

In the Company of the Prophet

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God's Chosen Messenger

Salman al-Oadah

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Introduction to the First Edition

Praise to God, the Lord of the universe, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger Muhammad and his family and companions.

Here are some moments of contemplation over some of the bright episodes of the life of Prophet Muhammad. They were presented and re-presented by Sheikh Salman bin Fahd al-Uda on television, and quickly gained the appreciation of the public.

Given the importance and beauty of these contemplation pauses, the Scientific Bureau of the institution of **Islam Today** has decided to publish this work, revising with special scrutiny its content, references, phrasing in some cases, for the sake of more clarity of ideas, without affecting the essence of the original text in any way.

Thus, by presenting this work in this image, we hope to give the reader a chance to approach a Prophetic text in a novel way. This, it is hoped, will lead to a more thorough appreciation of the guidance power of each of the situations portrayed in the work.

Moreover, we are happy to announce to the public that this is but the beginning of a whole series of the works of the honorable Sheikh, which the Scientific Bureau will be publishing.

We wish our Sheikh a long and prolific life. And may God guide us to the right path.

Signed:

Abdul Wahhab bin Nasser al-Tariri,

General Deputy Supervisor at the institution of **Islam Today**,

Rabia Awwal, 1428

As If You Were Seeing Him

A Spread Out Page

God has selected Muhammad as the finale of the divine message. He said, ‘...he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets’¹. As such, God made him a model for people: ‘Truly in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example for him who looks to Allah and the last Day, and remembers Allah much.’² It is not surprising, therefore, that the Prophet’s biography be so apparent to those who lived during his time, both friends and enemies, men and women, young and less young, those nearby and those at a distance. They knew every detail about his life; nothing of his personality was hidden from them. And that which they could not see about his private life was reported to them in detail by his wives.

So much so that we know of his private life – his ways of eating and drinking, traveling and home staying, while he was awake or sleeping, and other everyday activities, more than we know about any celebrity. We know more about him than we know about our parents or teachers. I would not be exaggerating if I said that we know more about him than we know about our own selves: some of us do things that we may pay little attention to. But once others have commented on us, we may say that we were not aware of what we were doing if what is said about us is really true. However, we know about the life of our Prophet down to the smallest detail. And what an exalted and fascinating biography it is!

A Well-Preserved Biography

It is with the will of God that this biography was preserved in minute detail. When you read such books on the Prophet’s special features as *al-Shamail al-Muhammadiya*, by al-Tirmidhi, or its simplified version *al-Mokhtassar*, by al-Albani, as well as other similar works, you see a very detailed portrayal of the Prophet. For

¹ Chapter of al-Ahzab: 40.

² Ibid: 21

example, they would talk about the white hairs in his hair and beard. Anas reported that ‘I did not count in the Prophet’s hair and beard more than fourteen white hairs.’³ Or, in another report, ‘...and there were less than twenty white hairs in his hair and beard’.⁴

In another report, a Companion states that ‘Allah had the soul of His Apostle without betraying his age with white hair: there were hardly thirty white hairs in his hair and beard’.⁵ Even the number of white hairs in the hair and beard of the Prophet was documented. Not only that, the very location of those hairs was specified.

One of the most attractive features of this biography is that by preserving it and making it a model for mankind, God left no excuse to humans. This biography has been carefully preserved by scholars and historians like no other biography has been. And none of the other prophets’ lives has been documented the way this prophet’s life has.

For example, if asked about the life of Moses, the Jews will give scattered accounts from parts of his life, with little historical evidence based on scientific facts. The Muslims, however, have paid attention to the smallest details about him, with utmost rigidity as to the credibility of the reporters of the accounts as well as their names.

The discipline of ‘*al Jarb wa al-Ta’del*’ (Criticism and Commendation (of reporters)) enumerated about five hundred thousand names at the time, although people had no printers, computers, or other assisting machines. However, they reached exceptional levels of memorization and accurate distinctions of names and people which surpassed many of the machines which technology has produced today. All this was done for one purpose – the conservation of the Prophet’s biography, tradition, and guidance.

³ Reported by Abdul-Razzaq (20185); Ahmad (12713); Abd bin Humaid (1243); Ibn Hibban (6293); cf. also *Mukhtassar al-Shama’il* (31).

⁴ Reported by Abdul-Razzaq (6786); Ahmad (11983, 13543); al-Bukhari (3547; 3548; 5900); Muslim (2346); al-Tirmidhi (3623); Ibn Hibban (6387).

⁵ Reported by Ahmad: (12496); cf. also *Kashf al-Mushkil* (3/222).

An Exalted Biography

God – the All Wise – did not choose His Messenger at random. He made pure his interior and exterior, his speech and acts, his body and his heart.

But when you read his biography – when you read *about* his biography, every aspect of his life stirs further admiration in you for him. When you read about the details of his look, his face, hair, stature, clothing, etc. you feel more love in your heart for him, and your soul bolsters in faith.

His behaviour, his manners, and the way he treats all people are all the more amazing! In a word, the more you discover about him, the more you love him. This is why loving him is a sign of faith. It is a condition of believing in him as a messenger to find in your heart a great place of sincere love for this noble prophet.

A Love which Grows with Reading

The love of Prophet Muhammad certainly grows with the reading of his biography. Therefore, programming a portion of reading of his biography occasionally would certainly rekindle his love in your heart every time it may subside. Take a short version of his biography to tighten that love so that, eventually, emulating him is not a mere idea void of any meaning to you, but a real experience of his spirit. Go into a real imitation of his daily behaviour; only then can you really concretely appreciate his life – his daily activities, his conditions, etc., and only then can you really understand him.

Under the unabating and overwhelming influence on the youth of the satellite channels and the internet as well as other media, the latter now know too many things about artists, athletes, and television stars, thinking that they still know too little! They rush for anything new about them and endeavor to mimic them as best they can.

It is not unlikely to find a girl from a very religious background, living in a conservative family, who copies an actress, a television announcer, or any kind of artist, in her look, hair style, behaviour, way of dressing and speaking – even the very expressions she chooses. She may impersonate that television announcer, actress,

etc. as her ideal model. In fact, a number of Muslim youths would behave along the same lines.

Connecting the Youth with the Prophet's Biography

It is high time we rehabilitated our youth and reconnected them with the Islamic history, particularly with Prophet Muhammad's life. And if we were to present it to them as we should, they would certainly never turn to other sources of inspiration for their behaviour.

Spontaneity

Whoever reads the Prophet's biography notices its simplicity and spontaneity. God addresses him thus: 'Say (O Muhammad): I ask of you no fee for this, nor am I a pretender.'⁶

His biography is not characterised by any difficulty, overstatement, or arbitrariness. In the biographies of some leaders or scientists, you find that the latter are keen on special protocol or agenda, to the extent that their behaviour and character are too difficult to adopt as a model. Meanwhile, the Prophet's example is not so hard to copy, his conduct being so simple and candid, and his character so straightforward.

I have read biographies of many scholars, including the four great *Imams* and others, including the Companions of the Prophet and the generation after them. I have found them to possess many special features and distinctions in some areas. Nevertheless, while reading the biography of this or that scholar, you realize it is somehow hard to emulate them. It is often just impossible to follow in their steps in many respects.

When you read the Prophet's biography, on the other hand, you find it within reach, and anybody can copy it: This is not a life for a special class or type of people. It is for all to read and emulate.

⁶. Chapter of Sad: 86.

A Biography for All

For rulers, this biography is a reference of justice, equity, and humility. It is a model for those of them who want to protect the people's rights and listen to the voice of reason. For scholars, it is a road map on how to deliver knowledge most efficiently. For preachers, it shows the methodology of how to patiently proceed in their task and how to appeal to the others. Fathers also have a good reason to refer to it: it is rich in lessons on how to deal with the children, depending on their age, level, conditions, etc. Similarly, husbands can use it as a basis for the ideal treatment of their wives, such as patience with their shortcomings. Wives can also rely on it for the best kind of relation with their husbands – the Prophet's guidance on how to deal with one's spouse is exemplary.

Thus, whether one is poor or rich, healthy or diseased, staying home or traveling, one finds guidance in the biography of the Prophet, for he went through all vicissitudes of life. And at each of those states and episodes, the beloved Prophet was always acting as a model servant of God who was supposed to act as a prototype noble servant and prophet whom God designed to be the best exemplar of good behavior.

This noble apostle is a grace from God, as is said in the Koran: 'We sent you not save as a mercy to all people'⁷. So he was not only a mercy to Muslims, or to a specific ethnic group, such as the Arabs, but a mercy to all mankind, bringing truth, guidance, and light. As a result of this mercy, blood was spared, rights were preserved, and the welfare of humanity thrived consistently – all with the grace of God, and with the mission of this noble illiterate messenger.

Civilization Makers

This *Umma*⁸, which once scarcely knew how to read, write, or count, has constructed one of the greatest civilisations in the history of mankind. It built its civilisation on those of previous nations, and

⁷ Chapter of al-Anbiya: 107.

⁸ The concept 'Umma' refers to all the people who follow Muhammad, or who lived at his time and after.

recycled and refined them, then produced a new version for the world. Humanity then witnessed great openings which did not rely on cruelty, arbitrariness or injustice. This civilisation used mercy to open the hearts before opening the lands.

As If You Were Seeing Him

Conspicuous Even to the Foes

There was nothing mysterious about the life of the Prophet. His conduct was an open book with infinite clarity. While he was in Mecca, the pagans were living side by side with him. In Medina, there were Jews, hypocrites, and pagans. In fact the whole of Arabia was infected with idols, as if it were a playground for gods. Different deities were installed in and around the Ka'ba. Under these conditions, the Prophet was constantly the subject of conspiracies by his enemies.

The Koran Records the Admonition

What is particularly amazing is that some of his private and family occurrences are disclosed in the Koran. God says in the Koran: 'And when you said to him on whom Allah has conferred favour and you have conferred favour: Keep your wife to yourself, and fear Allah. And you did hide in your mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and you did fear mankind whereas Allah had a better right that you should fear Him.'⁹ Imagine your father or your teacher said to you in public: 'Hey, you are concealing things which God is disclosing, and you fear people while God is more worthy of your fear'. What would be your reaction? You would certainly feel embarrassed, annoyed, even disgusted. You would find that remark most inappropriate. And you would wish it were never said more loudly than as a whisper in your ear!

This was not the case with Muhammad and the Koran. This came in a revelation to be recited until the Day of Judgment. God says to him: 'And you did hide in your mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and you did fear mankind whereas Allah had a better right that you should fear Him'. Then the Prophet went reciting these verses in public: there were the young and the elderly, the new converts, and so on. These were verses to be recited in prayers until the end of the world, verses to be learned and

⁹ Chapter of al-Ahzab: 37.

exchanged, to be read by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, such as the hypocrites, the idol worshippers, and the Jews who were conducting relentless conspiracies against him. Yet none of this worried him. It did not bother him in the least that those foes might use these verses to tarnish his reputation. The life of the Prophet is plain. And he never hid anything which was revealed to him, as Aisha recounted.¹⁰

One day a blind man came to him to inquire about Islam. He said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, teach me of that which Allah has taught you.’ At the time the Prophet was busy talking to the chieftains of Mecca. He was embarrassed, not because of any personal matter. He was not eating, drinking, sleeping or anything he was otherwise allowed to do. He was preaching for the sake of Islam. It was all in the benefit of the mission itself, and nothing personal. Yet, the rebuke was not to be delayed. Down came the revelation from Heaven with Gabriel, onto the heart of Muhammad. He would recite those verses loud and clear with no reservation in the least. He would read it in loud prayers, and chant it so that everyone could hear it – those in the vicinity and those distant:

*He frowned and turned away
Because the blind man came to him.
What could inform you but that he might grow (in grace)
Or take heed and so the reminder might avail him?
As for him who thinks himself independent,
To him you pay regard.
Yet it is not your concern if he grow not (in grace).
But as for him who comes to you striving earnestly
And has fear,*

¹⁰ Aisha said: ‘If Muhammad had willed to conceal anything, it would have been the verse: ‘And you did hide in your mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and you did fear mankind whereas Allah had a better right that you should fear Him’; (reported by Ahmad: 26083; 26338; Muslim: 177; al-Tirmidhi: 3207; al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (24/41): 111; and its meaning on the authority of Anas in al-Bukhari: 7420).

*From him you are distracted.*¹¹

And God referred to that as ‘distraction’ although it was not a leisure activity – never could that be the case. He was busy with others as part of the mission. But his God did rebuke him, teaching him that people are all equal, and that whoever accepts the Truth and his heart harmonises with it and loves it, that is the person who deserves the priority of attention. It is he who has to be turned to and listened to.¹²

Even more challenging was a theft which occurred in Medina. ‘Who stole?’, ‘Who stole’ people went on wondering with amazement. Some people thought of the Jews, others pointed at the hypocrites. The Prophet thought the latter were innocent. But soon the Koran came: ‘We reveal to you the Scripture with the truth, that you may judge between mankind by that which Allah shows you. And be not a pleader for the treacherous; And seek forgiveness of Allah. Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And plead not on behalf of (people) who deceive themselves. Allah loves not one who is treacherous and sinful.’¹³

Let us pause at this instance in the Medina, where the community was made up of different sub-communities: the Muslims, the Jews, the hypocrites, the pagans, and representatives of different tribes. With all this kaleidoscope, the commitment to the truth and the staunch belief in it remain the principles which God wants to breed in His Messenger regardless of the circumstances. The Koran came down to admonish the Messenger on his position. The Koran did acquit the Jews and put the blame on those hypocrites who feigned to be among the believers.¹⁴

This clarity and directness in the persona of the Prophet is one which fits the man whose conduct is for all mankind to emulate.

¹¹ Chapter of ‘Abassa: 1-10

¹² Cf. *al-Muatta’* (476); al-Tirmidhi’s *Al-Jami’*: (3331); al-Tabari’s *Al-Tafsir*: (30/51); Abu Ya’la’s *Al-Musnad*: (3123; 4848); Ibn Hibban’s *Al-Sahih*: (535); *al-Mustadrak*: (2/558); al-Qortobi’s *Al-Tafsir*: (19/212-213); Ibn Kathir’s *Al-Tafsir*: (4/471).

¹³ Chapter of al-Nissaa: 105-107.

¹⁴ Cf. al-Tirmidhi’s *Al-Jami’*: (3036); al-Tabari’s *Al-Tafsir*: (5/268-270); al-Tabarani’s *Al-Mu’jam al-Kabeer*: (19/9; (15)); *al-Mustadrak*: (4/426); Ibn Kathir’s *Al-Tafsir*: (1/551-552).

The Description of His Hair

One feels amazed by the degree of detailing in the description of the Prophet's physical features. The scholars talked about his external traits in the minutest way. Thus, they described the hair on his head. It was neither tightly curly nor completely straight, but between the two.¹⁵ At times it would grow until it reached his shoulders, and at others he would cut it to the level of half the ears.¹⁶ And he took good care of it:

Aisha said that 'when he was combing his hair, it was like paths of sand being furrowed by that comb'.¹⁷

Ummu Hani' reports that 'the Messenger of God once came to Mecca, and he had four braids'.¹⁸

In another report, she says: 'I saw four braids in the hair of the Messenger of God'.¹⁹

The Description of His Face

His face was also meticulously portrayed. He had a round face²⁰, not a complete roundness, but it was like the moon when it is complete. And it was white with a slight ruddiness, as if the sun or the moon were running in it²¹. He also had a broad forehead.

¹⁵ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Musannaf* (31805); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (13543); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (3547; 3548; 5900); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2347); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (3623; 3638); Abi Ya'la's *Al-Musnad* (3643); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (6387).

¹⁶ Cf. Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Mussannaf* (21033; 20519); Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (31805); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (12139; 12196; 18688); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (5901; 5903; 5904); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2337; 2338); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (4186); al-Nassai's *Al-Sunan* (5061).

¹⁷ Cf. Al-Bayhaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubunwa* (1/300); *Tareekh Dimashq* (3/357); *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Deen* (2/382).

¹⁸ Reported by Ahmad (26934; 27429); Abu Dawuud (4191); al-Tirmidhi (1781); Ibn Majah (3631); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (24/429;1049).

¹⁹ Reported by Ahmad (27430); Abu Dawuud (4191); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (24/429) (1048); cf. also *al-Tarikh* by al-Tabari (2/223).

²⁰ Cf. Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2344); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (6297).

²¹ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (31805; 31807); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (944); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2340; 2344); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubunwa* (1/299).

Aisha said: 'The Messenger had a spread out forehead. When it appeared from among the hair, or he would look at us at daybreak or at the onset of the night, or when he turned up to face people, they would see as if the light of a lantern were twinkling on his forehead'.²²

His eyes were large and white, as if having kohl.²³ His nose was straight with a little protruding in the middle.²⁴ His cheeks were straight and white.²⁵ His mouth was rather large²⁶ and had space between his foreteeth.²⁷ He took great care to clean his teeth by brushing them.²⁸

He also had a thick beard.²⁹ Yet it was neither too long nor too short. He made a point of combing it, cleaning it, anointing it and perfuming it.³⁰

²² Reported (abridged) by al-Khattabi in *Gharib al-Hadith* (1/597); Abu Nu'aim in *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (549); al-Baihaqi in *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (1/298-306); Ibn 'Assakir (3/356-363); cf. also *al-al-Seera al-Halabiya* (3/435); *Takbreej Ahadith al-Ihyaa* (6/168); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (8/453).

²³ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (31806); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (20955); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (3645); *Mukhtassar al-Shama'il* (193; 347); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (2024); *al-Mustadrak* (2/662); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (2/212); *al-al-Seera al-Halabiya* (3.436); al-Suyuti's *al-Shama'il al-Shareefa* (1/27).

²⁴ Cf. Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (1/422); *Mukhtassar al-Shama'il* (6); al-Tabarani's *Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (22/155) (414); al-Bayhaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (1/215).

²⁵ Cf. *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (1155); *Mukhtasar al-Shama'il* (6); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (22/155) (414); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (1/287).

²⁶ Cf. Ibn Sa'd's *al-Tabaqat* (1/422); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (20950; 21024); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2339); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (3647); *Mukhtasar al-Shama'il* (6); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (6288; 6289); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (1904; 22/155; 414); *Shu'ab Al-Eeman* (1430); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan al-Nubuwwa* (1/215); *Tarikh Dimashq* (3/293-4, 338, 344, 348).

²⁷ Cf. *Mukhtasar al-Shama'il* (6); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (22/155) (414); *Shu'ab Al-Eeman* (1430); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (1/215); *Tarikh Dimashq* (3/338, 344, 348).

²⁸ Cf. Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Musannaf* (2106, 19605); Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Musannaf* (1783, 1790); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (607, 967, 25594); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (245, 1136); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (252-3, 255).

²⁹ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Musannaf* (31807); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (684, 21036); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2344); al-Nasai's *Al-Sunan* (5232); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (6297, 6311); al-Tabarani's *Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (1916); *Takbrij Ahadith al-Ihyaa* (1/85-6).

³⁰ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (20826, 20843, 20872); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (296, 1545, 5923); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2344); al-Nasai's *Al-Sunan* (5114); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (6297); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (1963); *al-Mustadrak* (2/664, 4202); *Shu'ab Al-Eeman* (6463, 6465).

His Body

His body was moderate in everything. He was neither too tall, nor too short, but average height.³¹

His Clothing

As for his clothing, he was not particularly strict on garments. He would not ask for what was not to be found, nor refute what was at hand. He put on a gown imported from Levant.³² He put on a turban.³³ And he put on a cloak and a wrapper.³⁴

He used to like good, clean clothing. But he did not exaggerate in it and dressed without the least sense of pride. He never wore long clothes. He warned people against it, especially if it was accompanied by vanity. He said: ‘God turns away from one who drags his clothes out of vanity’.³⁵

His Humility

The Prophet was the best exemplar of simplicity, and hated vanity and arrogance. His constant aim was to remain close to the people in his nutrition, clothing, transport, and when sitting. One day he slept on a bed which left its traces on the side of his body³⁶ because there was nothing thick between him and the bed. He

³¹ Cf. Abdurrazzaq’s *Al-Musannaf* (6786); Ibn Abi Shayba’s *Al-Musannaf* (31807); Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (1053, 13543); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sabih* (3548-9, 5900); Muslim’s *Al-Sabih* (2347).

³² Cf. Abdurrazzaq’s *Al-Musannaf* (747, 750); Ibn Abi Shayba’s *Al-Musannaf* (1859, 1877); Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (18159, 18265); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sabih* (363, 2918, 5798-9); Muslim’s *Al-Sabih* (274); Abu Dawud’s *Al-Sunan* (151); al-Tirmidhi’s *Al-Jami’* (1768); Ibn Maja’s *Al-Sunan* (3563); al-Nassai’s *Al-Sunan* (82, 125); Ibn Khuzaima’s *Al-Sabih* (1645).

³³ Cf. Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (15196, 14375); Muslim’s *Al-Sabih* (1358-9); Abu Dawud’s *Al-Sunan* (4076-7); Ibn Maja’s *Al-Sunan* (1104, 3587); al-Tirmidhi’s *Al-Jami’* (1679, 1735); al-Nassai’s *Al-Sunan* (2869, 5346).

³⁴ Cf. . Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (208, 221, 26275); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sabih* (1545); Muslim’s *Al-Sabih* (1365, 2080).

³⁵ Cf. Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (5351, 11023); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sabih* (5783); Muslim’s *Al-Sabih* (2085); Abu Dawud’s *Al-Sunan* (4085); al-Tirmidhi’s *Al-Sunan* (1731); Abu Ya’la (5572).

³⁶ Cf. Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (222, 2744, 3709); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sabih* (2468, 4913, 5843); Muslim’s *Al-Sabih* (1479).

would often sit on the ground, eat on the floor, and sit on a straw mat.³⁷

One day, Mulaikah, Anas bin Malik's grandmother, invited the Prophet over to share a meal which she had prepared in his honor. He answered and ate of the food, then said: 'Stand up so you can pray behind me'. Anas said: 'So I brought a straw mat which had grown black with use. I sprayed it with water, and then the Prophet stood on it. The orphan and I stood behind him, and the elderly woman behind us. He prayed two Rak'at and then he left.'³⁸

The mountains would have been made gold and silver for him if so he had wished. Yet what he loved was simplicity³⁹ and spontaneity. He stayed away from affected behaviour. He preferred to be close to the people and be one of them, never assigning on them tasks beyond their capacity.

³⁷ Cf. Ibn Isshaq's *al-al-Seera* (1/175); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (3709); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahib* (1980, 5862); Muslim's *Al-Sahib* (1159).

³⁸ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (12362, 12529, 12703); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahib* (380, 860); Muslim's *Al-Sahib* (658); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (612); al-Nasai' *Al-Sunan* (801); Ibn Hibban (2205).

³⁹ Cf. Ibn Sa'd's *al-Tabaqat* (1/381, 466); Ahmad *Al-Musnad* (22190); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (2347); *al-Abaad wa al-Mathaani* (2253); al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (11/578); *Akblaq al-Nabiy* by Abu al-Shaykh (p. 267); Abu Nu'aim's *Ma'rifat al-Sahaba* (1404); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubunwa* (1/345); *al-Shifa bi-Ta'rif Huquq al-Mustafa* (1/241); *Tarikh Dimashq* (4/134); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/68, 6/62, 321); *Fath al-Bari* (11/292); *al-Khasais al-Kubra* (2/291).

Abu Talib

A Divine Secret

Part of God's bounty on His Prophet was Abu Talib, who defended and cared for him even though he was following his people's religion. There was probably a hidden wisdom there. If Abu Talib had been a Muslim, he would have hardly rendered those services to him. He would have been acting from a weaker position. But keeping his forefathers' religion gave him power and respect, and made Quraish venerate him on this asset.

Quraish came to him and said: 'This man said so and so, and did so and so. What if you handed him over to us, and we gave you one of our sons in exchange?' He retorted: 'By God, this is most unfair! You give me your son so I can feed him for you, and I give you my nephew to kill him. By God, never will this happen! If the she-camel loses her young, she does not develop love for another one?'⁴⁰

Another day, they came to him and said: 'O Abu Talib, your honor among us and old age and position notwithstanding, we will not leave your nephew on this until we take his life or else he stops what he is doing to us – abusing our deities, offending our ancestors, and sneering at our religion. Whether you want to get ready for our war or not, that rests with you: you have been warned, and we have done our best to stave off your enmity and war. We think that is the solution. So think it over and give us your point and your verdict.'

Abu Talib called his nephew. He said: 'O nephew, your people came to me and said such and such. And before that, they hurt me. So please preserve me and yourself. And do not put any burden on me or on yourself. And refrain from saying about your people what divides us.' So the Prophet thought that his uncle had started to take a new position. He thought he was letting him down, as if his protection had weakened. He said: 'O uncle. If they were to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand so that I

⁴⁰ Cf. Ibn Ishaq's *al-Seera* (2/133); Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (1/202); al-Tabari's *al-Tarikh* (1/545); *Tarikh Dimashq* (66/344); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/63).

abandon this matter before God makes it prevail or I die in its way, I would never abandon it.' The Prophet shed tears in sorrow and left. As he was turning away, Abu Talib called him and said: 'Come nephew.' When the Prophet went near him, the uncle said: 'Go and say whatever you will. I will never surrender you for anything in the world'.

