¹²⁷ Additionally, he instructed, "When you ask Allah, ask Him being certain of response."¹²⁸ He also informed us that there are three supplications which are not refused: that of the parent (for his child), that of the traveler, and that of the oppressed (against his oppressor).¹²⁹ Another ḥadīth affirms that the *du'aa'* of a person for his brother Muslim who is absent from him is also answered.¹³⁰ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) directed that when supplicating for another, one should begin with himself,¹³¹ saying, for example, "O Allah, guide me and guide him," or "O Allah, forgive me and forgive him."

There are certain things to be avoided in relation to *du'aa'* as they prevent response from Allah *ta'ālā*. *Du'aa'* must not be made for anything sinful or for cutting off relations. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "No Muslim prays to Allah with a *du'aa'* free from sin and from that which cuts ties between relatives without Allah giving him one of three things: the answer to his prayer during his lifetime, the accumulation of its reward for him until the next life, or the prevention of some evil from striking him which is equal to it [i.e., his effort in *du'aa'*]."¹³² Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* is well aware of which one of the three responses is most beneficial to the servant. One should not demand an immediate response, as he who says, "I prayed but was not answered" and then gives up.¹³³ The Prophet (ﷺ) also forbade making *du'aa'* against oneself, one's family, property or servants.¹³⁴ Moreover, the supplicant must not be a consumer of *ḥarām* (that which is unlawful). The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) mentioned a man on a long journey – all dirty and dusty – raising his hands to the heaven, saying, "O Lord, O Lord" while his food was from *ḥarām*, his clothing from *ḥarām*, and his having been sustained by *ḥarām*. He (ﷺ) concluded, "How then could he have been answered?"¹³⁵

¹²⁴ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:55.

¹²⁵ Group supplication led by one person while others repeat after him is an innovation and was not practiced by the Prophet (ﷺ) or his companions. Individual *du'aa'* is preferable, or one may join the *du'aa'* of another by saying "āmeen" at the end.

¹²⁶ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹²⁷ Al-Bukhārī and Abū Dāwūd.

¹²⁸ Aḥmad, Muslim and al-Bukhārī.

¹²⁹ Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

¹³⁰ Muslim.

¹³¹ At-Tirmidhī – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹³² Aḥmad – ḥasan.

¹³³ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd.

¹³⁴ Muslim.

¹³⁵ Muslim and al-Bukhārī.

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

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

The shaykh answered:¹³⁶ *Al-ḥamdu-lillāh*. It has been confirmed in *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī* that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Allah has sent down no disease for which He has not sent down a cure." And it is documented in *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim* that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "For every disease there is a medicine; and when the medicine contacts the disease, it cures with the permission of Allah." This includes the diseases of the heart and soul, as well as the body, and their treatments. The Prophet (ﷺ) considered ignorance a disease and consulting the learned as its treatment. And Allah informs us that the Qur'ān is a cure:

قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هُدًى وَشِفَاءً

"Say, 'It is, for those who believe, a guidance and cure.'"¹³⁷

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"And We send down of the Qur'ān that which is healing and mercy for the believers."¹³⁸

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

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

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

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

1. The *du`aa'* is stronger than the disaster and thus drives it away.
2. The *du`aa'* is weaker than the disaster, so the disaster overcomes and the servant is struck (although it may be lessened in degree by even a weak *du`aa'*).
3. The *du`aa'* and the disaster oppose each other, and each one prevents the other from victory. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Nothing repels fate except *du`aa'*."¹³⁹ And among the best of treatments is persistence in *du`aa'*. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do not weaken in *du`aa'*, for no one will be destroyed as long as he is making *du`aa'*."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶What remains of this chapter is a summary of Ibn al-Qayyim's words.

¹³⁷Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:44.

¹³⁸Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:82.

¹³⁹At-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim – ḥasan.

¹⁴⁰Al-Ḥākim, who graded it ṣaḥeeḥ.