According to another report, Abu Talib said: 'Your cousins here are saying that you are hurting them in their gatherings and worship place. So please give that up.' The Prophet raised his eyes to the sky and said: 'Can you this sun?' They said: 'Yes'. He said: 'It is not in my power to respond you to that anymore than you can give me a torch from it (i.e., the sun)'. Abu Talib said: 'By God, my nephew is right, so just go back'.⁴¹

Another time, Quraish came to Abu Talib. He stood before them and told them clearly that he could not possibly let down the Prophet. They threatened to make a coalition against him and his tribe. At that time, he made a poem⁴² where he expressed that he invoked God for protection from those who had no mercy and no sympathy and were plotting against him. In the same poem, he praised the Prophet and his generosity and great character.

His people did plot against him, as with the ill-famed proclamation which they hung in the Ka'ba. It was a declaration of complete embargo against the Hashim family and anyone affiliated to them: no commercial transactions, and no marriages with them.⁴³ This document once represented an unjust chapter against Islam. Now the enemies of Islam often resort to this kind of malice.

Quraish wrote it up and posted in on the wall of the Ka'ba, and acted accordingly. The extent of hunger and poverty which affected the Muslims was such that they had to eat dry leather among other things. Those who had a sense of justice stood up against the

⁴¹ Reported by Ibn Ishaq (2/136); al-Tabarani in his *Tarikh* (2/315); Abu Ya'la (12/176) (6804); Ibn Asakir (41/4-5; 66/315); cf. also al-Bayhaqi's *Dalail al-Nubunna* (2/187); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/149); *al-Isaba* (7/236).

⁴² Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/108); *Tarikh Dimashq* (66/319); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/39); *Fath al-Bari* (2/496).

⁴³ Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/195); al-Tabari's *Tarikh* (1/549); *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* (1/269); *Ussud al-Ghaba* (5/378); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/108).

document after a while and went to tear it. But by then, worms had already gnawed it. This was a sign that God does not bless the work of wrongdoers.

The noble position of Abu Talib and the Hashims in their efforts to protect the Prophet had wonderful significance. Part of it is the fact that those who do not follow this religion are not at the same degree of hate to it.

For example, Abu Talib had a special status. The Prophet tried and tried to attract him until the last moments of his life. While he was dying, the Prophet went to see him and said: ‘O uncle, say “there is no god but Allah” and I’ll be your witness on the Day of Judgment’. Abu Talib replied: ‘If I knew Quraish would not use it to call me names and say I did it out of cowardice, I would certainly have made you happy with it.’⁴⁴

Abu Talib died non-Muslim. He died saying that he had the faith of Abd al-Muttalib. Yet in spite of his death as a non-Muslim, the Muslims acknowledge his great services. All biographers pay tribute to him for his good role. Even the Koran talked about the Prophet’s special love for him, a love not based on religion, and said: ‘You will not guide whom you love. But Allah Guides those whom He wills’.⁴⁵ Yes, the Prophet did love him, and by so doing loved to see him guided. Hence we have to be aware that some non-Muslims tend to respect Islam and like it, and have a true sense of sincerity, honesty and loyalty.

Others are described differently in the Koran: ‘those who disbelieve and hinder, He will render their deeds vain.’⁴⁶ So in addition to their disbelief, these people hindered others from pursuing God’s path. The Koran also said: ‘Those who disbelieve and hinder from the path of God, for them We will add torment to

⁴⁴Cf. Ibn Ishaq’s *al-Seera* (4/222); Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (9608, 9685, 23724); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sahih* (1294); Muslim’s *Al-Sahih* (24-5); al-Tirmidhi’s *Al-Jami’* (3188); al-Tabari’s *Al-Tafsir* (11/41); al-Tabari’s *Tarikh* (1/544); al-Baihaqi’s *Dalail al-Nubunna* (2/344-5); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/233); Ibn Kathir’s *Al-Tafsir* (3/396); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/124, 7/334); *al-Seera al-Halabiyya* (2/46).

⁴⁵ Chapter of al-Qasas: 56.

⁴⁶ Chapter of Muhammad: 1.

the torment because they used to spread corruption.’⁴⁷ These people corrupt, hinder, and unjustly wage wars.

Therefore, the disbelievers have different ranks. Consequently, we have to remember that dealing with them on a just and honest basis is likely to draw them close to our religion. Perhaps one who has accepted Islam today was considering it yesterday. A month ago, he was reading about it. And a year ago, he heard about it and was interested to find out more about it. Thus he came a long way to find it. Indeed, a non-Muslim might be already halfway through the path leading him to receiving it. Therefore, we should not hinder the way of God. Rather, we should be a means to attract to Islam by good conduct and decent treatment of people: we should be constantly aware that the disbelievers are the subject of our preaching.

⁴⁷ Al-Nahl: 88.

The Year of Sorrow

Love and Sorrow

In the tenth year of the mission, the Prophet was hit by great sorrow due to the death of his uncle Abu Talib. What added to his grief was that his uncle died non-Muslim, until the revelation came with God's Word: 'You will not guide whom you love. But Allah Guides those whom He wills'.⁴⁸

The Prophet loved Abu Talib and yearned for his conversion. But for some wisdom which we do not know, God did not allow that to happen. This verse came from God to His Prophet to soothe him. The Prophet felt great pain at seeing his uncle die as a non-Muslim for several reasons:

1. He used to defend and protect him. And when he died, Quraish dared what it did not dare before.
2. He died a disbeliever. This unveils an important element in this religion. It is in total harmony with the decent qualities of the human nature, and emphasises and promotes them. For example, the Prophet informed us that a woman will go to Paradise because she quenched a thirsty dog.⁴⁹ He also told us of a woman who will go to Hell because she imprisoned a cat until it died.⁵⁰ He thus gave us a rule that 'In every living being there is charity'.⁵¹

We should never lose sight of these humane values in Islam.

⁴⁸ Chapter of al-Qasas: 56.

⁴⁹ Cf. al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahib* (3467); Muslim's *Al-Sahib* (2245); Abu Yaala's *Al-Musnad* (6044); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahib* (386); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* (531); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (15597).

⁵⁰ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (27008-9); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahib* (745, 2364-5, 3482); *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (379); Muslim's *Al-Sahib* (2242); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (1265); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahib* (2838); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (24/94, 252); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (9851, 15593).

⁵¹ Cf. al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahib* (2363); *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (378); Muslim's *Al-Sahib* (2244); al-Shihab's *Al-Musnad* (113).

The Elevated Values in Islam

We need such kind of preaching as would highlight the superior values of Islam, and tell people in the East and West that Islam rests on the honoring of humans. ‘And indeed We have honored the children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with pure good things, and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment.’⁵²

The original discourse in Mecca was ‘O mankind’. In Medina, another discourse was added: ‘O those who believe’. The two went hand-in-hand: ‘O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. The most honorable of you with God are the most God- fearing.’⁵³

The story of Khubaib bin Adiy,⁵⁴ who could have taken his revenge by killing a child of the disbelievers, which he would never even think of, is yet another indicator of the nobility of Islam. Another example is that Islam prohibited the burial of little girls live at a time when those little girls lived in an environment of idol worshiping and they would possibly have grown to be disbelievers too. This is also indicative of the humanitarian character of Islam, regardless of the faith of the person in question. These are all great values of faith, and we should never forget them at times of anger vis-a-vis those who fight Islam.

The year of sorrow highlights the humane aspect and grandeur of the Prophet even while he was facing hatred and war from some people. It shows that he would feel sorry even for those who did not earn the grace of guidance and died as non-Muslims.

⁵² Chapter of al-Israa: 70.

⁵³ Chapter of al-Hujurat: 13

⁵⁴ We will see the story below.

The Day at Taef

The Great Test

The Prophet once went in to see his wife Aisha. Like any husband, he started speaking to her about his reminiscences. Aisha asked him if he had been through harder times than those of the Badr and Uhud battles. She said: ‘Messenger of God, The day of Uhud was a particularly hard day: a number of men were killed and others injured. Even the Messenger’s head was gashed and his fore tooth broken. Did you ever go through a worse day?’

He said: ‘Yes, Aisha. I have seen from your people what I have seen. But the worst of what I have seen was on the day of Aqaba. I went to request the support of three brothers who were chiefs of Thaqeef – Abd Yalil son Abd Kulal, and Mas’oud and Habib, sons of Amr, son of Umair.’ These three men were among the senior figures of Thaqeef. He spoke to them and called them to God’s religion and solicited their support for Islam. One of them said sarcastically: ‘Did God find nobody other than you to send?’ The second one said: ‘I would put on the cloth of the Ka’ba if God sent you’. And the third one said: ‘I swear that I will never speak to you again. If you are truly a Messenger, you are too dangerous to respond to.’

Then the Prophet said to Aisha: ‘Then I left in great sorrow.’ He was not interested in this world or its pleasures, nor in power. All his concern was the mission and call to God. His purpose was to get people to listen to him and accept his message. And that is the mark of the sincere preacher, as is found in the Koranic verse: ‘Yet it may be, if they believe not in this statement, that you (Muhammad) will torment your soul with grief over their footsteps’.⁵⁵

Utterly disappointed, the Prophet left them weighed down with distress, deep in thought, not knowing exactly where he was going, until he found himself at Qarn al-Tha’alib. Such was his agony that he realised he was at that site only when he was there. His was

⁵⁵ Chapter of al-Kahf: 6

awakened by the sight of a cloud on which was Angel Gabriel. He said to him: ‘Allah has heard your people’s response to what you said. And He has sent you the angel of the mountains so that you order him of whatever you want him to do to them.’ Then the angel of the mountains greeted me’, said the Prophet, ‘and said: O Muhammad, our Lord has heard what your people have responded. And I am the angel of the mountains. Your Lord has sent me to obey your orders. Anything you want. I can crush them between the two Akhshabain mountains if so you wish.’⁵⁶

But hostility to, and disbelief in, religion are not limited to the story of Taef. It is an old and ongoing process of belligerence, denial, and disbelief vis-à-vis the mission of the Prophet Muhammad. It is a long historical chain of denial and rejection of the Prophet Muhammad, and of attempting to corrupt the image of the religion with all sorts of denigration and defamation of the Prophet, even though it was contradictory with the Arabs’ conduct and traditions. The Arabs were generous and noble; however, for example, when the Muslims migrated to Abyssinia, Quraish sent emissaries to warn the Abyssinians against Muhammad and his followers. So they asked the king to send away whoever came to them of the Muslims and return them to their people, who knew them better.

The Long Breath

The angel spoke of sandwiching the Meccans between the Akhshabain.⁵⁷ The Prophet’s response was: ‘I rather hope that God will make of their offspring a generation who would worship Him without associating any deities with Him’. He made this choice on the basis of wise and deep thinking. Had we been in those circumstances, we would have seized that unique opportunity and urged the angel to crush them between the two mountains!

⁵⁶ Reported by al-Bukhari (3231); Muslim (1795); al-Nassai in *al-Al-Sunan al-Kubra* (7706); Ibn Hibban (6561); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (8902); cf. also al-Asbahani’s *Dala’il al-Nubuwwa* (1/108, 208); *al-Rawd al-Unuf* (2/235); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/284); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (1/49; 4/352); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/57).

⁵⁷ The two mountains overlooking Mecca, named “Abu Qobais” and “Qu’aiqi’an”.

This would be the outlook of normal people who do not see the consequences of things as the Prophet did. Such harsh position would have been justifiable on several bases:

1. That those people worshiped idols in the very holy Ka'ba, where there were three hundred and sixty statues.
2. Those people had been duly warned. The Prophet had talked to them, and they rejected him as a messenger even though they had never questioned his trustworthiness, his honesty, and his lineage. They knew his rank among them, and yet they denied his mission and called him a liar.
3. They bothered the Muslims and persecuted them everywhere.
4. They prevented the other tribes from accepting Islam. During the different gatherings of the Arabs, the Prophet would ask tribe after tribe for their support for his mission, but the latter surmised that if he had been right, his own people would have been the first to believe him: they regarded his people as the wisest Arabs and the most respected among them. 'So how can we come in the way and believe him when they did not! It is not becoming of us and our tribal customs to do so', they surmised. Thus, getting rid of the disbelievers would certainly have helped to remove the obstacles between other people and this religion.
5. The annihilation of those disbelievers by means of an earthquake or an avalanche or by crushing them between the two mountains would have been a special incident, an extraordinary event which would have urged people to say: 'had he not been truly a messenger from God, that would not have happened. It is God who has given him victory over his opponents.' And all this would have induced more acceptance of the new religion among people.

This would be the position of an ordinary man – an obviously simple stance to take. The response of the Prophet, however, while he was immersed in sorrow, was different: ‘I rather hope that God will make of their offspring a generation who would worship Him without associating any deities with Him’. A look into this statement quickly reveals the profundity of his wisdom and his insightful appraisal of matters.

Great Lessons

This story has significant morals:

1. The Prophet’s persistent endeavor to guide his people even though they did not believe him. He still asked God to create from them descendants who would worship him.
2. The Prophet did not want them to suffer. He preferred to allow them more time, which shows the difference between him and the previous messengers, some of whom asked God to send His punishment on their people when they disappointed them. For example, ‘And Noah said: My Lord! Leave not of the disbelievers a single one on earth.’⁵⁸
3. The mission of the Prophet was based on mercy. This is why he was merciful toward his people and did not want them to die as agnostics or idol worshippers.
4. It is reflective of the patience which was the Prophet’s propensity in spite of the bitterness of the continuous persecution and ruthless war he was subjected to. If but a little of that had happened to us, we would have lost control of our senses and wished the whole existence would be crushed. But the Prophet was serene, self-possessed, and patient, even at the hardest of times.

⁵⁸ Chapter of Noah: 26

In the Prophet's response 'I rather hope that God will make of their offspring a generation who would worship Him without associating any deities with Him', there is an indication that this religion is built on rational belief and free choice. Those people did end up accepting the Prophet's mission when their rule and the obstacles disappeared. They saw the truth plain, as God says: 'We shall show them Our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth.'⁵⁹ Accordingly, they believed in God and followed His Messenger. Some of them were killed before the Prophet's eyes and some were killed defending him. Some of these had been among the most sworn enemies of the Prophet: they opposed his mission and fought him bitterly, but later turned leaders, chiefs, and scholars of Islam. And God gave them His grace before their offspring – all through rational persuasion, and the Religion was ultimately victorious.

In fact, the Prophet was sent with divine signs and evidence. And the greatest of these signs is the Koran, which abounds with miracles which have compelled a great many people to believe in it. Many of these miracles are not related to the life time of the Prophet, but extend beyond that and can be witnessed by those after him.

Conquering the Hearts before the Lands

In effect, the Prophet proved infinitely patient and so did his companions until God helped them to conquer the lands. And he did not die until he saw the signs of triumph and extensive conquest. Then came down the revelation:

*When the help of Allah comes and victory,
And you see people enter Allah's Religion in crowds,
Celebrate the praises of your Lord and ask for His forgiveness,
For He is ever ready to show grace and accept repentance.*⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Chapter of Fussilat: 53.

⁶⁰ Chapter of al-Nasr: 1-3.

It was not a victory based on pure fighting and physical power; rather, it was essentially a matter of reason, proof and persuasion. Such is the difference between the spiritual conquest based on divine meanings which are far from injustice and coercion, and imperial conquests which only aim at expansion, wealth accumulation and pleasures. In the Koran, God says: 'As for that Abode of the Hereafter We assign it to those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption. The sequel is for those who ward off (evil).'⁶¹

⁶¹ Chapter of al-Qassas: 83.

The Nocturnal Journey and the Ascension

A Great Sign

God says: ‘Glory to (Allah) Who carried His servant for a nocturnal journey from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We show him some of Our signs: He is the One Who sees and hears all things.’⁶²

In Mecca, the Prophet underwent all sorts of injustice, rejection, and hostilities. He went through enormous suffering and grief. But his Lord was protecting and tending him. Part of that was manifested in the Nocturnal Journey and then the Ascension. The former trip was explicitly mentioned in the Koran: ‘Glory to (Allah) Who carried His servant for a nocturnal journey’. The term ‘*Asra*’ means ‘walk at night’. God took him from Mecca to Jerusalem, from the Great Mosque of Mecca to al-Aqsa Mosque. Some accounts say that this took but a very short segment of time by people’s normal measurement criteria. But it was one of the greatest miracles of the Prophet. This happened a year before the migration to Medina, as many scholars say, and Ibn Hazm claimed that there is a general consensus among scholars about this statement.⁶³

The Nocturnal Journey occurred in the month of Rabia al-Awwal, as many scholars say, though many people mistakenly think it was in the month of Rajab.⁶⁴

While the Prophet was sleeping, Angel Gabriel came with the *Buraq*⁶⁵, an animal which lays its hoof on its tip. The Prophet was

⁶² Chapter of al-Israa: 1

⁶³ Cf. al-Baghaoui’s *Al-Tafsir* (3/92); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/242); Ibn Kathir’s *Al-Tafsir* (3/23); *Fath al-Bari* (7/203); *Rub al-Ma’ani* (30/183).

⁶⁴ Cf. *al-Shifa bi-Ta’rif Huquq al-Mustafa* (1/194); *Usud al-Ghaba* (1/128); *Lata’if al-Ma’arif* (p.236); Ibn al-Wardi’s *Tarikh* (1/102); *Tabyin al-’Ajab bi-ma Warada fi Fadl Rajab* (p.11); *Fath al-Bari* (2/203); ‘*Umdat al-Qari*’ (6/115); al-Suyuti’s *al-Isra wa al-Mi’raj* (p.36); *Rub al-Ma’ani* (15/16).

⁶⁵ An animal between the size of a horse and that of a mule.

taken from the Great Mosque of Mecca to al-Aqsa Mosque. All the prophets were gathered for him there, and he led the prayer for them. The *Buraq* was tied at the place where the previous prophets used to tie their horses, which is still there, and its name is *Ha'it al-Buraq*, but called the 'wailing wall' by the Jews. After that, the Prophet was raised to the heavens – the first heaven, then the second, etc. until he heard the Pens writing. There he received of the revelation what he received, and he saw great miracles and signs of his Lord.

Landmarks and Meanings

This special event is rich in meanings. Here are some of these:

1. The exclusive reliance on authentic hadiths which relate the details of this journey. As for the additions found in some books, such as the book *al-Israa wa al-Mi'raj*, attributed to Ibn 'Abbas, (but a book full of lies and fantasy, and myths having no rational basis or link with the reliable references,) they only portray matters of faith and prophethood as falsehood and folk tales, and exaggerated legends. All that has to be discarded as extraneous to our religion: it is better looked to as a drug to the minds.
2. It is evident that the Nocturnal Journey was true and not a dream, though some people claim that the Prophet was taken in his dream on this journey. Had it been a dream, it would not have been of any significance. Any one of us can see in his dreams that he is journeying in the extreme east or in the extreme west, or flying in outer space or even in the heavens, and the Prophet would not have had any special credit for that kind of journey.

In addition to this, the idol worshippers took advantage of this story to mount a malicious campaign against the Prophet: how can he claim to have done this in one night – to go to Levant and Jerusalem and return from it in one night, while it takes us huge

effort and months to get there and return. Meanwhile Muhammad alleges that he did it before his bed lost its warmth! From the latter detail we conclude that this journey was a real one. He did it with his body and soul together. The claim that only his soul took the trip is not true, although it was attributed to some Companions like Mu'awiya and Aisha, as was said by Ibn Kathir. Most Muslim scholars agree that the journey occurred with the body *and* the soul. This is where it gets its essence, grandeur, and power from.⁶⁶

The Nocturnal Journey and Ascension happened by the end of the Meccan era, and just before the migration to Medina. This shows that one of the most meaningful messages is to link Mecca with Jerusalem, in that the venues of the divine missions have been unified by the last of messengers into one entity once and for all. So when we read 'By the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai, and by this land made safe'⁶⁷, we see that the locations of the Messengers were juxtaposed in this chapter – the places where Jesus grew up: Levant, Nassira, and Palestine; and the places where Moses grew up: Sinai, and Palestine, too; and the place where Muhammad grew up and was sent: the Peaceful Country, which was the last one.

The Unity of Missions and the Unity of the Land

This emphasizes the unity of all divine missions, and that the mentioned land is a Muslim one. It shows the connection between the sacred places. It equally shows that these places are part of the history of this *Umma* and its reality – indeed part of its religion. This is why the Prophet said that a prayer at the Great Mosque of Mecca is worth a hundred thousand prayers elsewhere,⁶⁸ that a prayer at the Mosque of Medina is worth a thousand prayers elsewhere,⁶⁹ and

⁶⁶ Cf. al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (15/16-7); al-Qortobi's *Al-Tafsir* (10/209); *al-Rawd al-Anif* (2/191); Ibn Kathiri's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/104); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/114); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/143); 'Umdat al-Qari' (15/125).

⁶⁷ Chapter of al-Teen: 1-3.

⁶⁸ Cf. Abdurrazzaq'a *Al-Mussannaf* (15891); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (14735, 15306); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (1406, 1413);

⁶⁹ ⁶⁹ Cf. Abdurrazzaq'a *Al-Mussannaf* (9137, 9138, 9140, 9142); Ibn Abi Shaibah's *Al-Mussannaf* (7513, 7516, 16162); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (1605, 16162); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (1190); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (1394, 1395, 1396).

that a prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque is worth a thousand prayers⁷⁰, according to some Hadiths, or five hundred according to other Hadiths,⁷¹ though some more authentic Hadiths speak of the worth of two hundred and fifty prayers.⁷²

Thus, these places have a special status. They are the only place one can travel specifically to. The Prophet said: 'No journey can be taken to a holy place except three mosques: The Great Mosque of Mecca, al-Aqsa Mosque, and this mosque of mine'.⁷³

We have to revive this exceptional sense now that al-Aqsa Mosque is undergoing great suffering under the occupation of the Zionist usurpers, who are trying to ruin it through allowing extremists to carry out willfully destructive work in it. First they burned it down, and now they are digging tunnels underneath it, looking for an alleged temple or other things. What is amazing is that the more they dig, the more Islamic vestiges they unearth!

This is a Muslim land, and its historic framework is Muslim, too!

The Religion of All the Prophets

It is not only Muhammad who was sent with Islam; in fact all messengers came with Islam. For example, we believe in the religions of Moses and Jesus. And we believe that their heritage was taken over by Muhammad. This is precisely what the amazing occurrence of the Nocturnal Journey points to. It also shows the interconnection between all these sites, and their important place in the history of Muslims. Consequently, no one, be they individuals, groups, or even states, has the right to disown this land or part of it, or trade it for anything. It is part and parcel of Muslim land and

⁷⁰ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (7725, 11751); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (1407).

⁷¹ Cf. al-Fakihi's *Akhbar Makkah* (2/90); *Shu'ab Al-Eeman* (4140, 4144); al-Bayhaqi's *Al-Sunan al-Sughra* (1752).

⁷² Cf. al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* (6983, 8230); *al-Mustadrak* (4/554); *Shu'ab Al-Eeman* (4145). The wording of Abu Dharr was: 'We were discussing at the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which was the better, the Prophet's Mosque or al-Aqsa Mosque? The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'A prayer in my mosque is better than four prayers in it'.

⁷³ Reported by Ahmad (7191, 11523); al-Bukhari (1189, 1198, 1864, 1996); Muslim (1397); Abu Dawud (2033); Ibn Majah (1409, 1410); al-Tirmidhi (326); al-Nassai (700).

history, and Islamic glory, nay Islam per se. If the current generation is incapable of preserving it or re-establishing justice to it, let them at least acknowledge that truth is truth and falsehood is falsehood. Let them be sure that usurping and power do not change the essence of the truth in any way, and the future generations will be able to realize what the present one could not. We have to keep in mind the link between these lands.

The Nocturnal Journey event, in which the Prophet led the prayer for the other prophets at that holy site, is clearly symbolic of the concluding character of this mission. Prophet Muhammad was the heir of all messengers, and brought the last religion whereby God completed His mercy on mankind, giving people their last religion. God's grace was now fully bestowed on mankind: 'If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.'⁷⁴

The Prophet has brought the final religion, the final scripture, and hence ultimate guidance. It was necessary thereafter for anyone to listen to his call and believe in him. No one can reach Paradise except through his way. On the authority of Abu Huraira, the Prophet said: 'By the One Who owns my soul, anyone who hears of me in this *Umma*, be he a Jew or a Christian, and dies before believing in what I have brought, will enter Hell.'⁷⁵ The Prophet is therefore the final messenger, and his mission has brought the final and dominating religion.

A Hope which Never Withers

These notions should revive hope in our hearts that the holy land will return to its legitimate owners. And we should not be content with watching passively; we have to take the initiative and help the party of the fighters who strive on the way of God and defend it, and whom the Prophet mentioned as the dwellers of Baiyt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) and its dominion – the ones who will always be victorious over their enemy, acting on the principles of

⁷⁴ Chapter of Aal Imran: 85.

⁷⁵ Reprtd by al-Tayalissi (509); Ahmad (8188, 8594); Muslim (153); Abu Nu'aim in *al-Hiḥya* (4/308).

God, unconcerned about those who let them down or contradict them, until God's decision comes while they are on that conduct.⁷⁶ If a person cannot do that, at least let him, as the Prophet said, send a little oil to light up that mosque.⁷⁷

We have to endeavor to reach this goal by substantiating the divine account portrayed in the Nocturnal Journey occurrence, which shows that this land will return to its due owners sooner or later: 'And you will come in time to know the truth thereof.'⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (27667); al-Tabari's *al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (7643; 20/317; 754); *Al-Mu'jam al-Ansat* (47).

⁷⁷ Cf Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (27667); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (457); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (1407); Abu Yaala's *Al-Musnad* (7088); al-Tabari's *al-Mu'jam al-Ansat* (8445); al-Bayhaqi's *Al-Sunan* (4114).

⁷⁸ Chapter of Sad: 88.

Between Believing in the Unseen and Rejecting Falsehood

Some of the Lessons of the Occurrence

One of the striking stories which accompanied the occurrence of the Nocturnal Journey and the Ascension was that of Abu Bakr. The people of his tribe came to him and asked: ‘Did you hear what your man is saying?’ He inquired: ‘What is he saying?’ They informed him that he was claiming that he had been to Jerusalem and up to heaven in one night. So what was Abu Bakr’s response? He said: ‘Well, if he said that, it is the truth’.⁷⁹ From that day on, and even before, he was nicknamed ‘*Assiddeeq*’, as God says: ‘And whoso brings the truth and believes therein...’⁸⁰ He was truthful, believing the divine truth which the Prophet brought. And he was the first man to believe him, and believed the occurrence of the Nocturnal Journey and the Ascension.

But what is particularly amazing is that when he was told of the happening, he said: ‘If he said so, it is the truth’, thus linking the truthfulness of the event to the authenticity of the report – whether the Prophet did say it or not. He meant to conclude a great fact: that belief in the unseen is the foundation of religion, as God said: ‘... those who believe in the unseen...’⁸¹ People only know what is connected to God, the hereafter, Paradise and Hell, resurrection, etc. through the revelation. The difference between the believer and the non-believer is that the former accepts that the unseen exists, while the latter does not, and only believes in what is tangible.

⁷⁹ Cf. Abdurrazzaq’s *Al-Musannaf* (9719); Ibn Hisham’s *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/245); al-Tabari’s *Al-Tafsir* (15/6); al-Tabari’s *Al-Mu’jam al-Kabeer* (24/432; 1059); al-Baihaqi’s *Dala’il al-Nubumma* (2/360-1); *al-Mustadrak* (3/65, 81); Abu Nu’aim’s *Ma’rifat al-Sahaba* (62); *Tarikh Dimashq* (30/55); al-Mutahhar al-Maqdisi’s *al-Bad’ wa al-Tarikh* (4/163); al-Zaila’i’s *Takhrir al-Ahadiith wa al-Athar* (2/258); Ibn Kathiri’s *Al-Tafsir* (3/12); *Fath al-Bari* (8/392); *al-Darr al-Manthur* (5/188); *al-Khasa’is al-Kubra* (1/257); *al-Seera al-Halabiyya* (2/92); al-Albani’s *al-Israa wa al-Mi’raj* (pp. 60-1).

⁸⁰ Chapter of al-Zumar: 33.

⁸¹ Chapter of al-Baqara: 3.

Between the Unseen and Falsehood

We have to make a difference between the unseen and falsehood. The unseen transcends the mind. And the mind cannot visualize nor fully fathom it. If all humans were to attempt a definition of but a few divine facts, their minds would certainly come to nothing, because they have no set criteria to build their analogy on. It is simply too much for the mind. There is no way that the limited human mind could approach the great divine facts and all that which is linked to them!

So the unseen is over the mind. Meanwhile, falsehood is below it. The mind rejects and scorns it. Everything which people exchange with no solid basis from *shareea* is regarded as sheer falsehood. And many Muslims these days confuse one for the other, so that all too often they hastily rush for myths and mistake them for the truth.

Over thirty years ago I was reading a book by Abdul Aziz bin Baz which was warning about the alleged testament of Sheikh Ahmad about the keys of the Haram which he had, and the long alleged dream with bizarre details. Then I said to myself: does this really necessitate the writing of a book? This is an obvious story which everyone knows, so why should there be a need for a book on it? But since then, I have realized that it is a story which is repeated every year, and people start asking about it on the cellular and on the internet, as well as in meetings and lectures, as if it were there for the first time. In fact, other scholars such as Muhammad Rasheed Reda had dealt with it in his Fatwa books.

It is just amazing how people grab these stories and myths and fall for them! Worse than that, they spread them so quickly and believe them!

The Islamic Mind

The Islamic mind is supposedly a model in its purity, objectivity, and perspicacity in accepting only the information which can be proven. The Koran instructs us thus: ‘Say: Bring your

proof if you are truthful’,⁸² and: ‘He who invokes any other god along with Allah has no proof thereof. His reckoning is only with his Lord’⁸³. Hence those who worship gods other than Allah are shown to have no evidence. And certainly, idol worship can only be unfounded. But this is only to point to the issue of proofs and scientific facts. As for the evidence, one depends on the circumstances – one can rest on *shareea* when it is a matter of religious discussion; otherwise, on a different kind of substantiating.

This *Umma* is supposed to be the leader of the world. Unfortunately, however, it is common to witness aberration and falsehood in its everyday life, and deviant ways of worship!

The Past and the Present

This *Umma* is badly in need of someone who would cry out: ‘This *Umma* is not what God wanted it to be, nor is it living according to what His Messenger nurtured in his Companions!’ When Abu Bakr received the news of the Nocturnal Journey of the Prophet, while the Prophet was nearby in Mecca, he said: ‘If indeed he said that, it is the truth’. And he made the veracity of the event contingent on whether the Prophet did or did not say it: he wanted to make sure first.

The mind, the precious jewel whereby man has been distinguished as such, should not be allowed to become a vessel of myths and fairy tales. However, when you travel around in Islamic countries, you find exactly *that* deeply anchored in religious milieus. For example, in mosques, you see tombs and saints who people visit, and dances and songs. And you see fortune tellers there who pretend to know the future and the unseen. They claim that they have superpowers to cure all sorts of diseases and ills. And people do fall for that and love it and live in full harmony with it!

⁸² Chapter of al-Baqara: 111.

⁸³ Chapter of al-Muminun: 117.

Religion is a War on Falsehood

This is amazing! The people of the religion which has come to fight falsehood have turned into a community which accepts it and even incorporates in its religion. When you look at the rituals, you are surprised to see how falsehood has crept into their worship rituals and their piety! So much so that now they are now considered by many as part and parcel of their faith and practices.

True religion does not have any sympathy with falsehood. It rather publicly condemns it and fights it. The principles of the Koran and the Sunna and the conduct of the Prophet as well as that of his Companions and the early generations of Muslims, the Imams, and the scholars reflect this tendency. Some of those would say: 'I can only believe what is supported by the Book and the Sunna.'⁸⁴ They were alert even about the simplest statements, and did not accept them until they found in the Koran and the Sunna what proved them.

The Role of Reformists

We are aware that many Muslims today are naïve. But that is the responsibility of scholars, preachers, and the media. There should be a constant effort to construct a righteous Muslim mind, one which would not accept falsehood, but whose motto and guide would be based on the principle: 'Say: bring your proof if you are truthful'.⁸⁵ that is, a mind which would only accept what is built on evidence from the Koran and the Sunna, not what draws on myths and falsehood emanating from people's salons and societies, or, as the case may be, from their assertions indiscriminately. As often as not, one would find it embarrassing to deny these things and can neither accept them nor reject them at once, for one is not sure how to distinguish its truth from its falsehood.

We have to be clear about religious basics. That is the only way we can distinguish between what is truly a divine revelation and what is sheer fiction.

⁸⁴ Cf. *al-Ba'ith 'ala Inkar al-Bida'* (29); *Majmu' al-Fatawa* (10/694; 11/585, 595); *al-Fatawa al-Kubra* (2/390); *Madarij al-Salikin* (2/40; 3/142).

⁸⁵ Chapter of al-Baqara: 111.

Today, Islam is obscured by the ills of its people. Will *we* be the ones who will correct the false impression?!

Prayer in Islam

The Obligation of Prayer

What is amazing is that when the Prophet ascended to heaven, while up there, he was given the directive to do the daily prayers. Firstly, he was told to tell his *Umma* to perform fifty prayers each day and night. On his way back, he met Moses, who asked him: 'What were you instructed to do?' He said: 'I was told to do fifty prayers'. At that time Moses recalled his experience with the children of Israel, who kept on complaining to their prophets. Moses told him that 'I have experienced dealing with people before you, and I have suffered with the children of Israel.' (Note the value of experience, even in the life of prophets). Then he advised him to 'go back to your Lord and ask Him for a reduction'. (Note also how prophets exchanged advice: they were fellows in their task; therefore, they advised each other for the good of their communities.)

The Prophet returned to his Lord asking Him for a cut. Then he passed by Moses, who urged him to return yet again for a decrease. The Prophet did again and again until the number of prayers stopped at five in twenty-four hours. Still, Moses urged the Prophet to 'return to your Lord, for your *Umma* will not bear it'. But the latter said: 'I am too embarrassed to return to my Lord'. At that time, the Prophet heard a call saying: 'I am enforcing My injunction, and for My servants made a reduction, and will reward for one by ten'. Then the voice said: 'It is five but it is fifty – no altering of My Word'.⁸⁶ What heavily symbolic divine words!

There are Unquestionably Five Prayers

That is to say, this is the fate which God decreed for this *Umma*. It started out as fifty only as an indication that it was the original injunction, but then came the alleviation, so that people know of the grace of God on them: but the essence of the original

⁸⁶ Reported by Ahmad (12527; 17867; 17869; 21326); al-Bukhari (349; 3207; 3342; 3887; 7517); Muslim (162; 163); Ibn Majah (1399); al-Nassai (448-9); Ibn Hibban (48; 50).

value remained with its initial reward. For this *Umma*, one act is multiplied by ten, so five gives fifty. This is why He said 'It is five', i.e., in the number of acts, but 'It is fifty', i.e., in reward. Yet there is no limit to the increase offered by the Lord, for whoever He wills.

'I am enforcing My injunction', which is originally five prayers. Hence the general consensus that they are five prayers to all Muslims from the time of the Prophet to the present and to the end of the world – all Muslims: scholars and laypeople – five prayers in the day and night.

Ascension of the Soul

If the Prophet did ascend to heaven in person, until he was able to hear the sounds of the Pens, and other scenes were unveiled to him, there is a substitute which God has given his *Umma* – raising their souls to heaven in every prayer. Hence the exclusive orientation in the prayer to God: the only legitimate God to prostrate oneself to is God. This strengthens faith in God – the One and Only, the object of our worship and the One we return to, the One Who never begot nor was begotten; there is none like Him. This re-invigorates the energy of the heart and the soul. It rids them of the exhaustion and the wreck of this life. The worshipper leaves the prayer with a spirit and vigor quite different from the ones he had before entering it. This is why some sages used to say: 'If you want to know your value to God, see what the value of the prayer is to you'.

Acknowledgement of the importance of the prayer is a definite necessity to all Muslims. Islam is not complete without it. Performing the prayer is one of the essential foundations of Islam. No warning about anything in Islam outside idol worship is stronger than the one about not observing the prayers. The Prophet said: 'Failure to observe the prayer leads man to disbelieving and idol worshipping'.⁸⁷In another hadith, he said: 'The covenant

⁸⁷Reported by Ahmad (15021); al-Darimi (1233); Muslim (82); Ibn Majah (1080); al-Tirmidhi (2619); Abu Ya'la (4100); al-Bayhaqi (6287; 6289).

between us and them is the prayer: whoever fails to observe it is a disbeliever'.⁸⁸

The Prayer Fashions the Muslim's Personality

Every time you ponder over this religion anew, you think what a wonderful religion it is! Thanks to this teaching, and to the insistence of God and the Prophet on the affair of the prayer, the Muslim has developed a unique personality. So has the Muslim society. Every time you enter a Muslim country you notice its Islamic character through its mosques, pulpits, minarets, and the obvious character of this great ritual. All these are dignified signs of the splendor of Muslim civilization, and of the people's insistence on the prayer. You can hardly find a Muslim who does not have a story to tell about his relation with the prayer or with a mosque, regardless of who he is. He may be an addict, going astray, or what not; yet, he always keeps alight in his heart the torch which connects him to the essence of his faith through tangible means such as the prayer. It is one of the aspects of the greatness of this religion and its eternal existence, and its power to resist all sorts of destruction and corruption affecting the Muslim communities.

⁸⁸ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaibah (30396); Ahmad (22987); Ibn Majah (1079); al-Tirmidhi (2621); al-Nassai (463); Ibn Hibban (1454); al-Hakim (1/48).

Let Us Get to Work!

Between the Nocturnal Journey and the Migration

When God gave his Apostle the permission to do the Nocturnal Journey to Jerusalem and back, Angel Gabriel brought the *Buraq* – an animal which puts its hoof on its end. This is part of the unseen which we believe in without having to understand it in detail. There is no good in attempting to scrutinize things which the mind does not perceive. The mind should rather pore over such things as would fall within its range of capacity, and which lend themselves to methods which it can handle.

When, on the other hand, God gave His Apostle the permission to leave Mecca, no *Buraq* came to him, and no angel was sent to him. It was now his duty as a way to worship God to look for ways to get on with his migration. He thought out the means with Abu Bakr in secret. He left without anybody's knowing, even his own family. He took the camels, and went through the opposite direction, taking a difficult terrain in order to be difficult to reach. He hid in Cave Hira for a few days until the fervor to get him back abated. Then he set off towards Medina. During that trip, he went through a number of difficulties which can be related among these stories.

The story of Suraqa

Suraqa bin Malik bin Ju'shum al-Mudliji wanted by any means to get the prize – one hundred camels – for getting Muhammad dead or alive. But he was surprised by the help and protection which God blessed Muhammad with. As he came within sight of the Prophet and his Companion, his horse's legs sank in the sand. So he started shouting to the Prophet, who he thought to be straying and stranded, 'O Messenger of God, promise me safety!' which the Prophet did, and further promised him: 'What, Suraqa, if you put on the bracelets of Kisra?!' He asked: 'Kisra, son of Hurmuz?'⁸⁹ 'Yes, Kisra son of Hurmuz', confirmed the Prophet.

⁸⁹ Emperor of Persia.

Surāqa was taken aback. that promise came true during the reign of Omar.⁹⁰

The Companion and Friend

The Prophet went on in his journey through difficulties and concern, until the revelation came down: ‘...when they two were in the cave, when he said to his comrade: Grieve not. Allah is with us.’⁹¹ Abu Bakr sometimes walked in front of him, sometimes behind him, sometimes on his right, sometimes on his left. The Prophet asked: ‘What is this Abu Bakr? I am not used to this kind of behavior’. Abu Bakr said: ‘Messenger of God, now I remember the possibility of an ambush and I rush forward; now I remember the possibility of being tracked and I retreat; now on your right; now on your left: I just cannot help worrying for your safety’.⁹²

The Human Act and the Divine Act

So there is a big difference between the Nocturnal Journey and the Migration to Medina. The latter was assigned on humans, who were supposed to carry its burden. It was not an affair of the unseen like the Nocturnal Journey. It was a kind of worship and relied on man-sought means. The Prophet shed tears as he was leaving Mecca. He stopped at Khazwa, close to today’s Souk al-Layl, and turned to the Ka’ba and to Mecca, which was a small city at the bottom of a mountain, and said: ‘By God, you are the best of God’s land, and the dearest to God of His land. And had I not been driven out, I would have never left you.’⁹³

⁹⁰ Cf. the story of Surāqa on the migration to Medina in Ibn Sa’d’s *al-Tabaqat* (4/366); Ibn Abi Shaiba’s *Al-Mussannaf* (36610); Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (3); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sahih* (3652); Ibn Hibban’s *Al-Sahih* (6281); al-Baihaqi’s *Dala’il al-Nubumma* (2/484); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/187-8). Cf. also the story of the two bracelets in al-Baihaqi’s *Al-Sunan* (12812; 12815); al-Baihaqi’s *Dala’il al-Nubumma* (6/325); al-Istee’ab (1/174); *Ussud al-Ghaba* (1/422); Ibn al-Atheer’s *al-Kamil* (1/277); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (6/194); *al-Issaba* (3/41).

⁹¹ Chapter of al-Tawba: 40.

⁹² Reported by al-Lalika’i in *Sharh Ussul l’Itiqad Abl al-Sunna* (2426); al-Hakim (3/7); Ibn ‘Assakir (30/80). Also cf. al-Baihaqi’s *Dala’il al-Nubumma* (2/476, 477); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/180); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/203).

⁹³ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (36900); Ahmad (18737-40); Ibn Majah (3108); al-Tirmidhi (3925); Ibn Hibban (3708); al-Hakim (3/8; 3/489); Ibn ‘Assakir (11/492). Also cf. Ibn

When he left for Medina, his Lord soothed him with the verse 'He Who has ordained the Koran for you for a law will bring you back to the place of return.'⁹⁴ That is to Mecca, which he had left. And that was what happened eight years after, as his Lord had promised.

There are two fundamental differences to be heeded between the two occurrences: in the case of the Nocturnal Journey, the *Buraq* came with no effort from the Prophet. And in no time at all, he was in Jerusalem, nay, he ascended to the high heavens. In the case of the Migration to Medina, it was a matter of responsibility and testing. Therefore, the Prophet had to calculate and plan, organizing his trip as best he could, in absolute silence. He resorted to all his mental, material, and human resources until the trip was completed in the best possible conditions.

Such lessons as these show us the worth of fathoming the biography of the Prophet. There is more to it than the mere listening to its recitation and enjoying it in gatherings – that is not enough. The Prophet's biography is a record which exemplifies the implementation of the principles of Islam and its values. It is a chance for all the believers to implant in their hearts the correct acts and the right perception of the noble Prophet.

Causation

Working on the basis of causation is important in life and in religion. Those who will be dwelling in Paradise will be told by God: 'Enter the Garden because of what you used to do.'⁹⁵ They will not enter Paradise purely by means of their deeds, but by the grace of God. However, their deeds made them qualify for His grace. This is what we find in 'The mercy of Allah is nigh to the good.'⁹⁶ It is clear, therefore, that whoever gains Paradise does through his own good deeds; and whoever enters Hell does through his own

Sa'd's *al-Tabaqat* (2/137); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (2/518; 5/107); *Zad al-Ma'ad* (1/48); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/205); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/196).

⁹⁴ Chapter of al-Qassas: 85.

⁹⁵ Chapter of al-Nahl: 32.

⁹⁶ Chapter of al-A'raf: 56.

bad deeds. And he who earns the satisfaction of God does by way of His obedience, and he who incurs God's wrath does so by disobeying Him.

As for the context of this world, Islam emphasizes the cause-and-effect (or causation) law: God says: 'It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor the desires of the People of the Scripture. He who does wrong will have the recompense thereof, and will not find against Allah any protecting friend or helper. And whoever does good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter Paradise and they will not be wronged the dint in a date stone.'⁹⁷ And those who only keep making wishes 'grasp the goods of this low life (as the price of evil doing) and say: It will be forgiven us. And if there came to them (again) the offer of the like, they would accept it'⁹⁸. None of that will save them from God. This earth does not sanctify anybody, nor does pedigree. 'He who does wrong will have the recompense thereof, and will not find against Allah any protecting friend or helper. And whoever does good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter Paradise.'⁹⁹

He Died in Prostration

As in this life as a whole, simple wishes do not yield any reward. Muslims of today's world east and west keep talking, hoping, and blaming. But if they were sincere and fair, they would blame their own selves. 'So blame me not, but blame yourselves',¹⁰⁰ will say Satan to his followers on the Day of Judgment.

A Muslim has to know that being a Muslim entails being serious and doing a good job. It does not preclude being a businessman or a scientist in worldly matters. The One Who enjoins praying is the same One Who enjoins seeking worldly matters. It is a great fallacy to construe Islam as a religion exclusively for pure rituals to connect people with God. Often

⁹⁷ Chapter of al-Nissa: 123-4.

⁹⁸ Chapter of al-A'raf: 169.

⁹⁹ Chapter of al-Nissa: 123-4.

¹⁰⁰ Chapter of Ibrahim: 22.

people would laud someone who died in prostration. This is certainly a laudable situation to die ('the closest to God a servant can be is when he is prostrating himself'¹⁰¹; '...But prostrate yourself, and draw near (to Allah)').¹⁰²

Why do Muslims not hail one who dies at work? Is this not part of religion? Is it not a kind of worship? Does it not aim to benefit people? God rewards for any kind and degree of good deeds, even if with no intention. Do these values not lie at the heart of religion? Is the one who showed us how to bow and prostrate ourselves not the one who said: 'God loves when you do any work that you perfect it'?¹⁰³ The expression 'any work' includes any kind of work, big or small, for this world or the other. So as one is required to concentrate in his prayer, for example, so is he to do his best at work or in studies, or any work for that matter, as long as it is allowed and benefits him in this world.

While he does this to earn a promotion or succeed or excel, he finds here another motivation which dwarfs all other drives – it is the love of God.

This is a wonderful religion. But the eternal problem is the link between people and their religion, which has weakened. They are in dire need of someone to restore the spirit of religion to them and help them to reconnect with their Lord and turn this relation into perfected practical acts.

In this religion, the present world and the hereafter are not separate. The way to Paradise goes through being good to kin and neighbors, and being honest and doing one's duties. It passes through eminence at work and honesty with people. Rituals are not the only way to win Paradise.

Many Christians worship their Lord once a week and the bank in the rest of the week. But the Muslim's life is in constant worship: 'Say: my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are

¹⁰¹ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (34872); Ahmad (9442); Muslim (482); Abu Dawud (875); al-Nassa'i (1137); Ibn Hibban (1928); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (10014); al-Hakim (1/395).

¹⁰² Chapter of al-'Alaq; 19.

¹⁰³ Reported by Abu Ya'la (4386); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (897); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab Al-Eeman* (5312-4); and authenticated by al-Albani in *al-Silsila al-Sahiba* (1113).

for Allah, Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. This am I commanded.¹⁰⁴

So let the Muslim feel the meaning of worship while praying, bowing, and prostrating himself and by working. And let him sense the meaning of worship by hugging his child or performing his duties with his family, or studying hard or being honest at work.

¹⁰⁴ Chapter of al-An'am: 162-3.

The Prisoners of Badr

At the Council

On the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas, when the prisoners of Badr were taken, the Prophet asked Abu Bakr and Omar: “What do you think about these prisoners?”

Such was his habit: he was never dictatorial in decisions, but encouraged his Companions to voice their opinions with no reservation, even though he received the revelation continually, and he welcomed their views. Thus the first one to speak was their leader, Abu Bakr, saying: “Prophet of Allah, they are kith and kin. I suggest you claim a ransom, which we can use to strengthen ourselves, and maybe God will later guide them”.

This position reflects Abu Bakr’s desire to see them guided, although they were the ones who faced the Prophet with swords and spears, killed a number of the Prophet’s Companions, and were finally captured in a fierce battle with the very Muslims whom they had maltreated. Those were the people who had driven out the Prophet and waged war against him even after he had left them and settled far in Medina. Yet, Abu Bakr considered the kinship side by saying: ‘they are kith and kin’, and found this a good excuse to demand a ransom to secure their release rather than be killed.

Then the Prophet asked Omar for his opinion. Here was a man who scared Satan himself, so that Satan would never dare to go along the same path as Omar.¹⁰⁵ Omar said: ‘Oh no, Prophet of Allah. I certainly do not see what Abu Bakr sees’. This was a distinctly different position from that of Abu Bakr. He said: ‘I suggest you permit us to sever their heads: you permit Ali to sever the head of ‘Aqeel, and me to sever the head of such and such (mentioning a name of an in-law).’ He wanted each one to be allowed to kill his own relative, as if to show people that there is no sympathy for the enemy disbelievers even if they should be the closest of relatives.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (3294; Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2397).

But the Prophet sided with the stance of Abu Bakr rather than that of Omar. The Prophet said: 'You are weak and needy, so none of them shall be set free but on a ransom.' The prisoners paid the ransom and then they were released. The revelation came thereafter as follows: 'It is not for any Prophet to have captives until he has thoroughly subdued the land.'

This occurrence deserves a pause:

1. The Difference between Abu Bakr and Omar on the Prisoners

Difference of opinion should in no way damage good relations. Abu Bakr based his position on kinship and relations to suggest pardon for a ransom. Meanwhile, Omar saw that kinship and relations are the very reason why they should be treated toughly and killed. And when the Prophet opted for Abu Bakr's view, the problem certainly ended there. It was never reported that the Companions were divided into factions, one siding with Abu Bakr and the other with Omar, a third was unsure, a fourth stayed in the margin, etc. What was reported is that the whole story was over once and for all.

Besides, it is only normal for people to hold differing opinions on such issues as this one. The ruler then picks up one of the views and adopts it. The ruler here was Muhammad, Prophet of God. The Muslim society stays away from conflict, feuds and clashes which result from stubborn positions which people refuse to change at any rate.

Also, Abu Bakr and Omar did not find anything wrong with disagreeing. It was not reported that Abu Bakr summoned Omar to have a one-on-one audience with him and blamed him on presenting a point of view opposing his, and that Omar should have kept silent at that time. Nor was it ever related that Omar talked to him about that matter in privacy and accused him of not giving good enough opinions.