Among the weaknesses which prevent the effect of *du'aa'* is haste or impatience. According to the Prophet (ﷺ), "Any one of you will be answered as long as he is not hasty, saying, 'I made *du'aa'*, but it was not answered.'" ¹⁴¹ When the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The servant continues to be answered as long as he does not ask for something sinful or for that which cuts ties between relatives, and as long as he is not impatient," he was asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what is impatience?" He replied, "Impatience is when one says, 'I prayed and prayed, but I do not see that I am being answered,' and so becoming tired, he abandons *du'aa'*." ¹⁴² So the servant should not give up *du'aa'* prematurely, thinking the answer to be slow in coming; for then he becomes like one who plants a seed or a twig and begins to care for it and water it, but when he finds it to be slow in growing, leaves it and neglects it.

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

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

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

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

¹⁴¹ Al-Bukhārī.

¹⁴² Muslim.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. The servant must learn the causes of good and evil, developing such an understanding from all that he observes around him, from what he has experienced, from what others have experienced, and from what he has heard about other peoples, both ancient and modern. For this purpose, nothing is better than the study of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, since they picture good and evil and their causes to the reader almost as though he were an eyewitness. Then a look into history will provide the details within the general outlines given by Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ).
2. The servant must beware of himself being a preventing factor, blocking the desired result. Knowing that disobedience and ignorance are definite causes of harm to him in this life and the next, he should seek to remedy this in himself, not only to escape penalty in the Hereafter but also to obtain the maximum result when he turns to Allah in *du'aa'* throughout his life on earth.

Death (al-Mawt)

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ

"Every soul will taste death."¹⁴³

* * * * *

Almost every day we see or hear of a death, often that of someone we know; yet how often do we consider our own time and what will follow? While a funeral procession passes before us, we admit that, true, death has come to others; but we are still here and feel that we will continue to be for a long time. Once when a funeral procession passed near the Prophet (ﷺ), he remarked, "Relieved or relieved of him." Some inquired, "What is the meaning of 'relieved' and 'relieved of him'?" He answered, "The believing servant is relieved of the fatigue and afflictions of this world, [entering] into the mercy of Allah; and people, countries, plants and animals are relieved of the transgressing servant."¹⁴⁴

Consider a person who expects to travel and how he thinks of nothing but his journey – what to take along and how best to prepare himself. The believer prepares in the same way for his final and most important journey. This temporary station (i.e., life) in which he waits is not his primary concern. ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Umar reported that once the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) took hold of his shoulders and said, "Be in this world as a stranger or a traveler."¹⁴⁵

The One who has given life will surely take it back at the time determined by Him. There is no destination but the return to Allah, and there is no hope but in the acceptance of Allah. It is death which exposes the truth about this life – everything material will be left behind. For those who love the comforts of worldly life, it is good to remember the harshness and solitude of the grave and that one will be removed irrevocably from all that to which he had been so closely attached. The Prophet (ﷺ) advised, "Remember often the destroyer of pleasures – death."¹⁴⁶

Death is an awesome reality facing every living being. It is, in itself, a severe trial. Even Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), the most beloved of Allah's creatures, was not spared its pain. For the believer, affliction at death (as at any time) is a means of expiating sins or gaining a higher position in Paradise. Those attending a dying person should make every effort to have him remember Allah and give him hope and reassurance, not allowing him to submit to the Shayṭān out of pain or fear. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Help your dying ones to say, 'Lā ilāha ill-Allah.'"¹⁴⁷ And he also stated, "When death draws near to the believer, he receives glad tidings of Allah's pleasure with him and His generosity, so nothing is more loved by him than what is before him. As for the companion of the Fire, whose deeds were sealed with evil, he is given the news of it [i.e., Hellfire] during this terror [of death]."¹⁴⁸

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

¹⁴³ Sūrah 3:185, 21:35 and 29:57.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Bukhārī.

¹⁴⁶ At-Tirmidhī, an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹⁴⁷ Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhī. Scholars have added that this should be a gentle encouragement without insistence if it is feared that the person might become upset. It could be said by someone else within hearing distance to serve as an indirect reminder to the dying.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Bukhārī.