Everyone knew that good intentions were their main concern. They saw that supporting the religion was the priority. But Abu Bakr gave precedence to the guidance of the prisoners, which is

why the Prophet took his side. Omar, on the other hand, was taken by the sense of justice, and showing the triumphant side of the religion and the fact that infidels who wage war against the Muslims should have no sympathy in the hearts of Muslims. He thought that this was a much needed position at the first ever battle in Islam.

2. The Unarmed Party

We know that the battle of Badr was the battle of '*al-furqan*' (distinction), as our Lord called it. It was the first day Islam was made victorious. That battle was decisive, as all historians and biographers say, inasmuch as it was the very first one between Muslims and disbelievers. Victory in that battle announced the spread of Islam in the rest of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. However, God documented in the Koran that the Companions were not keen on clashing with those people to begin with: 'And when Allah promised you one of the two (enemy) bands that it should be yours, you wished that the unarmed one should be yours'.¹⁰⁶ In fact, they were wishing to get the caravan headed by Abu Sufian, which they had initially gone out for, so that they could recover part of the money which had been unduly taken away from them. They did not have any confrontation in mind whatsoever. This was consonant with what the hadith said, as reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim: 'O people, do not wish to confront the enemy. And ask God for safety. But if you meet him, be steadfast, and bear in mind that Paradise lies under the shade of the swords'.¹⁰⁷

Islam is not a religion which is thirsty for blood and wars. It is a religion of guidance, one for all mankind. But if it is fought and taken as an enemy, it grows fierce. It does not face swords, bombs and wars with flowers and other sweet smelling herbs. That is not the case. Muhammad was the Prophet of mercy but also war. And each one had its place. That is why the Prophet and his Companions did not wish for a battle. But God knew where good

¹⁰⁶ Chapter of al-Anfal: 7.

¹⁰⁷ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (9514); Ibn Abi Shaibah (19507; 33080); Ahmad (19137); al-Bukhari (2819; 7237); Muslim (1741; 1742; 1902); Abu Dawud (2631); al-Hakim (2/87).

lay and He wanted things to go in that direction. And there was the battle between the Muslims and their enemies.

So the Muslims were victorious, and their enemies suffered a humiliating defeat. This happened in spite of the long period of difficulties for Muslims both in Mecca and Medina. Now they were getting into a war for the first time although they did not want it. It was God's will, however, which led them there.

Now that the battle was over, and the Muslims had the toughest and most impudent of the men of Quraish in their hands, how would they treat them? Were the Muslims driven by a feeling of grudge and revenge which triumphant people generally resort to? Or were they mercifully and faithfully concerned about their repentance and guidance? This was the essence of the debate which took place between the Prophet and the Muslims, and finally led to the adoption of Abu Bakr's point by the Prophet. It was, therefore, the position of the Prophet himself and of Abu Bakr. And when the Prophet adopted it, it became a rule for those people.

3. The Lord Admonishes His Apostle

Some people wonder why God revealed the verse 'It is not for any Prophet to have captives until he has thoroughly subdued the land'.¹⁰⁸ Does it mean that the opinion of the Prophet and Abu Bakr was lesser than that of Omar? In fact it does not. The text of the Koran shows that what the Prophet did was perfectly right. And God never rebuked them on it. He said: 'It is not for any Prophet to have captives until he has thoroughly subdued the land', thus meaning the imprisonment. It is as if God said to the believers: 'Now that you have come face to face with the disbelievers and they have used their swords against you, why do you not use your swords against them?!' This is quite normal: 'Therefore, when you meet the unbelievers in battle, smite at their necks'.¹⁰⁹ This clearly does not mean meeting them at the market place, the street, at their homes, etc. It means when you meet them at the battlefield, that is, when they prepare for your fight and deliberately come to you for

¹⁰⁸ Chapter of al-Anfal: 67

¹⁰⁹ Chapter of Muhammad: 4.

that purpose. No one, no law, system, state, or principle in the world will dare say that those people are not called fighters and should not be treated likewise. People who do everything to fight you can only be dealt with in the same way.

He said: ‘Therefore, when you meet the unbelievers in battle, smite at their necks’, that is war for war, smite by smite, sword by sword – a fair encounter; and ‘at length, when you have thoroughly subdued them’, that is, by killing and overpowering them, at that time ‘make fast of bonds’, i.e., by taking them as prisoners. Thus the verse shows that taking prisoners is not done at the initial stage, with the intent to demand ransoms later on. It is only done after completely defeating them. And that is not what happened on the day of Badr.

So God rebuked them for taking prisoners before completely defeating them. Once they become prisoners, they will be in a different state – prisoners of war. That is the meaning of ‘It is not for any Prophet to have captives until he has thoroughly subdued the land’. Once they ‘make fast of bonds’, that is they tie the prisoners fast, the next stage comes: ‘thereafter either grace or ransom.’¹¹⁰ Note that God did not mention here killing, but pardon or ransom. This is exactly what the Prophet did: he pardoned many of them, as with Thumama bin Uthal.¹¹¹ He did not ask for a ransom from him in exchange of his release. This is what is meant by ‘...or a ransom’. However, a ruler may see that a detainee be killed for a special reason, as in the case of Abu ‘Izza al-Jumahi, who duped the Muslims time after time. The Prophet said to him: ‘Oh no! By Allah, I will not give you the chance to walk pompously in Mecca saying: I duped Muhammad again’.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Cf. Ibn Hisham’s *al-al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (6/51); *al-Bukhari’s Al-Sahih* (462; 2422; 4372); *Muslim’s Al-Sahih* (1764); *Abu Dawud’s Al-Sunan* (2679); *al-Tabari’s Al-Tafsir* (26/42); *al-Baghawi’s Al-Tafsir* (4/178); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (5/49).

¹¹² Cf. Ibn Hisham’s *al-al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (4/55); *al-Baihaqi’s Al-Sunan* (17807); *al-Baihaqi’s Dala’il al-Nubuwwa* (3/280-1); *Tarikh al-Islam* (2/207); *Nasb al-Raya* (3/405); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/46; 51); *al-al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/554); *Fath al-Bari* (10/440); *al-Maqassid al-Hassana* (1329); *Kashf al-Khafa’* (3132).

4. Islam is the Religion of Mercy and Valor

Islam is the religion of mercy, valor, and justice. And God gave each of these values a due portion: war has its rules; taking prisoners has its rules; peace has its rules. But for many Muslims who live with non-Muslims in the West these days, things may not be as clear as they should be. They do not always make any distinction between people and contexts. Therefore, due to the circumstances in which these Muslims live in Europe or America, be they native of those countries or from other origins, they are in special need of the method to approach the local people in terms of behavior, dialogue, persuasion, promoting the beauty of Islam, etc. to attract them to Islam and open their hearts so that they look into it for themselves. *That* is the role of Muslims, not waging wars. War is a necessary evil which is resorted to when need be. But it is the last of resorts. And over their long history, Muslims have never been aggressors or evil doers or pleasure or wealth seekers: they were only callers for God.

It is noteworthy that over twenty-three years, the number of casualties in all battles did not exceed a few hundred. Now the deaths in just one of the wars perpetrated against Islam by Eastern or Western powers are counted by the thousand, not to say hundreds of thousands. These are fighters, men, women, children, elderly as well as other innocent people. But Islam, the religion which God sent Muhammad with, is indeed a religion of mercy.

Khubaib in Mecca

On the water of Rajee'

The Prophet once dispatched a group of his Companions on a military mission under the leadership of Assim bin Thabit. They were attacked by the disbelievers and fought until all but three men were killed. Those three surrendered on the condition that they be spared. Khubaib was one of the three. But the disbelievers sold him to some Meccans who wanted to kill him to avenge their father, who had been killed at Badr. So he was taken in custody by the Meccans. And while he was waiting to be killed something particularly meaningful occurred.

Faithfulness in the Face of Betrayal

Al-Bukhari reports in his *Sahih* that Khubaib had prepared to be killed while in captivity. He had asked the woman in the house where he was being detained to give him a knife to cut the hair of some parts of his body as part of the hygiene of Islam. At that time a little child sneaked into his place.

The woman in the house lost sight of her child and was worried, as she later said. She looked around and found him in Khubaib's lap. Panic stricken, she thought: 'The knife is in his hand, and the child is in his lap, and he is a prisoner awaiting death, so he will definitely take his revenge and kill the child.'

Khubaib saw the fear on her face and understood her heart's feeling. He smiled and said: 'Are you afraid lest I kill him? I swear by God I would never do such a thing!'¹¹³

¹¹³ Reported by Ahmad (8082); al-Bukhari (3045, 3989, 4086); Abu Dawud (3112); al-Nassa'i in *al-Kubra* (8839); Ibn Hibban (7039); al-Baihaqi (6428). Cf. also al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubumma* (3/325); al-Baghaoui's *Al-Tafsir* (1/181); *Tarikh al-Islam* (2/230-1); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/62-3).

The Noble Foe

The character which this religion imprints on its followers is not a matter of vain slogans and meaningless, pompous claims. The effect of this religion transpires in big as well as small acts in the behavior of its adopters. This Companion, human nature notwithstanding, could not do what one might think of. It is his religion which bred in him his noble conduct, so that he did not even think of killing an innocent child!

This wonderful conduct has to be rekindled in the life of Muslims today. The world has to know that *these* are the values which Islam promotes, so that even at war, a Muslim never loses sight of his Prophet's moral code – that he should never kill a child, an elderly person, a woman, worshiping people in their places of worship, and so on; the list of the acts which the Prophet, Abu Bakr, and Omar prohibited at war is long.¹¹⁴

...And Do Not Transgress

Today we are witnessing the so-called war on terrorism. This war has betrayed a number of allegations about human rights, particularly when armies go to lands other than theirs, where we see aggression, torture, degrading human race with little regard to human dignity. Yet, in parallel we see formidable propaganda about the safeguarding of human rights and the promotion of democracy.

Islam, on the other hand, promotes these rights in its own way. The above story is the best expression to reach Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A little boy is in the lap of a man who is about to be unjustly executed, and who was taken by treachery; yet the man soothingly says to the child's mother: 'Do not worry; I would never kill him'.

Such are the principles instructed by Muhammad: 'Deliver what you have been entrusted with to that who has trusted you, but

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (2828); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (1731); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (2613, 2614); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (1408, 1617); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (2857, 2858); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (4739); al-Tabari's *al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (2305, 7397, 11562), *al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* (135, 1431, 4162), and *al-Mu'jam al-Saghir* (340, 514); *al-Mustadrak* (4/582); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (17728, 17825, 17929, 17931, 17932).

do not betray that who has betrayed you.¹¹⁵ What is the Muslim young people's position toward this? You must not kill a child, a woman, or an old person of those who do not fight! And this is the case when you are in the midst of a clearly defined battle with a clear enemy; let alone when the conflict is not so evident! But what if the situation involves aggression on your behalf?! God says in the Koran: 'Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loves not aggressors.'¹¹⁶ He also says: '...and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty.'¹¹⁷ And in another verse, He says: '...And let not your hatred of a folk who (once) stopped your going to the Inviolable Place of Worship seduce you to transgress; but help one another to righteousness and pious duty.'¹¹⁸ If someone disobeys God in treating you, it is your duty to obey God in treating him. Do not betray that who betrays you. Do not be unjust to one who is unjust to you. Do not be disloyal to one who is disloyal to you. And do not violate the honor of one who violated your honor.

These values are enjoined on Muslims even at war.

He is Dearer to Him than His Own Self

Here is another position: Khubaib bin 'Adiy is taken out of Mecca to be killed. He is asked: 'Wouldn't you rather Muhammad were here to be killed while you were safe at home?' He says: 'I swear by God I would not like Muhammad, where he is now, to be hurt by a thorn while I am safe at home.'¹¹⁹ That is, he would rather die than see a thorn hurt the Prophet's foot.

This is what it means to have faith and feel thankful to God for sending this noble messenger, as God says: 'Allah verily has shown

¹¹⁵ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (22949); Ahmad (15462); al-Darimi (2597); Abu Dawud (3534, 3535); al-Tirmidhi (1264); al-Daraqutni (3/35); al-Hakim (2/53); al-Baihaqi (21092).

¹¹⁶ Chapter of al-Baqara: 190.

¹¹⁷ Chapter of al-Maida: 8.

¹¹⁸ Ibid: 2.

¹¹⁹ Cf. al-Tabari's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (5284); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (3/326-7); *Hiya al-Anhya* (1/246); *Tarikh Dimashq* (21/162); *al-Muntadham* (4/303); *Zad al-Ma'ad* (3/244-5); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/66).

grace to the believers by sending to them a messenger of their own who recites to them His revelations, and causes them to grow, and teaches them the Scripture and wisdom; although before (he came to them) they were in flagrant error.¹²⁰ Khubaib was prepared to sacrifice himself, his family, and all his money for the sake of the Prophet. At this moment of utmost sincerity, Khubaib spoke on behalf of all those who truly love the Prophet and perceive his great influence on their lives. They realize that he is the prophetic leadership which God chose for us from among His prophets, and for whom God has chosen us from among the nations. His love is deep, very deep in the hearts of those who have really loved him. Those who do not realize this love do not really know what believing in God is: 'No one will be a believer until he loves me more than his father, children, and all people.'¹²¹

Khubaib at the Gallows

When Khubaib was taken to be executed, he showed two things:

First, he extemporized a poem as if he was wedding or celebrating some other happy event. In this poem, he talked confidently and defiantly, so that some of the disbelievers who were there wrote it down or memorized it and recited it later on when they became Muslims.

Second, he asked for their permission to perform a short prayer, and they accepted. He faced the Ka'ba and prayed.

In fact, unyielding determination is found among those who tie their hearts to God: 'If you are with God in easy times, He will be with you in difficult ones'.¹²² Khubaib stood and performed his prayer. What is remarkable is that he made his prayer rather short. Then he went giving them a lesson in the pride and strength of

¹²⁰ Chapter of Aal 'Imran: 164.

¹²¹ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (20321); Ahmad (12837, 13991); al-Darimi (2742); al-Bukhari (14, 15); Muslim (44); Ibn Majah (67); al-Nassa'i (5013, 5014, 5015); Ibn Hibban (179).

¹²² Reported by Ahmad (2804); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (11243, 11560); al-Hakim (3/623, 624); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (1074, 1139, 10000, 10001).

faith: 'Surely, if I knew you would not say I am afraid to be killed, I would have made my prayer longer.'¹²³

It is these great values and practices, which the first generation was brought up to observe, which we really need today. Every Muslim has to conform to these principles to appreciate the greatness of his religion. The morals of the first generation of Islam are what we should present to the non-Muslims, who generally think that Islam is a religion of blood, violence, and revenge. If we were to show them models of behavior from the life of the Prophet and his conduct, as well as the conduct of those who lived along with him, it would cause huge changes in their positions toward Islam.

¹²³ Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (4/126); *Hiliat al-Anbia* (1/113); *Siar A'lam al-Nubala'* (1/248); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/65).

Today Is a Day of Righteousness and Gratefulness

The Day of the Victory

It is reported in the *Sahih* that when the Prophet entered Mecca victoriously, he walked into the Ka'ba and found three hundred and sixty-three statues inside it. He went pushing them with a twig he had in his hand. They fell one after the other, while he was saying: 'Truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Truly, falsehood is ever bound to vanish. Truth has come, but falsehood neither creates anything new nor starts anything again.'¹²⁴

This great historic victory on Meccans and the opening of Mecca was in the eighth year of the Hijra (Islamic, lunar) calendar. It was not an opening of Mecca, the holy land, only. In fact it was the beginning of the conversion of the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula to Islam. It was also a turning-point to a new chapter of struggle, victories, and betterment.

Mecca was the toughest city for the Prophet and the mission of Islam. Not long before, he had left it with a sorrowful heart, turned to face it and said: 'By God, you are the best of God's land, and the dearest to God of His land. And had I not been driven out, I would have never left you'.¹²⁵ And his Lord soothed him saying: 'He Who has ordained the Koran for you for a law will bring you back to the place of return'.¹²⁶ And there he was, back in Mecca, triumphantly entering it with the Muslim squads. But though this was one of the greatest victories ever, no blood was spilt in it. Some scholars said that Mecca was taken by means of conciliation, though others disagree. However, almost no deaths occurred in this historic victory. This indicated that *jihad* in Islam does not aim to kill

¹²⁴ Reported by Ahmad (3584, 10961); al-Bukhari (2478, 4287, 4720); Muslim (1780, 1781); al-Tirmidhi (3138); Ibn Hibban (4760, 5862); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (10427, 10535, 10656).

¹²⁵ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (36900); Ahmad (18737-18737); al-Darimi (2510); Ibn Majah (3108); al-Tirmidhi (3925); Ibn Hibban (3708); al-Nassa'i in *al-Kubra* (2/479); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (454).

¹²⁶ Chapter of al-Qassas: 85.

people; rather, it aims at bringing people to worship their Lord, and worship none but Him.

Jihad is Neither for Expansion nor to Disdain Others

Islamic jihad does not aim at exacting people's money or enslaving them. Its only aim is to rid them of injustice so they can have the freedom to submit themselves to God. At that time, Caesar and the emperor of Persia subjected people to the worst treatment, until the Messenger of Islam came with this religion. Thus, Islam came to free men of the ill-treatment of other men, and allow them the chance to become servants only to the High One. God says: 'How should you not fight for the cause of Allah and of the feeble...' ¹²⁷

So the Prophet went into Mecca and, with a twig in his hand, symbolically went knocking the idols over, which collapsed one by one. Meanwhile, his Muezzin (prayer caller) was calling: 'There is no divinity but Allah'.

The history of Muslim victories is immaculate, in spite of the worldly aspirations which characterize some of the more recent cases. We do not draw morals from history per se, but from the righteous practices which genuinely derive from Islam. Yet, despite any possible blemishes, Islamic history remains the cleanest and most humane, as the enemies of Islam themselves acknowledge. As Arnold Twinby, among many other authors, says, 'the world has never known more just and merciful people than the Arabs'.

The triumph of Mecca was such a distinguished one, and it was Muhammad who led it: he showed people the right direction, and paved the path to the proper orientation. This victory, known as neat and clean, was not built on injustice or offense.

The then World's Regimes were Based on Tyranny and Arrogance

Many of those who wrote about this religion, its history, and its victories know how great it is. They know well about the great

¹²⁷ Chapter of al-Nissa': 75.

conduct of the Muslims, which allowed them to reach the hearts of millions before reaching their lands. The peoples conquered by Islam are now Muslims who genuinely abide by Islam and defend it. They are ready to sacrifice their lives for it, and are providing its essence just as they helped to make its glorious history. None of this would have happened had the arrival of Islam in those lands been coercive. All this stands for one thing – that Islam did not go to dwell in those lands only, but also to dwell in the hearts of their peoples, who quickly succumbed to its charm and the conviction that it was there to defend their rights.

Those people found in Islam what they had not found in their own ruling systems and rulers. Therefore, they fell in love with it and favored it after acknowledging its high merit. They embraced the religion which was triumphant by virtue of its justice, equity, and morality, before triumphing with the sword and with power. Similarly, the Muslim of today, though without the power of weapons, can win the hearts of people through virtue, through truthfulness and noble conduct, through moderate thinking, through a rational discourse, and through abiding by the Koran and by righteousness.

Today is a Day of Righteousness and Gratefulness

The custody of the Ka'ba was in the hands of the Shaiba clan. When the Prophet entered Mecca victoriously, Ali came up to him with the key to the Ka'ba in his hand. He said: 'Prophet of Allah, give us the Ka'ba's custody along with the watering custody'. But the Prophet asked: 'Where is Othman bin Talha?' When Othman was called, he handed out the key to him and said: 'Today is a day of righteousness and gratefulness'.¹²⁸

By laying emphasis on the values of gratefulness and honesty on this historic occasion, the Prophet meant to say that this religion, which has come to occupy life as a whole, has brought happiness and warmth, as well as all other social values which bring joy to man.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (5/74); *Tarikh Dimashq* (38/389); *Zad al-Ma'ad* (3/409); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/301); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (3/52); Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's *Mukhtasar al-Seera* (203).

Let Them Rejoice

The Prophet and his Companions rejoiced at the victory of Mecca like they had never rejoiced before. The Prophet had constantly encouraged the Muslims to cultivate this feeling of happiness as it is part of life. One has to delight in matters related to the hereafter, such as scholarship, or spiritual acts like worship, fasting, praying, especially in the night at home, doing right acts in general, reading or memorizing the Koran, preaching, or any other good acts along these lines. On these acts, God says: ‘Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy: therein let them rejoice. It is better than what they hoard.’¹²⁹

So delighting in worldly matters is also an acceptable aspiration as long as it falls within the permissible – which is meant by ‘...what they hoard’ – though investing in the hereafter is always better. For example, one can feel happy to realize a success, such as a promotion, an upgrading in one’s life in general, a marriage, etc. All this is not only permissible, but encouraged as part of natural life.

Life is not hard work all the time. Nor does it have to be serious in all its moments. A person has to have times of relaxation and lightness in things which God does not forbid. Excitement and fun give the heart a new lease of life, and help to get rid of stress. Life without happiness does not last long, and an unhappy person can hardly face the hassle and concerns of life. Happiness in what God did not prohibit opens up ever more vast horizons for life, boosts the moral and imparts a new glow of cheerfulness for the psyche, and grants an incessant reserve of energy. It keeps pressing on for more and more production and success. Let us rejoice then!

Happiness has to be part of life. And fun has to occupy a part of it, even for those who are busy. Omar used to spend light times when he said poetry and entertained himself with funny things to laugh and smile at. He learned this kind of spirit from the Prophet. When we speak of Omar, we visualize a stern man who might be thought of as an unsmiling figure, whose heart is locked to happiness and distraction. Yet that is a wrong impression about him.

¹²⁹ Chapter of Younous: 58.

For example, Omar was once clad in his *Ibram* cloth, riding, as a pilgrim, his she-camel which kept ascending and descending. While the other pilgrims were saying their special pilgrims' prayers, he recited poetry¹³⁰, describing the camel and its rider as a branch of a tree which the wind moved right and left, or as a drunken man moving on unsteady legs. Another example is when he competed with Ibn Abbas, who was a teenager then, who would stay under water for longer without breathing.¹³¹ And Othman bin Affan was asked: 'Can a pilgrim in his *ibram* walk into a garden?' He said: 'Yes, and he can smell sweet-smelling plants.'¹³²

Entertainment is a Right

Such was the conduct of the Companions, the scholars, and all Muslims: to give the self a recess for fun. Al-Shafi'i was reported as saying: 'It used to be said that it is not a sign of decency to be serious in a garden.'¹³³ And when he went to a garden, he would take off his turban and laugh and joke, speaking nicely to whoever was near him. In life, there are old and young people, teenagers and children, men and women, and there is fun and diversion.

One day the Prophet was lying down in Aisha's apartment, and there were two young girls in Aisha's company singing with a hand drum in *Jabiliya* style. Abu Bakr came in and wanted to stop them, saying: 'Is it Satan's oboe in the Prophet's house?' 'Leave them, Abu Bakr; these are festivity days', responded the Prophet.¹³⁴

And when the Abyssinians played with their arrows in the mosque, the Prophet said: 'Play —' or according to a different

¹³⁰ Cf. al-Shafi'i's *Al-Musnad* (1/366); al-Dinouri's *Al-Mujalassa* (2852); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (8965); *Kashf al-Mushkil* (1/383).

¹³¹ Cf. *Al-Muhalla* (7/174).

¹³² Cf. al-Ajuri's *al-Share'a* (p.103); *Tarikh Dimashq* (15/249, 250); al-Seerazi's *al-Muhadhab* (1/209); *al-Mabsout* (4/123); *al-Majmou'* (7/241); *Majma' al-Zawa'id* (3/524); *'Umdat al-Qari'* (9/156); *al-Talkhis al-Habir* (2/282).

¹³³ Cf. al-Baihaqi's *Manaqib al-Shafi'i* (2/212).

¹³⁴ Reported by Ahmad (24726, 24996, 25072); al-Bukhari (950, 952, 988, 2907, 3530, 3931); Muslim (892); Ibn Majah (1898); al-Nassai (1593, 1597); Ibn Hibban (5868, 5877); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (23/180, 181; 286-88); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (5110).

report, ‘come on, Bani Arfada, so that the Jews and Christians know that there is distraction in our religion’¹³⁵.

Indeed there is distraction in our religion. And we have to make the best of it, for being too strict and serious tends to disrupt production and prevent people from going on in their vocations. Distraction does have a place in our religion, but it has to be optimized and regularized so that it does not lose its innocent character and trespass.

The Permissible and the Prohibited in Pleasure

A person often knows the difference between what is allowed and what is not just by instinct. The Prophet said: ‘*Halal* is clear and *haram* is clear. And between the two there are hazy things, which many people do not know.’¹³⁶ He meant that much of what is *halal* is known as such, and much of what is *haram* is known as such. Other reports have the following wording: ‘virtue is what the heart and the spirit recognize as such, and sin is what causes a discomfort in the heart, and quivers in the chest, irrespective of people’s judgment.’¹³⁷

Oftentimes, a person knows from his heart that he is heading for wrong. When there is temptation, evil provocation, too strong a pleasure appeal, responding to the devil, forgetting God, the result is that the orientation is wrong. At that time, one has to be cautious of the distraction in question, and think twice about it as a potential illicit pitfall – it has to be abandoned at once.

What is permissible suffices people, so one has to abide by it. If people were content with what is permissible, they would realize the following:

¹³⁵ Cf. al-Humaidi’s *Al-Musnad* (254); Ahmad’s *Al-Musnad* (24898, 26004); al-Bukhari’s *Al-Sahih* (950, 988, 2907, 3530); Muslim’s *Al-Sahih* (892); al-Harith’s *Al-Musnad* (866-Bughya); Abu Yaala’s *Al-Musnad* (4829); al-Baihaqi’s *Al-Sunan al-Kubra* (20866).

¹³⁶ Reported by Ahmad (18394, 18398); al-Darimi (2531); al-Bukhari (52, 2051); Muslim (1599); Ibn Majah (3984); al-Tirmidhi (1205); al-Nassai (5397, 5398).

¹³⁷ Reported by Ahmad (18030, 18035); al-Darimi (2533); Abu Yaala (1586, 1587), al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (22/148; 403).

1. The inner self would be tranquil and safe, and the soul and heart pure. And determination would revitalize again and again.
2. God's religion would be respected, and the highest values observed.

Frowning or Exaggerating

Some people cannot make a difference between seriousness and playfulness. Some people go to a festival or wedding, but they never even smile. They would resent the most innocent of jokes. Such people often mar these occasions with issues, queries, or by opposing in useless ways. This is contrary to lightheartedness. There are also people who consider those happy occasions as exceptional opportunities to transgress, even when they do know that God does not like such behavior. If Prophet Muhammad were to see them in that behavior, they would have felt embarrassed. So how dare they do those things in front of God, Who sees them constantly!

There is a place for entertainment in our religion. But many people do not exploit it properly. While some have deprived themselves of the joy of amusement, others have exaggerated it. The Prophet, who is our leader and model, did enjoy himself and allowed this. He even taught his Companions how to be happy. He ran with Aisha while on their way to a battle. She outran him in one race and he outran her another time. The second time, he said: 'We are even now'.¹³⁸ One day he went joking with a Bedouin: he held him tightly from the back and said: 'Who wants to buy the slave? Who wants to buy the slave?' When the man turned and saw it was the Prophet, he started sticking his back on the Prophet and said: 'Then you would certainly find me worthless goods'. 'But to God, you are not worthless at all', answered the Prophet.¹³⁹

Another day a woman came up to the Prophet and asked him about her husband. He asked her: 'Is he the one with the white in

¹³⁸ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (33588); Ahmad (26320); Abu Dawud (2578); Ibn Majah (1979); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (8943, 8944, 8945); Ibn Hibban (4691); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (23/47)(124, 125); al-Baihaqi (19543, 19544).

¹³⁹ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (19688); Ahmad (12669); Abu Yaala (3456); Ibn Hibban (5790); al-Tabatani in *al-Kabeer* (23/47) (124, 125). Al-Baihaqi (19543, 19544).

his eye?’ She was worried a little that the white could be cataract. But the Prophet then explained what he meant by the word ‘white’, saying: ‘Everyone has white in the eyes’.¹⁴⁰ Another woman came asking him to pray to God that she go to Paradise. He said: ‘Old women will not go into Paradise’. She turned away crying. He said to his Companions: ‘Tell her that she will not go into Paradise as an old woman, and that God says: “We have created them a (new) creation, and made them virgins, lovers, friends, for those on the right hand”’^{141, 142}.

Unnatural strict seriousness is not part of solemnity. Indeed, smiling is a kind of charity, a nice expression is a charity, and being friendly to whoever is under your responsibility – a child, a spouse, a student, etc. is a charity. We have to teach everyone how Islam nurtures happiness and *joie de vivre*.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ibn Qudama’s *al-Mughni* (9/421); *Ighathat al-Lahfan* (2/105); *Takhrīj Ahādith al-Ibyaa* (3/89)(7).

¹⁴¹ Chapter of al-Waqi’a: 35-8.

¹⁴² Reported by al-Tirmidhi in *al-Shama’il* (241); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (5545); Abushshaikh in *Akblaq al-Nabiy* (185); Abu Nu’aim in *Sifat al-Janna* (391); al-Baihaqi in *al-Ba’th wa al-Nushur* (379, 382); cf. also *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (6/47-8); *Takhrīj Ahādith al-Ibyaa* (3/89)(6); *Ruh al-Ma’ani* (27/142); al-Albani in *al-Silsila Al-Sahiba* (2987).

In Khadija's House

A Noble Love

The Prophet married Khadija in Mecca while still a young man. Meanwhile she was forty years old or more. And he did not marry any other woman until she died.¹⁴³ She was the mother of all his children, except for Ibrahim, who was from Maria, the Copt.¹⁴⁴

He loved Khadija so much. He came to know her through business: she hired him to go to Levant with her servant on a business operation. When he came back, she noticed that he was a man of nobility and trust, and that his trip had been fruitful. She honored him and then had him as a husband.¹⁴⁵

Sweet Memories

When Khadija passed away, the Prophet never ceased to reminisce about her and say only good things about her; so much so that Aisha felt jealous of her, even though she never saw her. Aisha was such a little girl at Khadija's time. Aisha became the Prophet's wife when she was seven; he had intercourse with her when she was nine; and when he died, she was eighteen. Yet, as a result of hearing the Prophet talking about Khadija every so often, Aisha was jealous.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Cf. Ibn Isshaq's *al-Seera* (5/238);

¹⁴⁴ Ibid (5/238); Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (6/57); al-Istee'ab (1/50); Ibn Assakir's *al-Arbaeen fi Manaqib Ummabat al-Mumineen* (38); *Zad al-Ma'ad* (1/105).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Ibn Isshaq's *al-Seera* (2/60); Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/7); Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (1/131-2); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (2/66-7); al-Asbahani's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (1/178; 232); *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* (1/569); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (2/294); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (1/225).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (24355; 25699; 26430); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahib* (3816-8; 7484); Muslim's *Al-Sahib* (2435); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (1997); al-Tirmidhi's *al-Jami'* (2017; 7484); al-nasa'i's *Al-Sunan al-Kubra* (8363; 8913); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (23/11; 15-19); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (14574).

A Rare Faithfulness

One day a woman asked to see the Prophet. When she spoke, her voice sounded to him like that of Khadija. He started wondering who it might be. It was Hala Bint Khuwailid, Khadija's sister. He said '*Allahumma* Hala' ('My God, it's Hala!') out of joy for her sister.¹⁴⁷

The Prophet would also sacrifice a sheep and send meat to Khadija's friends.¹⁴⁸ And he would mention her so often that Aisha once said to him: 'Prophet of Allah, what do you remember about an old woman from Quraish, with red lips, who has long died, and instead of who Allah has given you a better one?', (meaning herself).¹⁴⁹ But the Prophet repeated to Aisha: 'Allah has not given me a better woman than her'.¹⁵⁰ In another report, he said: 'She was such and such, and I had children with her'.¹⁵¹ And in all spontaneity, he repeated her conduct, and added: 'I was blessed with her love'.¹⁵²

A Few Pauses to Ponder over the Refined Faithfulness of the Prophet to His Wife

1. It is a great model of faithfulness and keeping the old ties of affection. The Prophet used to say: 'Keeping one's word of honor is part of faith'. Khadija died, but her love remained live and radiant in the heart of the Prophet. He was proud of it and kept voicing it to people: 'I was blessed with her love', thus considering

¹⁴⁷ Reported by al-Bukhari (3821); Muslim (2437); Ibn Abi Assim in *al-Abaad wa al-Mathaani* (3001); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (23/12; 18); al-Baihaqi (14573). Cf. also *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/128); *al-Aadaab al-Shar'iyya* (1/265); *al-Issaba* (8/146).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (24355; 25699); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (3816; 6004); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2435); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (2017; 3875); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (23/11; 15); *al-Mustadrak* (4/194).

¹⁴⁹ Reported by al-Bukhari (3821; Muslim (2437); al-Baihaqi (14573); cf. also Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (25212; 25251); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (7008); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (23/11; 15); *al-Mustadrak* (4/318).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (24908; al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (23/13; 22); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/128).

¹⁵¹ Reported by al-Bukhari (3818); cf. also *Mishkat al-Massabih* (6177); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/128).

¹⁵² Reported by Muslim (2435); Ibn Hibban (7006); cf. also *Sahih al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (38).

her love a grace from God to motivate true happiness in him. He did not feel embarrassed or ashamed to say in front of his companions that he loved Khadija. How badly in need of the lessons of the first teacher people are these days!

2. It is an important lesson for people to use in their social relations. For example, a newly married couple may spend sweet times to begin with. But one wonders for how long the joy will last. Will this beautiful relation go on as it started, or will it undergo corrosion with time, and turn bitter, punctuated with disputes and giving in to divergence?

Matrimonial life is full of responsibilities. Muslim families can only succeed on a reasonable amount of understanding and brotherhood. The spouses should build their relation on honesty and mutual tenderness. At this time of enslavement by the media, which focus on people's physical attraction in films and shows, so that the spouses fail to find those physical attractions on the screen in their spouses, it is necessary for a Muslim at all times to safeguard the bonds with his/her spouse, which God called: 'a solemn covenant'. Otherwise, the marital institution may well turn into an insipid union of two bodies, and eventually into a fiasco.

It is well to learn from these lessons for both spouses prior to, and after the wedding. This would contribute to a stable marital life based on affection, understanding, patience, and appreciation of the status of each other.

3. It is essential for a person to remain faithful to friends, colleagues, classmates, etc. We have had friends in primary school, secondary and high school, and university. These friends have gone different ways, doing different jobs, working in different countries. There may be differences among us in ideas, positions, aspirations, etc.; however, we remain faithful. This is a moral bond which holds us all together.

Similarly, the graceful face you once loved and sat by at school, worked with, accompanied along the way of preaching, or had as a neighbor before you moved to a different neighborhood or city; will keep returning to you as beautiful souvenirs in your life. You may not meet them now, but you can call them by phone, or send them a phone message at least. You may congratulate them on Eed, or on the month of Ramadan.

What would be wrong with reconnecting with these people, visiting, or travelling with them, even if once a month, or once or twice a year? The least would be to keep a strong bond with them in your heart. When you meet the person you once saw, knew, liked or were polite to, you should show warmth and excitement on your face. Use warm phrases; renew the old ties; show good feelings; say nice expressions and nice wishes. Show regret for not contacting them, and that the circumstances of life and other factors prevented you from staying in touch.

We have to maintain lifelong links of faithfulness with our colleagues, friends from childhood, youth, school, the neighborhood, etc. who we were destined to meet and know.

4. One of the most refined kinds of faithfulness has to be maintained with one who has, one way or another, been good to you. A person who is in the service of others can only have a refined soul, and Islam encourages decency and kindness. Similarly, it cultivates the sense of gratitude so that one should remain grateful for as long as one lives. Otherwise, if a good service is not acknowledged, people will feel reluctant to do good things again. A person who behaves ungratefully towards your good act is thus pushing you to cease such act thereafter towards anybody! Many are those who wonder why they should act generously again if it brings forth ungrateful reactions! These people are advised to ignore that feeling and go on acting benevolently and forget their good deeds. Of course it is possible to recall them on occasions, but it is no good talking about them on every occasion.

Particularly, keep good relations with those who have instructed or guided you. A teacher or guide deserves your faithfulness. Al-Shafii, one of the greatest scholars of this Umma who 'graduated' from the prophetic school, said: 'Only a noble person remembers a short instant's good done by others, or acknowledges their grant even if it is but a single (nice) word'.

5. Another particularly beautiful kind of acknowledgement is that which we owe parents. We can remember their mercy to us as children. Those who are parents now can see what it means to be a parent in terms of mercy and love. A person wants to excel all others except his own children. It is said that a woman among the cursed people of Noah had a baby. As the water rose, she climbed

higher, until the water reached her neck. Then she raised her baby above the water, hoping to see him survive even after she drowned. As the saying goes: 'if God were to save any of the people of Noah, He would have saved the mother and the baby'.

6. This overflowing mercy and love should only cause love and mercy on our part, as well as our prayers for them: 'If one of them or both of them attain old age with you, say not "Fie" to them nor repulse them, but speak to them a gracious word. And lower to them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little.'

A number of young men will say: 'My father does not understand me!', and many a young woman will say: 'My mother will not understand me!' This may be true, but remember that you are from different generations. And you may have different levels of education. But it is up to you to make the necessary effort to bridge the gap and understand your parents by properly appraising their situation. On the other hand, they may well understand you but not necessarily agree with you. Alternatively, they may see your point but appreciate it differently for your own sake. Therefore, you should be keen to learn from the experience of older people. And be sure that no one in the world will be as soft and considerate to you as your parents. In other words, your parents need not always be right, but they are definitely always thoughtful and sincere to you. An important principle in the prophetic morals is to remain faithful to the parents.

Insights from Marital Life

Do not Feel Depressed

The tenth year of the prophetic mission, a little before the Prophet migrated to Medina, is referred to as the year of sorrow. Sorrow is part of the human nature. People suffer and go through hardship. And yet, God's mercy and relief are just round the corner.

Life is beautiful, but when harsh conditions hit but are faced with patience and complacency, it also turns into a kind of happiness. When the sick heart is treated with a touch of satisfaction with destiny, life then turns happy, all those hardships notwithstanding.

O Prophet of God, what is there in the world that I would not sacrifice for you! What made you cry and feel sad?

Two calamities befell the Prophet that year. One of them was the death of his wife Khadija. Indeed she was more than a wife to him. He knew her prior to his prophetic mission. She noticed his fine conduct and his honesty when she hired him for her commerce. She then asked him for marriage and he accepted. She proved to be a wonderful wife and companion. She provided him with advice and assistance. When he received the revelation, she was the first human to believe him.

The Prophet once said: 'I was instructed to bring Khadija good tidings of a house in Paradise of bamboo-like pearls, where there is no cause of stress nor weariness'.¹⁵³ What splendid news! And how marvelous its impact and significance!

The Marriage Vessel in the Midst of Waves

Marital life can be a world of pleasure to begin with. As time goes by, however, problems usually start emerging, and the partners start parting little by little, until their relation is no more than an official union with little meaning. And their ways are now parallel,

¹⁵³ Reported by Ahmad (1758; 7156; 26424); Muslim (2432, 2433; 2435); Ibn Majah (1997); al-Tirmidhi (3876); Abu Ya'la (6089; 6797); Ibn Hibban (7004; 7005; 7009); al-Hakim (3/203).

never crisscrossing except to deviate more than ever. Hence the happy news that Khadija would dwell in a house in Paradise where endless peacefulness and contentment reign.

The serene word, the content look, and unwavering patience are the basis of any solid couple's relation. The household is full of responsibilities – the children, the housework and its problems, the job-related and residence-related vicissitudes, travelling, different programs, to name but a few. Unless the couple are steadfast and good-natured, conjugal life is constantly in jeopardy.

A number of people, men and women, miss the whole point when they complain about their marital life: each side wants to *get* from the other, but hardly ever to give. Based on facts which I know about the reality of many households, I should say that marital life is like a vessel which ought to be steered with utmost constant alertness. Just as the conductor gets distracted, the winds shove the vessel adrift or cause its drowning. There needs to be mutual concessions, so that serenity and peacefulness reign at home, as in Khadija's household.

A Balanced, Give-and-Take Relation

Conjugal life should not be boiled down to a mere physical relation. Such relation will soon fade away with the withering of the physical appeal. But when the relation holds between minds, it is more rational, and the outlooks are akin. This paves the way to authentic love, mercy, patience, and mutual forgiveness. The relation then is not like a rope, where each side pulls towards itself: the wife claims and nags; the man blames and criticizes. Such a relation would entail anything but mutual understanding. The result is a lost conjugal life and, by extension, lost children.

For our marital relations to be stable and rewarding, we have a model to follow – the Prophet. Here is a teacher in a school which has so much to offer if only we bothered to look inside it to see how he behaved with his wives.

Our Teacher taught us everything having to do with the husband-wife relation. He showed us that life is so sweet when it stays far from the noise; when it is characterized by modesty, by refraining from selfish acts, and by taking into account the positions

of the others and respecting them. It gets peaceful when we smother our fury and restrain our reactions, so that none of us would allow their fits to have an impact on their relations, or yield to the agitation and utter insults or hurting critical remarks at times of anger. If such things do occur as a matter of human condition, the person in question should show regret and apologize openly. There are many ways to make up for those lapses, so that the man or woman who has fallen victim to ill-treatment recovers his/her dignity.

Insisting and Claiming

‘I was instructed to bring Khadija good tidings of a house in Paradise of bamboo-like pearls, where there is no cause of stress nor weariness’ – a house free of problems and tedious responsibilities. The latter are among the problems likely to destabilize marital life. Persistent demands never stop even though each party knows well the other one. Besides his material constraints, the husband may be too involved in work and its requirements, which often curbs his abilities and ambitions toward his family. The wife, on the other hand, may be subject to biological discomfort (e.g. due to menstruation) or to psychological agitation (due to pregnancy). In these circumstances, the wife is in special need of care and soft treatment from her husband, particularly when she goes through anxiety or similar psychological pressure. All in all, virtuous women whose concern is the hereafter have a model in Khadija, and virtuous men whose concern is the hereafter have a model in the Prophet.

In Aisha's Household

A Woman who Taught Men

The Companions of the Prophet were aware of the special rank of Aisha: she was not only their Prophet's wife, but his favorite one.¹⁵⁴ Aisha also memorized the Hadiths of the Prophet, and was a great scholar. Abu Mussa al-Ash'ari said: 'Every time we go to ask her about an issue, we find her to know the answer'.¹⁵⁵

She was created to be the Prophet's beloved wife, and learned to be a huge source of knowledge. Indeed she was one of the most prolific hadith reporters. She often rectified the greatest Companions, such as Abdullah bin Omar, Abu Huraira, Abdullah bin Abbas, etc. Al-Zarkashi wrote a book which he called *al-Ijaba li-Eeradi ma Istadrakat-hu Aisha 'ala al-Sababa*. A young woman of her age being in the Prophet's household, with such great intelligence and staunch will, can only be a manifestation of divine wisdom.

Why Did the Prophet Marry Aisha?

Beautiful women were not his goal, though Aisha was one of the most beautiful women. Nor was he looking for young girls – if so had he wished, Quraish would have given him the best ones in the tribe. His first choice fell on Khadija, and only after she died did he marry Aisha, the only one of his wives who had never married before. For one thing, this came as a result of the deep relation which linked the Prophet with Abu Bakr. Secondly, God's wisdom decreed that she be the Prophetic school which would immortalize the Prophet's wisdom and tradition, particularly relative to his family life. For example, who would have transmitted to us the details of his intimate life with his wife!

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (32276 ; 32281 ; 32866) ; Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (12619; 25299); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (3411; 3434; 5428); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2431; 2441; 2446); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (3280-1); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (1834; 3887); al-Nassai's *Al-Sunan* (3947-8).

¹⁵⁵ Reported by al-Tirmidhi (3883). Cf. also *Sifat al-Safwa* (2/32); *Tarikh al-Islam* (4/247); *Siar A'lam al-Nubalaa* (2/179); *Mishkat al-Masabeeh* (6185); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (8/92).

Of course those were private things; but it was necessary for the people to know about them to distinguish what is permitted from what is not. Aisha was the person who reported all those things. For example, she said that in her menstruation, the Prophet would ask her in bed to wrap her waist down to the knee. Then he would flirt with her without having (prohibited) sex;¹⁵⁶ God says in the Koran: 'So stay away from women in their menses'.¹⁵⁷

How could we have known how the Prophet did his ritual showers, had it not been to Aisha! She said that she and the Prophet would be washing together from the same water container: she would say 'it's my turn, Prophet of Allah!', and he would say: 'it's my turn, Aisha' when their hands met in the water container.¹⁵⁸ Such was the kind of simple life which the Prophet led with his wives, and which is missing these days in many of our households. He was far from any complications or mysteries which are likely to blur the transparency of the ideal relation of a married couple.

The Residence of the Prophet

Once the Prophet came to Aisha's residence, which was nothing like those luxurious, comfortable mansions. The Prophet's residences were in fact small, simple rooms: one would almost touch the ceiling if standing upright, and would almost span the two opposite walls if lying. So when the Prophet wanted to prostrate himself in the night prayers, he would signal to Aisha with a gentle touch so that she would retract her legs to allow for his prostration. And when he raised his head, she would stretch them again and resume her sleep.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Reported by Ahmad (25449; 25455); al-Bukhari (302); Muslim (1106); Abu Dawud (268; 2167); al-Nassa'i (286; 374-5); Ibn Hibban (1364; 1367).

¹⁵⁷ Chapter of al-Baqara: 222.

¹⁵⁸ Reported by Ahmad (24767; 24910; 25426); Muslim (321); al-Nassai (239; 414); al-Baihaqi (852-3); cf. also *Mishkat al-Massabih* (440); al-Shawkani's *Nail al-Awtar* (1/33); *Adab al-Zifaf* (p. 36).

¹⁵⁹ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (2376); Ahmad (24215; 26224); al-Bukhari (382; 513; 1209); Muslim (512); Abu Dawud (712); al-Nassai (167-8); Ibn Hibban (2342; 2348); al-Baihaqi (609; 3240; 3309).

So the Prophet's residences were simple buildings with simple 'furniture'. But they were full of glory, knowledge and human warmth. They were epitomes of happiness and love. Why should people go on thinking that happiness resides in jewelry or luxurious clothing and cars, or palaces and assets and large accounts! These things are certainly permissible; however, it is crucial to remember that happiness pours from a heart which is full of remembrance of God and His obedience!

The Prophet once walked into Aisha's residence and slept next to her. When he felt that she was asleep, he left her bed and went out, gently locking the door behind him. As she was not fast asleep, she followed him, with the displeasing assumption that he was going to see some of his wives in her night. In utter darkness, she followed him from a distance. He ended up at the Baqee' cemetery, where he stopped, greeted his defunct companions buried there and prayed for them.

Then the Prophet returned home and went to bed. There, he found Aisha lying with closed eyes, as if sound asleep. But the fast breathing indicated to him that she was not really sleeping. The teacher-husband turned to her and asked: 'What's the matter, Aisha?' She opened her eyes as if just waking up, and said: 'Nothing, Messenger of Allah'. He said: 'If you do not tell me, God will'. She said: 'By God, I saw you walk out and I followed, fearing that you go to see some of your wives'. Then he said: 'you were afraid that God and His Apostle would wrong you! So *you* were the black shape I saw preceding me!' She said: 'That was me, Apostle of God'. Then he playfully hit on her chest, as if to say, without hurting her, that what she did was not the right thing, and that she should not have jumped to that conclusion about him. He went on to explain that 'Gabriel came to me and told me that God was bidding me to go the Baqee' cemetery and pray for the dead there. And so I did'.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (6712); Ahmad (25897); Muslim (974); al-Nassa'i (2037; 3963-4); Ibn Hibban (7110).

Lessons in Correcting

This is a wonderful story, portraying a special scene in the Prophet's household. Aisha, her great knowledge and understanding notwithstanding, rushed to this presumption on the Prophet himself, and disclosed it. She followed in his footsteps, and ended up being gently tapped in the chest as a gentle admonition. Finally, he informed her of the coming of Gabriel with the mission from God to tell him to go and pray Him to forgive the dead buried at the Baqee's cemetery.

Note how the Prophet, whose rank to God is what it is, considerably takes the time to explain to Aisha the whole situation.

The differences which come up here and there often blow up the lives of couples. In fact these are the main cause of trouble between husbands and wives. They tend to lead to emotional distance, if not to divorce. Consequently, whole households crumble, though they were once built on piety and on a God-blessed contract. What is more, these problems begin trivial, but are not treated appropriately in time. They grow bigger and bigger until they are too big to be solved.

Therefore, it is essential for each and every one of us to know how to cohabit and how to be fair-minded and not too egocentric. When such a problem occurs, the husband has to take into account the circumstances of his spouse if she is a housewife: she is chained to her domestic responsibilities—the kitchen, the children, etc. and the absence of the husband. Do not blame her if she reprimands you for being late, which may well be because you were having a good time with friends! Avoid having strong reactions. Imagine you were to swap positions with her; would you bear it as she does?! How would you behave if you were to dress the children, clean them, feed them, and still have to put up with their noise and feuds?! God has endowed the woman with a power of patience which the man does not have. The strongest of men can get into tough battles, for example. But they can hardly bear and deliver children.

A woman also supports her husband and guides him. In a word, she is a queen who runs a significant realm. She, therefore, deserves the husband's respect, sincerity, and admiration. If she

errs, that should be played down as insignificant beside all the good things she is or does!

On the other hand, the wife should observe her husband's rights. She should remember that after all he is the boss, as God says: '...and they found her lord [i.e., husband] at the door'.¹⁶¹ And *he* has the final word. If we live with this kind of mutual respect, we will certainly live in great harmony, guaranteeing happiness and tranquility, in the shade of faith and piety. Such peaceful households are a basic guarantee for a lasting Muslim *Umma*. They stand firm in the face of destruction in the Muslim society.