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

"And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who denied...¹⁴⁹ They are striking their faces and their backs and [saying], 'Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire. That is for what your hands have put forth [of evil] and because Allah is not ever unjust to [His] servants.'¹⁵⁰

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

"Indeed, those who have said, 'Our Lord is Allah' and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], 'Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.'¹⁵¹

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

At death the soul leaves the body. All things are now absolutely clear to that soul – the realities concerning all of which one was unaware during his lifetime or chose to ignore.¹⁵² The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) reported, "When one of you dies, he is shown his place [in the Hereafter] morning and evening. If he is from the people of Paradise, then among the people of Paradise. And if he is from the people of Hell, then among the people of Hell. And it will be said to him, 'This is your place until Allah resurrects you on the Day of Judgement.'¹⁵³ Thus each soul remains until the Day of Judgement (according to its preview of the Hereafter), feeling sadness and regret or happiness and reassurance.

*"The grave is the first station among the stations of the Hereafter."*¹⁵⁴ In a long and detailed ḥadīth the Prophet (ﷺ) described how two angels come to the believer in beautiful form, taking his sweet-smelling soul gently up to the seventh heaven where Allah registers him and the angels question him about his Lord, his religion and his prophet. After he has answered correctly, "My Lord is Allah; my religion is Islam; and my prophet is Muḥammad (ﷺ)," his soul is returned to its body in the grave, which is expanded for him for as far as he can see. Then his good deeds come to keep him company in the form of a beautiful man telling him to look forward to all that will please him. As for the nonbeliever, two angels come to him in ugly form, tearing his foul-smelling soul violently from its body; and when they ascend to the lowest of the heavens, the door does not open, and Allah registers him in the book of Hell. His soul is then thrown back to its body in the grave, and the angels come to question him about his Lord, his religion and his prophet. But he can only answer, "Uh... uh... I don't know." (And in another narration: "I only said as the people said.") So the door of Hell is opened before him, and his grave contracts, compressing him until his ribs are crushed against each other. Then his bad

¹⁴⁹ This sentence is left incomplete for additional effect. Its conclusion is left to the imagination of the reader or listener and estimated as "...you would see a dreadful sight."

¹⁵⁰ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:50-51.

¹⁵¹ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:30.

¹⁵² See Sūrah Qāf, 50:20.

¹⁵³ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁵⁴ At-Tirmidhī – ḥasan.

deeds come to him in the form of a repulsive man telling him to look forward to all that he despises – humiliation and eternal punishment – and he is struck a blow which causes his scream to be heard by everything except men and jinn.¹⁵⁵ The Prophet (ﷺ) advised us to seek from Allah protection from the punishment of the grave and the punishment of the Fire.¹⁵⁶

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

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا. وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

"Indeed, they see it [as] distant, but We see it [as] near."¹⁵⁷

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

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

قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا تُحِيطُ بِهُ لَوْ قَرَّبَهَا إِلَّا هُوَ

"Say, 'Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him.'"¹⁵⁸

Certain signs or warnings have been mentioned in both the Qur'ān and the prophetic statements – events that will take place before that Last Hour; but these signs are for the living to observe. The souls of the dead are no longer subject to time as we know it. The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, "The Hour will not come until 'Allah, Allah' is no longer uttered upon the earth," (i.e., when Allah has been completely forgotten by the earth's inhabitants.)¹⁵⁹

Just as the death of every individual is the first stage in his new life, the death of the universe and its recreation in a different form signals the beginning of the true existence promised by Allah:¹⁶⁰

كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ وَعَدًا عَلَيْنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ

"As We began the first creation, We will repeat it. [That is] a promise binding upon Us. Indeed, We will do it."¹⁶¹

يَوْمَ تُبَدَّلُ الْأَرْضُ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَوَاتُ

"On the Day the earth will be replaced by another earth, and the heavens [as well]..."¹⁶²

When the appointed Hour has arrived, the whole universe will undergo such drastic changes as no man can imagine. In early Makkan sūrahs, Allah *ta'ālā* gives terrifying descriptions of some of these events in order to awaken man and shake him into the realization that Allah, his

¹⁵⁵ Aḥmad – ṣaḥeeḥ.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

¹⁵⁷ Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:6-7.