Another lesson we take from the above occurrence is the importance of belief in the hereafter and preparing for it, by reading the Koran and visiting the tombs, which helps to safeguard faith.

¹⁶¹ Chapter of Yussuf: 25.

His Behavior Was the Koran

The Prophet was sent as a model for noble behavior. it is not surprising to hear him say: 'I was only sent to perfect noble conduct'.¹⁶² There are two types of conduct:

1. Innate conduct: all people like truthfulness and hate falsehood. They like faithfulness and hate treachery. They like generosity and hate miserliness. In a word, people like good behavior, and hate bad behavior.
2. Anything which helps to promote the above mentioned kind of conduct and refine it. This is what the Prophet was sent with – to perfect noble behavior, and this is what his religion and mission call for. Indeed, he was the archetype of good conduct. Not only did he proclaim it, but he was the first to set the example for people.

The Practical Test

History tells us that many of the theories and movements have called for principles and values which they themselves fail to abide by. Take communism for example: it talks about equity, equality and labor rights. The Masonic doctrine also talks about these values in its precepts. So do democracy, capitalism, liberalism, and other – isms, all of which came out east or west, past or present. Each of these speaks of values, raises slogans, and uses glamorous discourse. But it is the test of actual life which confirms all that or disproves it. So many nations were annihilated, and properties ransacked; so much injustice was perpetrated, and coercion and oppression occurred – all in the name of liberty, justice, and equity! As to the Prophet, it was a completely different story.

¹⁶² Reported in this wording by al-Hakim (2/670); al-Baihaqi (20571). Cf. also *Takbreej Abaadeeth al-Ihya* (2/120; 259; 3/26; 34). It was also reported with the phrase '...correct conduct' by Ibn Abi Shaiba (31773); Ahmad (8939); al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (273); al-Baihaqi (20572); and cf. *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (7978).

He was close to the slaves and servants. He humbly listened to their complaints and sympathized with their grievances. A woman would come to him and he would tell her to choose where to sit so he would sit to her and see to her issue. He would then attend to her.¹⁶³

This great apostle was a military leader. He was the guide of a whole *Umma*. God sent him to found a religion. And Gabriel came to him with the divine message morning and afternoon. And yet he would go to some woman who wanted his service at a place she chose. Trivial though her complaint might have been, whether about her work, her boss, her children, the Prophet had a portion of his time allotted to her and to any creature in times of distress.

The Troubles of the Young and the Weak

What is all the more astounding is that at a time the world was ruled by injustice, the Prophet would ask a simple servant: 'Is there anything I can help you with?'¹⁶⁴ Thus he would *invite* the servant to speak out, to ask for a service, and to voice his grievances if any.

Has anyone ever seen this kind of humility and proximity between a chief and the servants and most modest people among his nation?!

It was also a crucial part of life that little children have their own share in the Prophet's humane treatment. The children of today are the adults of tomorrow. Abu Umair, Anas's brother, was a little boy who had a little pet bird. The Prophet saw his keenness on this bird and his absorption in his play with it, as is the nature of all children anywhere and at any time. One day the Prophet walked up to him and found him sad because of the death of the bird. He asked him: 'Abu Umair, what has become of the bird?'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Reported by Ahmad (12218; 13264; 13078); Muslim (2326); Abu Dawuud (4818); Abu Yaala (3472); Ibn Hibban (4527); Ibn Assakir (4/88; 15/252). Cf also *Mukhtasar al-Shama'il* (285); *Tareekh al-Islam* (1/129); *Mishkat al-Masabeeh* (5810); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (6/40); *Takbreej Ahadeeth al-Ihya* (2/154; 9).

¹⁶⁴ Reported by Ahmad (16120). Cf. also *al-Silsila al-Saheeha* (2102).

¹⁶⁵ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (4042; 28292); Ahmad (12158; 14103); al-Bukhari (6129; 6203); Muslim (2150); Abu Dawud (4969); Ibn Majah (3720); al-Tirmidhi (333; 1989).

Isn't this remarkable! This heart, which was full of immense issues and countless grave concerns, was not too full or preoccupied to find a place for this playing child and his worries, and to join him in his sorrow for some dead bird!

Women's Concerns

Part of the Prophet's tradition was the way to treat women. Whether his wives or other women came to ask him, his treatment was alike. He was a refuge for them. For example, in opposition to the old tradition of beating women among the old Arabs, he forbade the maltreatment of women, and ordered people to treat them with the respect they deserve, and never be unjust to them.

Then some men came to him to complain about their wives' rebellious behavior with them. He then allowed them to beat them. The next day, the women came to his house and complained about their husbands. At that time, the Prophet made a speech, saying that 'many a woman came to my wives complaining about their husbands [for beating them]. Those [men] are certainly not among the best of you.'¹⁶⁶

Indeed, they were not among the best of men. As the Prophet said, 'the best among you are those who are best to their wives. And I am the best of you to my wives'.¹⁶⁷

People's Concerns

Except rarely, the Prophet was constantly living with the people. He was with them in the mosque, in homes, in trips, etc. One who reads his biography would wonder about the bountiful character of his time, considering the number of his trips, the time he spent with them in the mosque for days on end, as he was reported to spend the first ten days of Ramadan in the mosque, not leaving it, then the

¹⁶⁶ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (17945); al-Darimi (2219); Abu Dawud (2146); Ibn Majah (1985); Ibn Hibban (4186); al-Hakim (2/205); al-Baihaqi (14553).

¹⁶⁷ Reported by al-Darimi (2260); Ibn Majah (1977); al-Tirmidhi (3895); Ibn Hibban (4177; 4186); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (19/363; 853); al-Baihaqi (15477); and in his *Shu'ab* (4220; 8781; 11014).

middle ten days of another Ramadan, then the last ten days of Ramadan another year.¹⁶⁸

Thus did the Prophet live with his people – traveling, home staying, receiving people at home, being asked his opinion in any matter, without ever losing his strength and character, or his forgiveness and patience. Despite all that happened and all people's reactions, he was never one to lose his temper and react inappropriately. For example, a rough countryman came to him and pulled his cover vestment with extreme violence from behind – so hard that the Prophet's neck was red. He added, no less rudely: 'Give me a couple of camels' load: it is neither your property, nor your father's.' The Prophet did not react, kept silent, and gave orders to give him what he wanted.¹⁶⁹

On another occasion, a man came to the Prophet and said: 'It is your habit, you Abd al-Muttalib, to play for time when it comes to settling up your debts.' The Prophet just smiled and gave orders to give him his due and extra.¹⁷⁰

Another countryman came to the Prophet while he was with his Companions. Without any polite introduction, he asked: 'Who of you is Muhammad?' They pointed to the Prophet. He approached him and said: 'Look, Ibn Abd al-Muttalib.' The Prophet said: 'I am ready to answer'. The man said: 'I am going to ask you hard questions; so do not have any grudge.' The Prophet said: 'Ask whatever questions you want'. The man said: 'for the sake of your lord and the lord of those before you, did God send you to all people?' The Prophet said: 'Yes, He did'. The man asked: 'For God's sake, did God instruct us to pray the five prayers in the day and the night?' The Prophet said: 'Yes, He did'. The man asked: 'For God's sake, did God instruct us to fast this month of the year?' The Prophet said: 'Yes, He did'. The man asked: 'For God's sake,

¹⁶⁸ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (7683); Muslim (1167; 1172); Ibn Hibban (3684); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (23/412; 993); al-Baihaqi (8350).

¹⁶⁹ Reported by Adburrazzaq (12604); al-Bukhari (5809; 6088); Muslim (1057); Abu Dawud (4775); al-Nassai (4776). Cf. also *Mushkil al-Aathaar* (9/153); *al-Aadab al-Shar'iya* (1/439).

¹⁷⁰ Reported by Ibn Hibban (288); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (5147); al-Hakim (2/37; 2237); al-Baihaqi (11022). Cf. also Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (1/361); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (6/279); al-Asbahani's *Dalail al-Nubuwwa* (1/233).

did God instruct you to take alms from our rich and divide it among our poor? The Prophet said: 'Yes, He did'. The man said: 'I believe in what you have been sent with, and I am your messenger to my people'.¹⁷¹

Thus was the Prophet's behavior with all people, in spite of the various aberrant or unrefined reactions, which caused the revelation to come as: 'Those who call you from behind the dwellings, most of them have no sense'.¹⁷² This revelation came to correct men who came to the apartments of the Prophet and took to shouting: 'Muhammad! Come out! Muhammad! Come out!'¹⁷³ This style of calling and addressing is not particularly refined with ordinary people, much less so with a Messenger of God. The Prophet taught his disciples the ways of addressing and soliciting people in the most urbane fashions. God says: 'Make not the calling of the Messenger among you as your calling one another.'¹⁷⁴ Therefore, the Prophet must not be called thus 'O Muhammad'; he should be called with such reverential expressions as 'O Messenger of God', 'O Prophet of God', etc.

Even with Foes

His behavior with his foes was no different: a man once attacked him with a sword in his hand and said: 'Who will protect you from me?' The Prophet said: 'God will'. The sword fell off the hand of the man and the Prophet picked it up and said: 'And now, who will protect you from me?'. The man said: 'Be a generous man'. The Prophet asked him: 'Would you bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah?' The man says: 'No, but I promise never to fight you nor be with a party that fights

¹⁷¹ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (30318); Ahmad (2380; 13034); al-Darimi (650; 656); al-Bukhari (63); Muslim (12); Ibn Majah (1402); al-Tirmidhi (619); al-Nassai' (2091-4); Ibn Khuzaima (2358); Ibn Hibban (154-5); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (8149); al-Hakim (3/55). Cf. also Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (5/267); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (5/62); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (3/248).

¹⁷² Chapter of al-Hujurat: 4.

¹⁷³ Cf. Ibn Saa'd's *al-Tabaqat* (1/294); al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (26/121); *Tareekh Dimashq* (40/358); al-Qortobi's *Al-Tafsir* (16/ 310); Ibn Kathiri's *Al-Tafsir* (4/209); al-Zaila'i's *Takhtreej al-Ahaadeeth wa al-Aathaar* (3/329-31); *Rooh al-Ma'ani* (26/141).

¹⁷⁴ Chapter of al-Nur: 63.

you'. And the Prophet let him go unharmed.¹⁷⁵ This is a story worth considering as a sample of his behavior with his enemies and those who wanted to hurt or even assassinate him.

This conduct shows that his declaration – 'I was only sent to perfect noble conduct' – ¹⁷⁶ was not a random saying, devoid of meaning. The Prophet was a model in actual behavior and taught people through real acts. He showed his Companions what they had to do and show the generations after: it was a way of life for then and later. In its history, movement, and mission, Islam was, therefore, a mercy for all mankind, as people with fair judgment concede.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (14374; 14970; 14971; 15227); Abd bin Humaid (1096); Abu Ya'la (1778); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (2910; 4137; 4139); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (843); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (2882; 2883; 4537); al-Hakim's *al-Mustadrak* (3/31; 4322).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. footnote 166.

The Prophet as Servant

God's Servant, God's Messenger

May the peace and blessings of God be upon the noble Prophet. He was sent with mercy, so that many people accepted his religion, and followed his code. Some of his most sworn enemies became his followers because of his noble behavior, and were impressed and overwhelmed by his magnanimous and gracious character. The signs of his prophethood were plain to see. Consider his servility to God and his spontaneity. Note how far he was from the pride and stateliness which leaders often put on. History has known many leaders, kings and emperors, and known their biographies: like a number of present-day nations, they presented sweet words to people, while their acts were monstrous.

The Eclipse Sign

Muhammad was smooth, forgiving, easy and close to his people. This was exemplified by the story of the eclipse which was reported in the two *Sahih* (by al-Bukhari and Muslim) and other references.

When the sun eclipsed, the Prophet rushed out in an anxious mood. He did not rule out the likelihood that it might be the end of the world. So he performed a long prayer with long chapters, so that some people were about to sit down. When he left the prayer, he gave a sermon, in which he said: 'The sun and the moon are two of God's signs. They do not eclipse for the death or life of anybody. So when you see them [eclipsing], keep praying and imploring God until they clear.' He also said: 'O Umma of Muhammad, God gets the most offended when His servant, whether a man or woman, commits adultery.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (4925); Ibn Abi Shaiba (8299; 36496); Ahmad (2811; 6483; 25351; 27037); al-Bukhari (1044; 1048; 5785); Muslim (901; 904; 907; 911; 915); Abu Dawud (1178); Ibn Majah (1263); al-Nassai (1459; 1474; 1502); Ibn Khuzaima (1395); Ibn Hibban (2845).

Do not Approach Shameful Sin

On that eclipse occurrence, the Prophet exploited the mood of fear among the believers and spoke to them of the great matter of safeguarding families, and staying away from sins, especially adultery. It is a great evil and crime, so that God said: ‘Do not come nigh to adultery; it is a shameful deed and an evil’.¹⁷⁸ The word ‘*fabisha*’, used in the verse, refers to any odious act with horrific repercussions in this world and in the hereafter. One of its results is the HIV virus, which leads to AIDS, a disease almost exclusively transmissible through sex or blood transfusion. It can hit any promiscuous person at any time, and can subsequently be transmitted to an innocent spouse or child. The Prophet warned against this hideous act, partly because it leads to such dreadful results. Then he went on to talk about the eclipsing sun and moon, saying that they are two of God’s signs, and that they do not eclipse due to the death or life of anyone.

Disproving a Rumor

Rumor ran in Medina that the eclipse occurred because of the death of Ibrahim, the Prophet’s son from Maria the Copt, who had been sent to him as a gift by the Egyptian king. The Prophet loved Ibrahim very much. He would visit him at his suckling woman’s place and would sit while smoke was in the house. He found pleasure in carrying his son against his chest and kissing him. But God willed that Ibrahim die as a child before being weaned. It was normal for the Prophet to feel sad and cry. His Companions saw him crying and said: ‘You, Messenger of God, crying?!’ The Prophet replied: ‘The eye sheds tears, and the heart mourns, yet we say only what pleases God – how sad we are for losing you, O Ibrahim!’¹⁷⁹

Thus the Prophet had both features: while he reacted normally as a human by feeling sad and crying over a lost son, he stayed within the limits of what God allows. Many people are incapable of reconciling the two: they either see only God’s destined will, so that

¹⁷⁸ Chapter of al-Israa: 32.

¹⁷⁹ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (6672); Ibn Abi Shaiba (12124; 12126); Ahmad (13037); al-Bukhari (1303); Muslim (2315); Abu Dawud (3126); Ibn Majah (1589); Ibn Hibban (2902; 3160); al-Hakim (4/43).

they show no sadness;¹⁸⁰ or they give in to despair and grief. Some women particularly lose control of their feelings and keep crying and crying if one of their children dies, reminiscing his or her acts, words, smiles, playing, sleeping, etc. and every time they see what reminds them of him/her, they start all over again, crying on and on, and rekindling their sorrow anew, and reviving their suffering.

In his sermon, the Prophet placed special emphasis on the fact that there is no connection whatsoever between the eclipse and Ibrahim's death. We have seen so many of those who seek glory and admiration feel content with people's linking natural phenomena to themselves. For example, 'it rained as a result of their holy presence at some place', or 'the sun eclipsed as a result of their son's death', or other kinds of connections with that individual, until he seems supernatural, and is thought to exert a kind of influence upon what goes on in the universe!

Some royalties were praised in hyperbolic ways by poets. A Fatimide ruler was once described by his poet thus:

*As YOU, not destiny, will,
Determine, for you are the Unique,
And your hegemony absolute;
As Muhammad, the Messenger, you seem,
And as Muhammad's, your supporters are.*¹⁸¹

This kind of exaggeration which bestows divine attributes on humans may be consented by some kings and the like. Alternatively, if they turn it down, it is only to feign humility.

But this Prophet categorically rejected the people's association between the eclipse and his son's death. He called for a sermon to declare that loud and clear: 'the sun and the moon are two of God's

¹⁸⁰ As it was reported on Fudail bin Ayyad: he laughed when he heard of his son's death, which is against human nature.

¹⁸¹ Excerpt from a poem by Ibh Hanii al-Andalussi, in which he praised the Fatimide king al-Mu'izz lidinillah.

signs: they do not eclipse for the death or life of anybody'. The sun will not be sad for the loss of some person, nor eclipse in concomitance with someone's birth as a cynical omen. The sun is but a sign of God's power, and He uses it to induce people to fear Him.

A School of Modesty

A man came to the Prophet and started trembling. The Prophet said: 'Take it easy, man. I am not a king; I am the son of a woman who used to eat shredded bread'.¹⁸²

Who would teach people these values other than the Prophet and his Companions, who followed his tradition?! Some people, e.g. directors, scientists, etc. aspire to grand treatments while people are speaking to them, entering their office or leaving it. They impose barriers between them and people. They want to stay isolated from them. They claim a very special status.

This was never the behavior of the Prophet. He was happy with being a simple servant of God's. He walked alongside with ordinary people. He would repair his shoes and patch his clothes. He would go to the market and carry his own belongings. As Aisha said, 'He was at his wife's service, and when it was prayer's time he went out at once'.¹⁸³

Thus was the Prophet – simple, spontaneous, modest, and close to people. Often newcomers would not distinguish him from his Companions. When he migrated with Abu Bakr, the residents of Medina who had not met the Prophet did not know who of the two he was. It was only when the sun hit the Prophet and Abu Bakr made a shade for him that they knew who was who.

Similarly, in pilgrimage, in the crowd, while walking around the Ka'ba, in the laps between the Safaa and the Marwa, while throwing the pebbles, at Arafa, on leaving Arafa, etc., there were one hundred

¹⁸² Reported by Ibn Majah (3312); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (1260); al-Hakim (2/506; 3/50); Ibn Assakir (4/82, 83, 85, 86). Cf. also Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (1/23); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (5/69); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/293); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (3/43).

¹⁸³ Reported by Ahmad (24272; 24992; 25751); al-Bukhari (676; 5363); and in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (538); al-Tirmidhi (2489); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (1082); al-Baihaqi (2989).

and fourteen thousand pilgrims – all performing the pilgrimage with the Prophet. They jostled with him, asking him about the steps of the ritual, about what was allowed and what was not, and about placing some ritual before or after another, etc. In all that, the Prophet refused to distinguish himself from the rest of the crowd in his tent, his clothing, his look, etc.

If people, especially those of knowledge and scholarship, try to be close to others, they will be more influential, and closer to the tradition of the Prophet, who was happy to be a simple servant.

He Loved Beauty

Pride is for God

Al-Bukhari and Muslim report on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Prophet talked of a man who was vaingloriously walking in long garments. Then God ordered the ground to swallow him, so he is down there, being pressed and shaken until the Day of Judgment.¹⁸⁴

This great *Hadith* is about the spirit of humility. It tells us to be aware of who we are and to put ourselves in the place which we deserve. It emphasizes the principle that all kinds of pride are condemned by Islam. The Prophet was sent as a servant of God's, and as a messenger to eradicate all sorts of arrogance and its remnants, which some people can attribute to themselves out of sheer ignorance, wealth, pretence, power, fame, or what not. Whatever the cause, it leads one to forget one's humanness, though each and every one of us knows well that our beginning was humble and weak. As God Almighty says:

'So let man consider from what he is created.

He is created from a gushing fluid

*That issued from between the loins and ribs.*¹⁸⁵

This initial state does certainly not qualify man to claim for himself any grandeur or pride. These are given by God. The end, death, does not give man license to allege any degree of pride. When those arrogant kings or men of power attain their last stage, and the angel of death comes to seize their soul, they realize then who they really are, and they wish they had been acting and thinking differently: they are so small and weak now!

¹⁸⁴ Reported by al-Bukhari (5789; 5452); Muslim (2088); Ahmad (8162; 11371); Al-Darimi (437); al-Tirmidhi (2491); Al-Nassa'i in *al-Kubra* (9679); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (7720; 9176); al-Baihaqi in *Sbu'ab al-Eeman* (6124; 8163-4).

¹⁸⁵ Chapter of al-Tariq: 5-7.

No matter how much man enjoys himself, and how wealthy and comfortable his life may be, he should never lose sight of his destiny, and the wisdom for which he has been created.

Pride is in Hell

It is one of the worst sins to be arrogant and narcissistic. It deserves punishment in both worlds. The Prophet said: 'He who has the slightest amount of pride in his heart will never enter Paradise'. A man said: 'what if a man likes to have good-looking clothing and shoes?' The Prophet then said: 'God is beautiful and loves beauty. Pride is deliberately rejecting the truth, and denying people's rights'.¹⁸⁶

Rejecting the truth happens if the truth comes from others. If otherwise it comes from the person who rejects it, it is a different story. So the decisive gauge becomes whether it is us or the others who say it. Hence the egocentric view that it is only accepted when it comes from ourselves! The Prophet condemns it insofar as the position of accepting or rejecting it rests on who has it. That is if it is someone else, we reject it.

Denying people's rights entails, among other things, backbiting. Some people happily indulge in flaying others in meetings. They will portray them as deficient in physical or moral features or even positions. They keep dispersing all types of defamation: 'That person is too tall', or 'too short', or 'mean', or 'has no value', etc. And 'the other is not a real scholar', or 'a scholar but not sincere', or 'a worshipper, yet it is not a matter of how much you worship', as if they did look into their hearts!

Why do we not just train ourselves to look to the positive sides even if they are not the predominant aspects of a person! Why do we not focus on the good things and praise them, as the Prophet did! Concentrating on the negative sides of people, not of ourselves, may have only one meaning – we think that we monopolize good qualities, and deny them to others. In that case, we would see only ourselves as good!

¹⁸⁶Reported by Ahmad (3789; 17407); Muslim (91); al-Tirmidhi (1999); Ibn Hibban (5466); al-Hakim (1/78); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (6192; 8152).

Religion and Beauty

The other side of the Hadith is ‘God is beautiful and loves beauty’. It precisely speaks of the importance of appearances in Islam. This religion gives great importance to the look. There are a multitude of texts which corroborate the fact that one of the main concerns of Islam is to instruct people to take care of their look and beauty – their clothes, hair, body; as well as their speech and behavior.

Although beauty does not lie exclusively in the outer look, Islam did not ignore the latter; so much so that the Prophet said: ‘God loves to see the traces of His mercy on His servants’.¹⁸⁷ If God bestows His bounty on you, put on nice clothes; you deserve them. Islam is not an enemy to these things; on the contrary, it encourages them.

Islam commands its followers as part of their worship to be clean, especially for meetings and occasions. For example, the Prophet says: ‘Every Muslim has to wash himself and brush his teeth, and if possible, apply perfume on Friday’.¹⁸⁸ In congregations, it is especially mandatory for a Muslim to be clean, well dressed, and perfumed. The Prophet had a special dress for Fridays and for visiting delegations, and he used to recommend the same thing to his Companions.¹⁸⁹

Many Muslims are unfortunately unaware of the importance of beauty in their clothes and hair. The Prophet used to comb his hair and apply ointment to it and to his beard¹⁹⁰, until his look was particularly attractive. And scholars agree that the hairs of the beard which grow wild have to be removed to avoid giving an unattractive look to the face. This was reported on a number of Companions, such as Abu Huraira and Ibn Omar, and the Tabi’un, such as Saeed

¹⁸⁷ Reported by Ahmad (8092; 19948); al-Tirmidhi (2819); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (18/135, 281; 19/278, 610) and in *al-Awsat* (4668); al-Hakim (4668); al-Baihaqi in *Shu’ab al-Eeman* (6194, 6196).

¹⁸⁸ Reported by Ahmad (11268; 11676); al-Bukhari (880); Muslim 846; Abu Dawud (344); al-Nassai (1375; 1383); Ibn Khuzaima (1747); Ibn Hibban (1233); al-Baihaqi (1318; 5748).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Abu Dawud’s *Al-Sunan* (1078); Ibn Majah’s *Al-Sunan* (1095-6); Ibn Khuzaima’s *Al-Sabih* (1765); Ibn Hibban’s *Al-Sabih* (2777); al-Baihaqi’s *Shu’ab al-Eeman* (2992); al-Baihaqi’s *Al-Sunan* (5745),

¹⁹⁰ Ibid: pp. 22-5.

bin al-Mussayyab, and the great Imams, such as Ahmad, al-Shafi'i, Malik, Abu Hanifa, and others.¹⁹¹

Taking Care of Hygiene

Hygiene has a crucial place in Islam. The Prophet talked about different aspects of hygiene, saying: 'five things are part of natural purity: circumcision, cutting the hair of the genitals, plucking out the armpit hair, cutting the fingernails, and trimming the mustache'.¹⁹² These are all required in Islam.

The Prophet also allowed women to go to the mosque, telling his Companions not to prevent them from going there.¹⁹³ But he disallowed perfume for women when they go out,¹⁹⁴ for it is for a necessary reason that they go out, not to charm men. This, however, does not mean that a woman should go out reeking. But she has to clean herself and her clothes, just like men have to – this is required from both men and women. Smell and look have to be pleasant in all cases.

As for clothing, a number of Hadiths have come to caution us against vanity. For example, the Prophet says: 'He who dresses for pride, God will clothe him in a dress of mortification, and will set fire on it on the Day of Judgment'.¹⁹⁵ Exaggerating attention towards dressing in such a way as to attract everybody is prohibited

¹⁹¹ Cf. Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (4/178); Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (5/225); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (5892); *al-Tamheed* (24/145); *Ikmal al-Ma'lam* (2/64).

¹⁹² Reported by al-Bukhari (5889; 5891; 6297); Muslim (257); Abu Dawud (4198); Ibn Majah (292); al-Nassai (9); Ibn Hibban (5480-1); al-Baihaqi (669; 5757; 17334); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (2759; 6442; 8637).

¹⁹³ Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (4655; 24451); al-Darimi's *Al-Sunan* (1279); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (900); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (442); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (567); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (16); Ibn Khuzaima's *Al-Sahih* (1678-9; 1984); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (2209; 2211; 2214); *al-Mustadrak* (1/327).

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Mussannaf* (5108; 5119; 5121); Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (5157; 7609); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (5725; 24451); al-Darimi's *Al-Sunan* (1279); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (565); Ibn Khuzaima's *Al-Sahih* (1679); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (2211; 2214); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (5239; 13471); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* (568; 3411); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (5160).

¹⁹⁵ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (19979); Ibn Abi Shaiba (25266); Ahmad (5664; 6245); Abu Dawud (4029); Ibn Majah (3606-7); Abu Ya'ala (5698); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (9560); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (6227-8).

in Islam. Similarly, a dress may be excessively hideous, to the extent of being repulsive. This is equally prohibited, for it aims at attracting people's attention, too.

Between Beautification of Oneself and Humility

The Prophet was reported as saying: 'Humility is part of faith'.¹⁹⁶ This means that one should not exaggerate in dressing; otherwise, wearing beautiful and clean clothes is recommended: this religion came for all people.

Some people love physical or sartorial beauty. There is nothing wrong with that. As we have seen before (cf. footnote 189), the Prophet said: 'God is beautiful and loves beauty'. If the person does not aspire to arrogance with his clothes, and if the clothes have not been illicitly obtained, as in they have not been stolen, and they are not made of silk (for men), dressing nicely is appreciated, and maybe the person in question may be even rewarded for wearing beautiful clothes, under the above mentioned conditions.

On the other hand, there are some people who have a propensity to dress modestly. To these, the Prophet said: 'humility is part of faith'. This kind of humility stems from their faith and the fact that they know what God has for them: they prefer that which God has for them in the hereafter.

Dressing Like Other People

As said above, a Muslim's attentiveness to his clothing is of paramount importance. Part of that is to take into consideration the society where he lives. Therefore, he should dress like those people, as long as it is not forbidden from the religious perspective. He will thereby feel close to the people of his environment, and find it easier to call them to God. This can only happen when those people feel naturally close to him, not seeing him as an alien, as if from a different planet. Without making people feel at ease with

¹⁹⁶ Reported by Abu Dawud (4161); Ibn Majah (4118); al-Hakim (1/51); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (788-91); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (6173; 6470; 8135-6).

him, a person can never open their hearts and eyes to see the way of God.

Islam has made it acceptable for a Muslim to wear what people wear unless it is unambiguously prohibited. When the Prophet was in Mecca, he dressed like Meccans; when he was in Medina, he dressed like Medinans. He put on local hats at times, and walked bareheaded at others. One day he came out to his Companions with his hair dripping¹⁹⁷, which proves that he was not wearing anything on his head. He would put on any kind of available clothes. The dresses which the Muslims took as booty were put to use as well.

Therefore, Islam does not impose a particular style of dressing. Though it does lay conditions on some sartorial features, it does not say *what* exactly to put on. A wide variety of clothes can be put on: the list of permissible dresses is open – just like the rest of daily matters in a Muslim's life. This is all part of the bounties of God for the Muslims, who can adapt to the different circumstances and times and places. Muslims can easily adapt to the different environments, whether in a Muslim or non-Muslim milieu.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Mussannaf* (2113); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (777); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (640); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (605); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (541; 1220); al-Nassai's *Al-Sunan al-Kubra* (2931); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (1533); al-Daraqutni's *Al-Sunan* (1/632); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (11390), and al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* (251; 3947; 4064; 6390).

The Vision

By sending this Prophet, God breathed new life into a whole generation of people, who were living in utter darkness and overwhelming ignorance. With the Koran as a torch in their way, the Prophet's followers turned from sheep tenders into historic leaders, and went on to lead the nations.

Abu Bakr was the first man to believe in Muhammad as a prophet. He soon became his best companion ('...the second of two, when they were in the cave').¹⁹⁸ He was also the first caliph (successor of the Prophet). His virtues are too many to be listed here.

A Vision of the Future

A man came to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God, this night I had a vision where I saw a cloud dropping ghee and honey. And people were spreading out their hands to get of that; some getting more than others. And I saw a rope hanging from the sky and reaching the round. You got hold of the rope and you rose to the sky. Then a man came after you and did the same. Then a third man did the same. And then a man came and held it but the rope broke. Then he reached for it and rose.' Then Abu Bakr said: 'Messenger of God, please let me interpret it'. The Prophet said: 'Do'. Abu Bakr said: 'As for the cloud, it is the shade of Islam. As for the ghee and honey which it drops, that is the Koran – its sweetness and softness. The people who get it are those who get the Koran – some get more of it than others. The rope which extends from the sky down is the Truth whereby you stand – you hold it and God raises you higher. A man will come after you and will hold it and rise. Then another man will do the same. And then a man will hold it and it will break, but it will reach him again and he will rise. I wonder if I was right or wrong, Messenger of God'. The Prophet said: 'You had some parts right and others wrong'. Then Abu Bakr said: 'By God, Messenger of God, do tell me which

¹⁹⁸ Chapter of al-Tawba: 40.

I had right and which I had wrong'. The Prophet said: 'Do not swear'.¹⁹⁹

Let us stop awhile at this Hadith:

1. Abu Bakr is the Master of Vision Interpreters

Abu Bakr, the Siddeeq (i.e., the 'truth teller') was keen on visions. The latter are linked to the unseen world and the world of the hereafter, which people do not know. However, God has made it a window through which people can discover parts of the mysterious world which they otherwise remain totally unaware of. As the Hadith goes: 'A good vision, seen by the virtuous man, is one of forty-six divisions of prophethood.'²⁰⁰ Later on, Asmaa, daughter of Abu Bakr, inherited this skill from her father, and then Ibn Seereen inherited it from her (Ibn Seereen was one of the Mawlas of Asmaa). Eventually, Ibn Seereen became to be known as the master of vision interpretation.²⁰¹

So it is noteworthy how Abu Bakr got involved in the interpretation of that vision, and how, when he swore and insisted that the Prophet tell him which part he was wrong about, the Prophet said: 'Do not swear'. That is he would not answer him, even though it was a good omen, and it was a prophecy, and even though the Prophet used to interpret people's visions, because that had great significance to people, as in the Koranic story of Youssouf and the king, who had a vision.

¹⁹⁹ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (30481); Ahmad (2113); al-Bukhari (7046); Muslim (2269); Abu Dawud (3268; 4632); Ibn Majah (3918); al-Tirmidhi (2293); Abu Yaala (2565); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (7640); Ibn Hibban (111); al-Baihaqi (19669; 19670);

²⁰⁰ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (20352); Ahmad (7630; 12294; 12530); al-Bukhari (6983); Muslim (2264); Ibn Majah (3893); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (7624); Ibn Hibban (6043); al-Hakim (4/432); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (4763).

²⁰¹ There is a book on vision interpretation which is wrongly attributed to him. But much of what scholars know about vision interpretation has been authenticated as originally from him.

2. Visions are an Outlet

A vision is often regarded as a solution. This is why many of those who tend to have a depressed or melancholy character take visions seriously. When inmates meet, they often ask each other what they have seen in their dreams. In the Koran, too, we find Youssouf's story with the two inmates: 'One of them said: I dreamed that I was pressing wine. The other said I dreamed that I was carrying upon my head bread whereof birds were eating.'²⁰²

A Sleeper's Dreams

Visions are often linked to hardship, and, logically, to sleep. Many Muslims are excessively turning to visions these days and to their interpretations, missing no chance to talk about them to whoever can fathom them. There are many programs, books, and web sites for vision interpreting. This is not to say that all these things are absurd; there are interesting and plausible parts in them.

However, people seem to think too much of their dreams. When a person sleeps for four to six hours, he may see so many details which can take no more than a few seconds. If we had to write down everything we see in a dream, it would take us ages to do so, and we would spend all our time talking about sleep, rather than do useful things. Probably this is exactly why people in the Muslim world are fond of talking about their visions – they are sound asleep, and because of the bewilderment they are living in, they are incapable of dealing with real life. They are incapable of creating and building for their betterment. Visions are the last remaining resort where they find refuge from their powerlessness.

An inmate may be justified to see in visions an outlet: he may have no news of his family, his friends, his money, etc. And when a vision comes, it provides him with a bubble of oxygen, whether his interpretation of it is correct or wrong.

²⁰² Chapter of Youssouf: 36.

4. The Passion for Visions

We are not obliged to interpret visions and see which parts of our interpretations are correct and which are not. We need not look for ways to apply what we see in dreams to our daily life. Often this only benefits those who ask for money to interpret dreams. Worse than that, the passion which some people develop for this is just regrettable.

Being especially sentimental, women seem to indulge in vision interpretation more than men do. It is therefore well to deal with vision interpretation rationally and confine it to its proper limits. A vision may well be a positive sign, supplying a good impulse, say a psychological push or an optimistic attitude. All this is fine. The interpreter should always be inclined to giving constructive readings to what is exposed to him. When the Prophet was asked about a vision, he would say: 'You have seen well', or 'Good for us and bad for our enemies'.²⁰³ Optimism is good and beautiful. But we should not make of vision interpretation real agenda, with insistence on understanding and application to the letter, so that one asks about the details of visions more than about personal and religious matters. For example, some people, e.g., girls wishing to get married, expect a vision to orient them, as it were.

Consequently, many people would become gloomy because of a distressing vision, even though it has little significance in real life. It is better for a person to perform a prayer, asking God to guide him to do something if He knows it is good, or to keep him away from something if it is bad. This is what he is supposed to do anyway. Sometimes a decision has to be made about something serious, e.g. the company, the family, or, more importantly, the state. This decision awaits a vision to show one what to do! Some people would go so far as to decide if something is *halal* or *haram* on the basis of a vision!

Such decisions as *halal* and *haram*, right or wrong, true or false, must never be based on visions, nor must be the decision to love or hate, or whether some person is better than another.

²⁰³ Reported by Ahmad (26917); Ibn Majah (3923); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (25/25; 27; 39; 42); al-Hakim (3/194).

5. A Dialogue of the Self

Most of what people see in dreams is influenced by their daily life. As the Prophet said, a vision is one of three: from God, from Satan, or the result of one's own inner dialogue in the day. From what I have been reading and what I have seen about people, I have come to conclude that 90% of visions are from people themselves.

The concerns and the thoughts which cross your mind in the day come back in visions. This is tantamount to speaking all the time about something when it represents a real concern to you. In this case, what you see in your visions has nothing to do with what is right or wrong, and what you should or should not do. It only reflects your daily feelings and dialogues within.

Sometimes one sees symbols related to particular people or things. Here again, one should not exaggerate in the interpretations. One need not go into painstaking interpretations about that – we have wasted enough time on these visions! Toiling in order to relate the plot of a vision and finally realizing that it is meaningless, or that it is no more than the self speaking, is simply a waste of time.

Wakefulness is Better than Sleep

With the Koran in our hand, and the Hadith, and faith in God Almighty, and with a mind to distinguish the truth from falsehood, and with the believers, the family, the friends, the colleagues, and others ready to supply advice, a vision at best remains a mere good omen if it is from God. In the Koran, God says: 'Verily those who rely on God are (those) on whom fear (comes) not, nor do they grieve; those who believe and keep their duty (to God). Theirs are good tidings in the life of the world and in the Hereafter. There is no changing the Words of God.'²⁰⁴ Some Koran exegesis specialists says that part of the 'good tidings' is the good vision, for it announces good things to come, or warns against bad ones. This kind of vision does exist, and it is true.

²⁰⁴ Chapter of Younouss: 62-4.

A Prophecy is Not a Game

Interpreting visions is no game. The Koran speaks of it as a ‘*Fatwa*’, or legal opinion: ‘Thus is the case judged concerning which you did inquire.’²⁰⁵

A person should not ask about every detail of the vision he has seen. And the interpreter should not be cruel on people by giving them callous interpretations. Some people would spend ages in a miserable mood because someone somewhere gave them an interpretation which scared them. And they live with the burden of that interpretation, waiting for the potential harm to befall them. If lucky, they eventually run into someone who relieves them of the onus of that ill-advised interpretation for a better one.

Often people unduly take a vision seriously. First they are firm that it is from God, not Satan. Second, they ask about the minutest details in it. In addition, they exaggerate its proportions. The Prophet was a wonderful teacher when he said to Abu Bakr that he was right in parts of his interpretation and wrong in others.

²⁰⁵ Chapter of Yousouf: 41.

Do Not Lose Your Temper

Suleiman bin Surad, a Prophet's Companion, said that 'two men insulted each other while we were in the presence of the Prophet. One of them had a fit and would not stop. The Prophet said: I know of a phrase which would drive away that from him if he said it. If only he said "A'udhu billahi mina ashshaitani arrajeem" (i.e., "I seek refuge in God from the ignoble Satan")'. A man²⁰⁶ heard what the Prophet said and went to the furious man, and told him to say the invocation. But he grew even more furious, and he violently fluttered his hand. He said: 'Do you see any trouble with me?! Am I crazy?! Go away!'²⁰⁷

This story is interesting in many ways:

1. People have Different Levels of Fury

The Prophet indicated that fury is from Satan. This is the case when it is unfounded, which happens in most cases. Most probably, when people have a fit, it is mostly for their own pride. When they see that their pride has been stepped on, or when their rights are being taken away, or when they are cornered in a kind of embarrassment, they react in an angry way. But this anger manifests itself in people with different characters:

- a. There are people who are slow to satisfy and slow to be infuriated. But once they do get angry, it becomes difficult to calm them down.
- b. There are people who are quick to lose temper, quick to pacify. These are easy to deal with once you understand them.

²⁰⁶ In some accounts it was Mu'adh bin Jabal.

²⁰⁷ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (25382; 29582); Ahmad (22139; 22164; 27249); al-Bukhari (3282; 6048; 6115); Muslim (2610); Abu Dawud (4780-1); al-Tirmidhi (3452); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (10221; 10224-5); Ibn Hibban (5692); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (20/140-1; 286-9); al-Hakim (2/478); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (8283).

- c. Some people are slow to get angry but quick to appease. This is the best type: they rarely get angry. And when they do get angry, they return to themselves and repent to God and ask Him for forgiveness.
- d. Others are quick to lose temper, but slow to pacify. These are the worst category. They get furious for the most trivial reasons, and once in a fit, it is very hard to appease them.

2. Anger and Nature

Anger is an instinctive feature. It has positive purposes and a wisdom which, if rightly exploited, do much good. The problem is when rage overtakes pardon, self-possessed action, and reason. When Ashajj Abdulqais came to the Prophet, the latter said: 'You have two features which God and His Messenger like: pardon and self-possessed, unrushed reaction'. The man said: 'Do I endeavor to adopt them, or is it God Who gave them to me innately?' The Prophet said: 'It is God Who gave them to you innately'. The man said: 'Praise to God, Who gave me two innate features which God and His Messenger like'.²⁰⁸

3. The Therapy for Fury

Pardon and patience have to be learned from the school of experience. Some people will be too quick to lose their self-control and start swearing and physically show that they are having a fit – all for the slightest reason. They may even turn violent.

Many a decision or position is taken in a state of great anger. Many a family is destroyed by an irrevocable decision of divorce taken in a state of anger, and regret comes too late. Some people have lost, not their money, spouse, or life, but their religion due to loss of self-control. They may insult religion, or the Prophet, or the

²⁰⁸ Reported by Muslim (17); Abu Dawud (5225); Ibn Majah (4188); al-Tirmidhi (2011); Ibn Hibban (7204); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (12969) and in *al-Ansat* (2374; 5256) and in *al-Sagheer* (792); al-Baihaqi (20060; 20591) and in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (7729; 8409). The part 'Do I endeavor...' to the end is found in Abu Dawud (5225); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (5313); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (8966).

Koran, or the One Who sent down the Koran! This can all happen as a result of this bad nature, or bad upbringing. It is from early childhood that people have to learn the rules of self-control. A man came to the Prophet and asked: 'Messenger of God, advise me'. The Prophet said: 'Do not lose your temper, do not lose your temper do not lose your temper...' He repeated it several times.²⁰⁹

This advice was not specially for this man; it is for every one of us. We all have to learn how to control ourselves, as well as how to avoid provoking others when they are angry. A married couple, for example, has to learn how to deal with each other when they are furious. They should find the best and softest ways to appease each other's rage. Unlike what some ignorant men believe, this in no way affects a man's pride.

So the Prophet indicated that anger is a satanic feature²¹⁰. He taught his Companions to deal with it thus:

- a. By saying 'A'udhu billahi mina ashshaitani arrajeem' (i.e., "I seek refuge in God from the ignoble Satan");
- b. By doing ablutions, for they cool down the body and chase the devil away;
- c. By changing the posture: if the angry person is standing, he sits down; if he is sitting, he lies down. This helps to change the tense mood.

I have come across a beautiful statement by sage. He said if you are angry, look at your face in the mirror: you will see something awful which you will not bear to look at – that is a different person!

That is to say, it is as if a demon had imbued you. It is no more you, the gentleman who people love and respect.

²⁰⁹ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (20286); Ahmad (8729; 23219); al-Bukhari (6116); al-Tirmidhi (2020); Ibn Hibban (5689-90); al-Baihaqi (20065-6); al-Hakim (3/713).

²¹⁰ Reported by Ahmad (18014); Abu Dawud (4784); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (17/167; 443); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (8291-2).

So an individual has to make sure people do not define him as short-tempered. He should therefore shun the situations which are likely to cause his anger if he knows that he has that weakness.

4. The Preacher's Deference to the Conditions of His Audience:

Note that the Prophet did not go in person to the angry man to tell him what to say; he only said the words to his Companions sitting next to him. Only when he mentioned the invocation did one of his Companions go to the angry man to say it to him. The result turned out to be vociferous exasperation. Realizing the degree of fury in which the man was, the Prophet did not speak to him directly. Had he talked to him, he could have reacted the way he did with the Companion, and the consequences would have been devastating to his faith.

This story shows us that the advising person has to take into cognizance the circumstances of the person being advised – his feelings, his relations, his background, his shortcomings, and so on. He is not just a lump of flesh and bones. He is the result of a childhood where he went through mistakes which he can hardly overcome now.

Furthermore, a man should not be assessed on a word, a mistake, an isolated act, on which he should be blamed. Nor should he be looked down on due to a sin, or thereupon be considered as a condemned person. How can we *know* that he has no faith, or has a wicked heart?! These are unfortunate things which happen to many good people. And the Prophet says: 'All humans are fault makers. And the best fault makers are those who repent from them'.²¹¹ He also says: 'I swear by that Who holds my soul that even if you did not sin, God would take you away and create other people who would ask Him for forgiveness, and He would forgive them'.²¹² In

²¹¹ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (34216); Ahmad (13072); al-Darimi (2727); Ibn Majah (4251); al-Tirmidhi (2499); Abu Yaala (2922); al-Hakim (4/272); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (273; 7127).

²¹² Reported by Abdurrazzaq (20271); Ibn Abi Shaiba (34201); Ahmad (2623; 8030; 8068); Muslim (2749); al-Tirmidhi (2526); Ibn Hibban (7387); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (3992; 12794), and in al-Awsat (2376; 5073); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (798; 7102).

another Hadith, we have ‘Any believer has a sin which he goes back to every once in a while, or a sin which he dwells at until he dies. The believer has been created to be constantly tested, regretting his sins, and forgetful. But when he is reminded, he remembers.’²¹³

We must never judge people on a particular position or mistake: they may go through special psychological circumstances. On that particular occasion, the person in question may be uncommonly nervous, whether excessively happy or exceptionally furious; greatly depressed or markedly distracted. We have to be considerate towards people. And our message has to pass in the best silver-tongued way.

We must not take them from a bad situation to a worse one, which a careless style of speaking can cause. But to be successful in our task, we have to conjure up effort and talent, as well as leniency and patience, avoiding direct methods. Do not face the person and use blunt style. The Prophet used such indirect style as ‘How come some people are doing/saying...’²¹⁴ when somebody erred.

Preaching vs. Overt Denunciation

Preaching should not turn into public criticism or a one-on-one deal. With this in mind, and with the background and upbringing of the erring person in mind, we can win the hearts of a great many people. If we run into a difficult case – one who does not admit his faults easily – we give him another chance, and more time. For example, we may use indirect counseling, by talking to others and implying him. We may praise things which he does not have, or criticize others which he has, without speaking directly to him. Alternatively, we can tell stories or allegorize. Throughout, we have to keep the psychological and socio-cultural background of that person in mind.

²¹³ Reported by Abd bin Hameed (674); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (11810; 12457), and in *al-Ansat* (5884); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (7124); al-Quda'i in *Musnad al-Shihab* (534; 809).

²¹⁴ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's *Al-Mussannaf* (6317 ; 3313) ; Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Mussannaf* (2725; 3135; 12124); Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (8337; 11001; 20842); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (456; 750; 7301); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (1401; 1504; 1694; 2356); Abu Dawud's *Al-Sunan* (913; 4788); Ibn Majah's *Al-Sunan* (140; 2017); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (2124); al-Nassai's *Al-Sunan* (947; 1193; 3217; 3451; 4655); Ibn Khuzaima's *Al-Sahih* (475); Ibn Hibban's *Al-Sahih* (14; 2284; 4272; 4438; 4515; 5120); *al-Mustadrak* (4/84-5; 403); *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (7642; 8099).

The Prophet was sent with *this* noble mission. And his followers had to follow suit, with wisdom and tact as fundamental elements of their strategies of advising.

... And Do Not Disperse

Dispersal is from Satan

In Abu Dawud's *al-Sunan* et al., Abu Tha'laba al-Khushani reported that when the Prophet settled at a place while traveling, the Companions with him dispersed in different areas. So he said: 'Your dispersal in different directions is but from Satan'. After that, said the reporter of the Hadith, the Companions clustered together, so much so that if you spread a cloth over them, it would cover them all.²¹⁵

These meanings are worth noting. The Arabs were a scattered people. They were among the most dispersed and war waging nations in the world. Their wars were ruthless. This went on until Islam came, with the aim to unify them as one of its basic missions. Subsequently, they became brothers and made a solid group. The Prophet wove a real pact of brotherhood between the Muhajirun (the inhabitants of Mecca who migrated and settled in Medina) and the Ansar (the residents of Medina).

The Brotherhood of Islam

God made the brotherhood of Islam stronger than any other kind of brotherhood. He said: 'And the believers, men and women, are protecting allies one of another.'²¹⁶ He also said: 'The believers are naught else than brothers.'²¹⁷ He made Suhaib and Salman and Bilal and Ammar and Abu Bakr, and prior to those, Muhammad and the men and women of Islam, and those far and those close, Arabs and non-Arabs – all brothers and sisters in God, fusing them in one *Umma*, erasing all sorts of differences among them, saying: '...so that you became brothers by His grace.'²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Reported by Ahmad (17771); Abu Dawud (2628); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (8856); Ibn Hibban (2690); al-Hakim (2/126); al-Baihaqi (18238).

²¹⁶ Chapter of al-Tawba: 71.

²¹⁷ Chapter of al-Hujurat: 10.

²¹⁸ Chapter of Aal 'Imran: 103.

This is the brotherhood which the Prophet established, and which supplied the foundation of the *Umma* which set out to spread gloriously through the world. It included various nations, such as the Kurds, who supplied great leaders and warriors, and who had a great presence in the world with their leadership and their role in defending the frontiers of Islam. The Berbers, too, had their say in the *Umma*, when they accepted this religion and learned the Arabic language. They, too, had their share of glory, just like the nations of India, Sind, Persia, etc. – they blended with the rest of the Muslim *Umma* through this religion.

There are other fundamentals which have to be revitalized every time one performs a ritual. For example, when the Muslim performs his prayer, he knows he performs this ritual side-by-side to his brothers in Islam. And when he reads the Koran, he knows that millions of other Muslims are reading the same Koran at the same time. While fasting the month of Ramadan, he is aware that the rest of the Muslim *Umma* are doing likewise since it is an obligation on anyone who shares this religion. Walking around the Ka'ba, he also knows that all Muslims the world over pray toward this shrine.

A Miserable Reality

However, it is regrettable to see these days a revival of some pre-Islamic slogans. We are witnessing a return to tribal and ethnic affiliations, and nationalistic and regional affiliations which damage the Islamic unity.

These days, we notice that the nations of the world are joining the so-called globalization, which the dominant nations are endeavoring to push the other nations to join, economically, politically, culturally, mediatically, etc. We can now see cross-continental companies, e.g. oil companies, computer companies, vehicle companies, media companies, etc. Some of these may have a capital of billions of dollars, but they prefer to join other companies to be more powerful, in fact they have more influence than states and political forces.

Sometimes it is the states which cluster together to be more powerful, like the European nations – a group of empires – e.g.