¹⁵⁸ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:187.

¹⁵⁹ Muslim. At that point there will no longer be any reason for continuation of the present creation. It must make way for the new order.

¹⁶⁰ "And indeed, the home of the Hereafter – that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew." (29:64)

¹⁶¹ Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:104.

¹⁶² Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:48.

Creator, will manifest His absolute power and control that Day over all things, that He will restore life to the dead, and that all beings will be then totally helpless and answerable to Him...

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ. عَلِمْتَ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ

"When the sky breaks apart and when the stars fall, scattering, and when the seas are erupted and when the [contents of] graves are scattered [i.e., exposed], a soul will [then] know what it has put forth and kept back."¹⁶³

The Hour will be heralded by a trumpet blast which will strike everyone in the heavens and upon the earth dead from terror, except whom Allah wills. Then upon the second blast, life will be restored to all of the dead.¹⁶⁴ Each will feel as one who has slept but a short while, having been awakened when the soul returned to the body.

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ

"And the Day the Hour appears the criminals will swear they had remained but an hour."¹⁶⁵

Thus will every soul be returned to life in the same psychological condition it was at the time of death – in belief or denial, in good or evil. In support of this statement are the Prophet's words: "Every servant will be brought back to life in accordance with the state in which he died."¹⁶⁶

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

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

فَلَا أُنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ

"No relationship will there be among them that Day."¹⁶⁷

The following information about the Gathering comes from *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim*: People will be gathered on a land that is white, untrodden, pure and unowned by anyone. They will be gathered as they were at birth – barefoot, naked and uncircumcised – but they will be too preoccupied to notice each other. This Day every person will be concerned only with the judgement that awaits him, no longer thinking of those he loved in his earthly life – even being willing to sacrifice them to save himself, if only that was possible.¹⁶⁸ On that Day Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* will fold up the heavens, taking them in His right hand; and He will fold up the earth, taking it in His left hand, saying, "I am the Sovereign. Where are the tyrants? Where are the arrogant?"

¹⁶³ Sūrah al-Infīṭār, 82:1-5.

¹⁶⁴ See Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:68.

¹⁶⁵ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:55.

¹⁶⁶ Muslim.

¹⁶⁷ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:101.

¹⁶⁸ See Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:11-14.

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

لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا

***"It leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it."*¹⁶⁹**

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

***"So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it."*¹⁷⁰**

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

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

أَقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا

***"Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant."*¹⁷¹**

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

فَيَحْلِفُونَ لَهُ، كَمَا سَاحَفُونَ لَكُمْ

***"And they will swear to Him as they swear to you."*¹⁷²**

And they will say:

وَاللَّهِ رَبِّنَا مَا كُنَّا مُشْرِكِينَ

***"By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who associated."*¹⁷³**

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

لَمَقَّتْ لِّلّٰهِ اَكْبَرُ مِنْ مَّقْتِكُمْ اَنْفُسَكُمْ

***"The hatred of Allah for you was [even] greater than your hatred of yourselves."*¹⁷⁴**

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

¹⁶⁹ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:49.

¹⁷⁰ Sūrah az-Zalzalah, 99:7-8.

¹⁷¹ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:14.

¹⁷² Sūrah al-Mujādilah, 58:18.

¹⁷³ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:23.

¹⁷⁴ Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:10.

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

هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ أَلَّا لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

"These are the ones who lied against their Lord. Unquestionably, the curse of Allah is upon the wrongdoers."¹⁷⁵

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

وَإِنْ مِّنكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا

"And there is none of you except he will come to it."¹⁷⁶

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

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

"On the Day We will say to Hell, 'Have you been filled?' and it will say, 'Are there some more,' and Paradise will be brought near to the righteous, not far, [it will be said], 'This is what you were promised – for every returner [to Allah] and keeper [of His covenant] who feared the Most Merciful in the unseen and came with a heart returning [in repentance].'"¹⁷⁷

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

¹⁷⁵ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The Qur'ānic reference is Sūrah Hūd, 11:18.

¹⁷⁶ Sūrah Maryam, 19:71.

¹⁷⁷ Sūrah Qāf, 50:30-33.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) once recited from the Qur'ān: ***"For those who have done good is the best [reward] – and extra..."***¹⁷⁸ and then said, "When the people of Paradise have entered Paradise and the people of Hell have entered Hell, a crier will call out, 'O people of Paradise, you have a promise from Allah, and He wishes to fulfill it for you.' So they will say, 'What could it be? Has He not made our scales heavy [with good deeds], whitened our faces [i.e., shown us in the best light], and caused us to enter Paradise and avoid Hellfire?' Then the screen will be removed, and they will look at Allah. He will not have given them anything that they love more than looking at Him, and that is the 'extra.'"¹⁷⁹

Allah Himself confirms:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ. إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

"[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord."¹⁸⁰

It is mentioned in the prophetic narratives that there are those among the believers who will enter the Fire for a time due to the gravity of their sins. It is possible that one might not be forgiven if he did not repent before his death. It is true, as well, that every soul will be compensated in full at the time of judgement, and that even animals will obtain their rights. So if one has been unjust to others, then he has, in reality, been unjust to himself since he will have to pay the price. The Prophet (ﷺ) referred to such a person as "bankrupt" because he will come forward on the Day of Judgement with some good deeds, such as prayer, fasting and *zākah*, but if he had wronged others during his lifetime, those people will all take their compensation from his good deeds until, when there are no good deeds left, they will unload their bad deeds upon him, one by one, until justice is restored. Thus he will be thrown into the Fire.¹⁸¹ The Prophet (ﷺ) added, "As for the true people of the Fire, they will not die therein nor will they live. But others of you afflicted by the Fire by reason of sins will be caused by Allah to die therein a death¹⁸² until, after their having become charcoal, permission will be given for intercession. They will then be gathered, brought forth and scattered in the rivers of Paradise. Then it will be said, 'O people of Paradise, pour upon them,' and they will grow like seeds that have been carried by a flood."¹⁸³

Those who loved the Messenger of Allah, following his teachings and obeying him, can hope for his intercession in the life to come, for he said, "For every prophet there is a supplication which is answered. Every other prophet asked for something immediate, but I have saved this prayer for my community until the Day of Judgement. And it will be obtained, Allah willing, by whoever dies from my community not associating anything with Allah."¹⁸⁴

But lest a servant fall into false security, it must be emphasized that no one enters Paradise sooner or later without true belief and the proof of that belief, which is obedience to Allah and His final Messenger (ﷺ).¹⁸⁵ For it is stated in authentic ḥadīths that some Muslims will seek to

¹⁷⁸ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:26.

¹⁷⁹ Muslim.

¹⁸⁰ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:22-23.

¹⁸¹ Muslim.

¹⁸² The word "*imātah*" (death) is used here in the sense of a temporary death or a sleep. It has been related in Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim that on the Day of Judgement a plump ram will be brought forth, which will be recognized as death by the inhabitants of Paradise and the Hellfire alike. The ram will be slaughtered before them, and they will be told, "O people of Paradise, [there is now] eternity and no death. O people of Hell, [there is now] eternity and no death." Thus their respective conditions of bliss or misery will be rendered complete.

¹⁸³ Muslim.

¹⁸⁴ Muslim. The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasized here that *tawḥeed* is a condition for his intercession.

¹⁸⁵ See Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:31-32.

join the Prophet at his pool but will be prevented, and Allah will tell him, "Verily, you do not know what they did after you."¹⁸⁶ Indeed, Allah *ta'ālā* warns about complacency in religion like that of the Jews and Christians who claim that He has favored them over others. Concerning entry into Paradise, the Qur'ān states:

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

"It is not [obtained] by your wishful thinking nor by that of the People of the Scripture. Whoever does a wrong will be recompensed for it, and he will not find besides Allah a protector or a helper."¹⁸⁷

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

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُ أَجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فَمَنْ زُحْزِحَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ

"Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [success]. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion."¹⁸⁸

والحمد لله رب العالمين

¹⁸⁶ Muslim.

¹⁸⁷ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:123.

¹⁸⁸ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:185.

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