Germany, Britain, France, to name but these, under the same currency, customs system, constitution, and maybe in the future with the same army and security system. They use every means to sustain their influence and hegemony on the weaker nations of the world to extort what they want from them.

On the other hand, if you look to this *Umma*, which God has unified and set a code for it, and which the Prophet has personally established, you feel amazed. The Prophet urged his Companions to stay close to each other physically. When they were in the valley, he pointed out to them that their dispersal was from Satan. So they went back to bunch together. But though the physical clustering is the basis, and though it is recommended, when they settle at a distance of each other, they still felt that they were one entity, sensing the presence of the others even though from a distance. Furthermore, this notion concerns the hearts and souls: they felt that they belonged with the same spiritual group, and that each individual had a duty over the group for protection and help in all circumstances.

Helping the Wronged

Part of this unity is to help your brother in Islam when he is suffering from an injustice. These days, we see that the Muslim world is the part which suffers the most injustice, and that is because it is a scattered world. It is also because we are still dead to the world, while the other nations have realized great progress. The Islamic world is being robbed of everything it has. The Muslim nations are deprived of the critical decisions, even those which concern them. And the powerful nations know that it is in this (Islamic) world that their interests lie, not in so-called Israel. Yet they consistently vote for Israel in spite of the fact that they know it is occupying Palestine. They support the occupiers and stand by them both overtly and covertly. And elected presidents compete to show support for these usurping occupiers.

Meanwhile, the Muslim world gets little care although it has huge riches, such as oil and other material and human resources. All this is due to the division in the Muslim world. This division does not affect just the Muslim nations per se; even within the same country some counties are hardly united with the others, and

sometimes even the cities bear hostile feelings towards each other. It is not uncommon, too, to see hatred between tribes or clans, so that people do not pray together in the same mosque, or on the day of Eed, which is supposed to be a day of celebration, merriment, and unity of the Muslims.

In the West, too, we find Muslims behaving no differently. For example, in Ramadan some people fast with their original countries, while others fast according to the local sighting of the moon. In the very same mosque, some Muslims are fasting while others are not. On Eed day, some are still fasting on the basis that they want to finish the thirty days of the month, while others are already celebrating the end of Ramadan.

Is it not time we put an end to these behaviors?! Are we ever going to be tired of absurd justifications and abiding by them?!

The Ingredients of Division

The factors of division exist in the Muslim world, and there is no denying them. One of them is tribalism. The Prophet said: 'Four things will linger from *Jahiliya*²¹⁹ in my *Umma*: boasting about clans, defaming family backgrounds and relations, praying to the stars for rain, and wailing.'²²⁰

Many people may be very religious and benevolent. But if they have responsibility, they are primarily motivated by tribal or ethnic impulses. They would appoint relatives despite their poor competence. We often condemn such attitudes and acts in public. But once away from the eyes and ears of the public, we have a different stance: now we are more egocentrically outspoken and honest about the difference between us and the 'others'.

If these attitudes linger among us, stamping even the best of our behaviors and urges, they will only deepen the crack between groups, scholars, madhhabs, etc. In earlier times, scholars had wonderful relations, and had great respect for one another.

²¹⁹ I.e., the pre-Islamic era.

²²⁰ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (12103); Ahmad (9354; 9873; 22955; 22963); Muslim (934); al-Tirmidhi (1001); Abu Yaala (1577); Ibn Hibban (3143); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (3425; 6100); al-Hakim (1/539); al-Baihaqi (6902), and in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (5142).

Difference in opinion was never a reason for tension. For example, after al-Shafii had a debate with Younous al-Sadafi, they stood up to leave. Al-Sadafi said: 'I have never seen a wiser man than al-Shafii. He took me by the hand and said: "Younous, could we not be brothers even if we do not agree about all points?"' ²²¹

It is high time we appreciated the wisdom of this great scholar. It is equally high time we looked to the factors of unity: the unity based on the Koran, the religion of Islam, faith, compliance with the way of the Prophet, the rituals which bind us, practical factors, and the fundamental foundations which make us all servants of God. It is time to focus on these elements, not the elements of division and difference, which can be admitted within reasonable limits.

When an object is given more proportion than it deserves, it obstructs the view of the world. But when it is put in its right place, it is seen in its normal size.

We have to grow up in our homes and all types of preaching environments with the appreciation of the means of unity and harmony among the members of this Umma. We ought to give the differences the size they deserve. We must not allow differences to prevail over the agents of unity and brotherhood among us.

²²¹ Then al-Shafii advised him saying: 'There is no escape from people. So stick with the virtue you find in your soul and ignore people'. Cf. *Adab al-Mufti wa al-Mustafti* (2/459).

The Romans Will Outnumber the Other People

A Profound Diagnosis

Al-Mustawrid bin Shaddad, a Companion of the Prophet, was once speaking in the presence of ‘Amr bin al-’Aas, another Companion. He said that he had heard the Prophet say: ‘On Doomsday eve, the Romans will outnumber the other people’. ‘Amr bin al-’Aas said: ‘Watch your words!’ (i.e., be careful what you say; did the Prophet really say it?) Al-Mustawrid said: ‘I am saying what I heard from the Messenger of God. The Prophet said: “On doomsday eve, the Romans will outnumber the other people” ‘. ‘Amr said: ‘Now that you are sure, they have four characteristics: when there is a commotion, they are the most forgiving; they are the quickest to recover after a crisis; they are the most likely to come back after running away; they are the most merciful to the needy, the orphan, and the vulnerable. And there is a beautiful fifth one: they are the most protective of each other from the injustice of kings’.²²²

Every time I go through ‘Amr bin al-’Aas’s diagnosis, I stand amazed at his insight! I imagine the West and its research centers, and the studies which are conducted almost exclusively there about such issues as different peoples’ psychologies, which lead to conclusions on how to deal with these peoples. Then I realize Amr’s bull’s eye in characterizing the Romans.

These days the extension of the Romans is the West – Europe, America, etc.

Numerousness Defeats Dravery

The Prophet informed us that on Doomsday eve the Romans will be the most numerous nations. This is a prophetic

²²² Reported by Ahmad (18051); Muslim (2898); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (736), and in *al-Awsat* (8668).

announcement, and it is certainly true. This numerousness is not limited to sheer number; it is associated with power as well.

The Muslims are characterized by bravery and sacrifice. But the other people whom the Prophet mentioned, the Romans that is, have number. And by connecting this great number with Doomsday eve, the Prophet implies a certain degree of power and independence in their decisions, positions, systems, etc. This is exactly what we see today.

Continuation is Conditional on Preserving the Rights

The insightful portrayal by ‘Amr bin al-’Aas sets a link between the great number of Romans until Doomsday with certain conditions. This shows that the destiny running these days is not arbitrary. Destiny flows in line with laws which God has fixed in the universe. Justice, equity, truthfulness, science, etc. are important things which give victory once they are attained. If the Muslim realizes them, he gets significant consequences; otherwise, he misses great opportunities. Hence Ibn Taymiyya’s statement in his book, *Qa’ida fi al-Hisba*, that ‘people do not contest that the consequences of injustice are detrimental, and that the consequences of justice are beneficial – the reason why it is said that God helps the just state even if it is one of non-believers, and does not help the unjust state even if it is a Muslim one.’²²³ The Muslims necessarily obey these laws just like any other people.

It is possible to understand how the Law-Maker encourages us to adopt these principles from the Qudsi Hadith: ‘God says: whoever gets closer to me by a span, I get closer to him by an arm’s length. And whoever gets closer to me by an arm’s length, I get closer to him by a wider distance’.²²⁴ This Hadith includes both good acts and repenting from bad ones. Whoever repents to God, He accepts him and helps him to turn a new page, and alters his bad deeds into good ones, and endows him with someone who assists him on his way – a spouse, a relative, a friend, etc.

²²³ *Al-Hisba fi al-Islam*, as part of *Majmou’ al-Fatawa* (28/63).

²²⁴ Reported by Ahmad (9340; 9615; 10792; 10922; 13899); al-Bukhari (7405; 7536); Muslim (2675); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (6141).

Seeking God's Acceptance through Knowledge and Power

This Hadith also implies that Muslims should seek God's acceptance by acquiring the means of power; that is to say, science, technology, and unity, which Muslims lack. God is with those who seek these means and paves their way.

If the Muslim works hard according to these laws, he may realize in a day what the others realize in a month, as long as there is good will and good intent. An important condition for this to come true is that action be taken rather than mere words and wishes and dreams. Nothing comes out of nothing.

All in all, by means of the four qualities, and the fifth beautiful one, which gave the Romans their merit, 'Amr bin al-'Aas offered a concise interpretation of the Prophet's Hadith. The Prophet talked about their eminence, and the facts point to it: 'And your Lord is not at all unjust to His slaves'.²²⁵

The following is a summary of the four characteristics whereby the Romans won their position:

1. They are the Most Forgiving after a Commotion

More often than not, upheavals compel people to lose their reason. In special emotional situations, people can lose their balance; consequently, they find it difficult to analyze correctly and make rational judgments. The final result is seen in practical life.

As 'Amr said, these people – the Romans, that is – are characterized by forgiveness and patience. When they are hit by hard times, they prove patient and wise. This is a clear indication that these features are beneficial, and that a Muslim should have them, since the context is one of praising. A Muslim is supposed to pick up all sorts of good qualities, whether from friends or foes.

2. They are the Quickest to Recover after a Crisis

This may refer to specific or general crises, though it seems that the general crises are more likely to be the ones meant in this

²²⁵ Chapter of Fussilat: 46.

statement. It is not just the death of a family member, for example, which is intended. It is when the whole nation is involved.

For example, they go through a devastating war. But soon they rise from the ashes and start a new chapter. Then life goes on, probably because their ruling systems allow that. Thus, when a ruling system is based on institutions, and is constantly under scrutiny, mistakes are quickly corrected, and their traces soon disappear. This is what ‘recovering after a crisis’ means – their errors do not linger for ever. Come elections, mistakes are exposed, corrected, and alternatives put forward.

3. They are the Most Merciful to the Needy, the Orphan, and the Vulnerable

This is exactly the humane value which Islam calls for. It is also part of the mercy with which Muhammad has been sent. The Prophet said: ‘I forbid the usurpation of the rights of the weak two: the right of the orphan and the right of the woman’.²²⁶ The Prophet was always on the side of the weak, such as the needy, the orphans, and the widows. He was a model for people, and his code is based on this conduct.

As Jabir, one of the Companions of the Prophet, said, when the Muslim migrants came back from Abyssinia, the Prophet asked them about the most astonishing thing they had witnessed. Some young men said: ‘While we were sitting once, an old woman walked by us with a gourd of water on her head. She passed by one of their young men, who put his hand between her shoulders and pushed her. She fell on her knees and broke her gourd. When she stood up, she turned to him and said: “Soon will you know, Ghodar, when God gathers the first and the last of people, and when the hands and the legs speak out what they were doing, you will know then what your affair and mine will be!” ‘ The Prophet said: “She was right, she was right. How can God prize a nation if their weak are not protected from their strong?”’²²⁷

²²⁶ Reported by Ahmad (9664); Ibn Majah (3678); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (9149-50); Ibn Hibban (5565); al-Hakim (1/131; 4/142).

²²⁷ Reported by Ibn Majah (4010); Abu Ya’la (2003); Ibn Hibban (5058-9); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (24/248; 635), and in *al-Ansat* (7208); al-Baihaqi in *Shu’ab al-Eeman* (11232).

So the Prophet shows that a society where the poor, the weak, etc. can claim their rights with no hesitation and no fear is a society worthy of continuance, because this society upholds the human values which God has characterized mankind with: 'Verily We have honored the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment.'²²⁸ Such society endorses these humane values, so that people live in it peacefully. They feel they have a sense of belonging, and they benefit from it. Accordingly, they contribute to its perpetuation far from anxiety.

4. They are the Most likely to Come Back after Running Away

That is if they lose a battle, they soon recover their strength and re-attack their enemy.

5. They are the Most Protective of Each Other from the Injustice of Kings

This is a most beautiful characteristic. That is to say, they do not tolerate the injustice of kings. This may not be the case on an individual basis. Otherwise, this can be said about the Arabs, too, like Quhait al-'Ajli, who refused to yield his horse to the king and said a few verses on that. In fact, their repudiation of that injustice is realized collectively. Their institutions and agenda allow them to work jointly, and hence avoid the potential tyranny of individuals.

So 'Amr bin al-'Aas talked astutely about the characteristics above, explaining the destiny which made the Romans as they are, and which the Prophet mentioned in the Hadith: 'On Doomsday eve, the Romans will outnumber the other people'.

To conclude, the Muslim should pick up these values and prophetic insinuations, as well as the insightful remarks of the shrewd leader, 'Amr bin al-'Aas, to adopt them as a living reality for him and for people. Their implementation is worthwhile, and the Muslim society is in great need of them.

²²⁸ Chapter of al-Israa: 70.

The Preaching Prophet

Preoccupations of a Preacher

The Prophet was busy talk the chiefs of Quraish into Islam. His main concern was to see them respond to the divine call, and see light reach their hearts. Then a blind man, Abdullah bin Ummi Maktoum, turned up. His question was direct, though he did not know what the Prophet was doing. He said: ‘Messenger of God, teach me of that which God has taught you’.²²⁹ But the Prophet was reluctant to do that, assuming he was busy doing something more urgently important.

The Prophet was subjected to a harsh war. His enemies were eagerly waiting for the slightest mistake or weakness, and the ‘media’ war was at its peak. Meanwhile, the followers were too few. After the occurrence with the blind man, the Prophet went home with a shattered heart. There, Gabriel came down to him with a message from God. Here was an angel who would come to Muhammad on a comforting mission and with relief. Now he came with these verses:

‘He frowned and turned away

Because the blind man came up to him.

What could inform you but that he might grow (in grace)

Or take heed and so the reminder might avail him?’²³⁰

A Divine Rebuke

God reprimanded His Prophet for what can be explained as an act which the Prophet thought, according to what he saw, to be the more advantageous move. But to God, he opted for the less appropriate choice. God knew in advance that those people were

²²⁹ Cf. al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (30/51); *Takbreej al-Ahadeeth wa al-Aathar*, by al-Zaila'i (4/155-6); Ibn Kathir's *Al-Tafsir* (4/471).

²³⁰ Chapter of ‘Abassa: 1-4.

not to believe, and that the effort with them was vain, as He did with Noah when He said: 'No one of the folk will believe save him who has believed already.'²³¹ He said about the people of the Prophet: 'Nay, but (man) has not done what He commanded him'.²³² This verse suggests that the Prophet's arrogant folks would never turn Muslims. In the meantime, God vigorously rebuked His Prophet regarding this weak man, saying: 'He frowned and turned away'.²³³

A Rebuke in the Third-Person Pronoun

The discourse uses the pronoun 'he' rather than the direct pronoun 'you'. It is used compatibly with the reaction of the Prophet with the blind man, Abdullah bin Umri Maktum, when he turned away from him as he was busy with the chieftains of Quraish. Then, after saying 'He frowned and turned away', God says: 'Because the blind man came unto him.' The word 'blind' implies the excuse which that man had: he could not see what the Prophet was doing when the latter was sitting and talking in the presence of those people. The man had a valid excuse. This shows that Islam does not make any difference between people on the basis of their physical or any other capacities, e.g., financial, political, social, familial, etc. Only virtue is recognized as a criterion for difference by this religion. This is why the next verse says: 'What could inform you but that he might grow (in grace)?' That is, this man, who you turned away from, may grow spiritually, and 'Or take heed and so the reminder might avail him?' So he may either improve in virtue by hearing the words of wisdom, guidance, faith and obedience, or by hearing the call he will remember that he has to abstain from sins. He will therefore get two means of attaining virtue to take from you. That is what concerns Abdullah bin Umri Maktum.

As for the other men who were there, the verses refer to them thus: 'As for him who thinks himself independent, to him you pay

²³¹ Chapter of Hood: 36

²³² Chapter of Abasa: 23.

²³³ Ibid: 1.

regard. Yet it is not your concern if he grows not (in grace).²³⁴ These people were feeling they were above the call. Therefore, what makes you endeavor so hard with him after you have done what you were required to do, and worry too much to care for one who willingly comes along seeking your call – seeking guidance and advice?!

Taking Sides with the Weak and the Needy

This shows that Islam is with the weak and the needy, and that the decisive factor in preference is not a material one. God says: ‘Allah is Knower, Aware.’²³⁵ Worth is not based on family relations or blood ties, even if those be the blood ties with the Prophet himself, who said: ‘The family of (and he mentioned somebody) are not my allies; my alliance is with God and the righteous of Muslims’.²³⁶

The Ultimate Intent

The essential object of divine missions is not to be a war ground and a cause for singing one’s own praises. Divine missions aim to raise man and provide him with the best morals and behavior. They ultimately aim to establish a decent society for a fine civilization. If that be attained, no men would be aspiring to enslave any other men, or degrade them. Humans would be treating each other with respect, and considering themselves all equal in rights. This is the message revealed in the divine discourse, as in: ‘O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another.’²³⁷ The only way to gain any value is by righteousness and seeking God’s appreciation. As Omar bin al-Kattab said, ‘God raises some people with this Scripture, and lowers others with it’.²³⁸ So whoever

²³⁴ Chapter of Abassa: 5-7.

²³⁵ Chapter of al-Hujurat: 13

²³⁶ Reported by Ahmad (17837); al-Bukhari (5644); Muslim (215).

²³⁷ Chapter of al-Hujurat: 13.

²³⁸ Reported by Ahmad (232); al-Darimi (3365); Muslim (817); Ibn Majah (218); Ibn Hibban (722); al-Baihaqi (4904), and in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (2682).

clings to this Scripture will reach God's triumph. On the other hand, whoever leaves it behind will suffer God's humiliation and have only misery. The land does not hoist anybody; blood ties do not honor anybody; and history does not glorify anybody: it is his work which honors man.

An Eternal, Declared Rebuke

It was amazing! The admonition came down from God, and yet the Prophet did not conceal it or had any reservation reading it aloud to his followers, who were so few: 'He frowned and turned away'. And he would welcome Abdullah bin Ummi Maktoum and say: 'Welcome to a man my God rebuked me about'.²³⁹ This revelation came to be read aloud, and thus did the Prophet read it – loud and clear for the believer and the non-believer alike to hear.

In this occurrence and the revelation of these verses, we see the credibility of the mission of Muhammad, who would never blame himself. It was God Who blamed him from above. And he would not camouflage this blame: he used to say it aloud to his followers and teach it to them. He would read it in prayers, and his enemies could have heard it and used it against him.

This is the limit of greatness. It can only be attributed to a messenger chosen by God. Imagine a person you value, say, a parent, reprimanded you in private; would you tell the world, especially if the reprimand was strong? Here was a man who was being attacked day in, day out, and the 'media' waged an unrelenting war against him, and yet he did not hesitate to declare the message which harshly rebuked him to the public, though his enemies were eager to use anything against him.

The worldly criteria are not the same as those of the revelation. The Prophet used to read the Koran to all people. Another such revelation is: 'And when you said to him on whom Allah has conferred favor and you have conferred favor: Keep your wife to yourself, and fear Allah. And you did hide in your mind that which

²³⁹ Cf. al-Baghaoui's *al-Tafseer* (4/446); al-Qortobi's *al-Tafseer* (19/213); al-Zaila'i's *Takbreej al-Abadeeth wa al-Aathar* (4/155); Ibn Muflih's *al-Aadaab al-Shar'iyya* (1/441); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (1/490); *Ruh al-Ma'aani* (30/39).

Allah was to bring to light.²⁴⁰ Imagine you were told this ‘And you did hide in your mind that which Allah was to bring to light!’ Is it not so hard to accept this! That is what the Prophet did, and he read it out to his Companions and recited it in his prayers. Yet even harder was the next verse – ‘...and you did fear mankind whereas Allah had a better right that you should fear Him’.

A similar kind of discourse is in the chapter of al-Anfal (verses 67-8): ‘It is not fitting for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land. You took for the temporal goods of this world, but Allah looks for the hereafter: and Allah is Exalted in might, Wise. Had it not been for a previous ordainment from Allah, a severe penalty would have reached you for (the ransom) that you took’. He was as disposed to read them these verses as he was to read ‘...and you stand on an exalted standard of character’²⁴¹, and ‘Those who annoy Allah and His Messenger – Allah has cursed them in this world and in the hereafter, and has prepared for them a humiliating punishment.’²⁴²

Some of the Evidence that He was a Prophet

All these verses stand for the truthfulness of the Prophet, and that he did not talk his own whims: ‘It is no less than inspiration sent down to him.’²⁴³ It would be bizarre for a person to blame himself, even more so to declare that publicly. Moreover, none of the worldly criteria favor such statements, unless linked to the revelation. Therefore, this can only point to the truthfulness of the divine revelation. Another central import of these verses is that a Muslim who really considers the Prophet his model has to accept criticism even if it should be public, as long as it is supported by evidence, and as long as its aim is to correct. This can only contribute to the improvement of one’s personality. It helps to build up a real sense of humility and isolate the persona from

²⁴⁰ Chapter of al-Ahzaab: 37.

²⁴¹ Chapter of al-Qalam: 4.

²⁴² Chapter of al-Ahzaab: 57.

²⁴³ Chapter of an-Najm: 4.

negative factors. After all, God the all-Wise said: ‘And you stand on an exalted standard of character.’²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Chapter of al-Qalam: 4.

The Prophet of Mercy

The Hypocrisy Movement

In Mecca there were two groups of people: the believers and the non-believers. When the Prophet migrated to Medina, there emerged a third category: the hypocrites. These people displayed Islam out of fear and concealed disbelief, hate, and conspiracy for Muslims. The leader of this group was Abdullah bin Ubayy bin Salul.

One day, the Prophet passed by them and talked them into Islam. Bin Ubayy said: 'There is nothing better than what you say if it is the truth'. Thus was his style in alluding: '...if it is the truth'. Some of his (many) offensive expressions included: 'Don't insult us with your speech. Go back home and recount to whoever comes to you.'²⁴⁵ This man knew about the truthfulness of Islam, but he hated it because he saw that it was preventing him from his enthronement: the residents of Medina were preparing to crown him as their king when Islam arrived.

A Military Betrayal

When the Muslims left for the battle of Uhud, he withdrew with the third of the army, saying: 'I do not think there will be a fight'.²⁴⁶ In fact he said much worse than that on the way back from the battle of al-Mustaliq, as recorded by the Koran: 'If we return to Medina, surely the more honorable (people) will expel therefrom the meaner.'²⁴⁷ He also whispered to his clique: 'Spend not on those who are with Allah's Messenger to the end that they may disperse

²⁴⁵ Reported by al-Bukhari (4290); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (7502); al-Baihaqi (17517). Cf. also Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (3/130); al-Qortobi's *Al-Tafsir* (2/72; 4/303); *al-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatimi al-Rasul* (2/407); Ibn Kathir's *Al-Tafsir* (1/436); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (6/10).

²⁴⁶ Cf. Ibn ishaq's *al-Seera* (1/301-4); Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Mussannaf* (9735); al-Tabari's *al-Tareekh* (5/60); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/14).

²⁴⁷ Chapter of al-Munafiquun: 8.

(and quit Medina)²⁴⁸, the innuendo being that those are mercenaries who have come only for money, so that if you refrain from giving them money, they will disperse and leave him by himself. This is how he used to imagine the situation!

Perfecting companionship

His son Abdullah, who was a sincere believer, was the antithesis of his father. He came one day to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of Allah, I have heard that you want my father Ubayy killed. If that be true, tell me to do it; I can bring you his head, though the clan of al-Khazraj know of no man more obedient to his father than me. But I am afraid that you bid another man to kill him, and I feel incapable of curbing myself to see the killer of my father walking in front of me, and I kill a believer for a non-believer and go to Hell.' The Prophet said to him: 'Rather, we take good care of him, and we treat him as best we can as long as he is with us.'²⁴⁹

On the Deathbed

When the last day of his father's life came, this young man went to the Prophet and requested his gown to use as a coffin for his father.²⁵⁰ The Prophet gave it to him. And when his corpse was brought before the Prophet to pray for, the Prophet proceeded to pray. But Omar, the strong and tough man, walked up and grabbed the Prophet and interceded, saying: 'Are you going to pray for Ibn Ubayy?! Didn't he say such and such on day such and such?' (reminding the Prophet of all that which Ibn Ubayy had said). But the Prophet said: 'Back off Omar'. And when Omar insisted, the Prophet said: 'I was given the choice, and I have made my choice. If

²⁴⁸ Ibid: 7. Cf. Ahmad's *Al-Musnad* (19304; 19314; 19352-3); al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* (3615); Muslim's *Al-Sahih* (2772); al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Jami'* (3312-4); al-Tabari's *al-Tareekh* (2/110); al-Tabari's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (5003); *al-Mustadrak* (2/531).

²⁴⁹ Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (4/256); al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (12/105); al-Tabari's *al-Tareekh* (2/110); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubumwa* (4/121); *Kashf al-Mushkil* (2/532); *Ussud al-Ghaba* (2/133); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/158); *al-Seera al-Halabiyya* (2/599).

²⁵⁰ Reported by Ahmad (4680); al-Bukhari (1210); Muslim (2400; 2774); Abu Dawud (3094); Ibn Majah (1524); al-Nassai (1900); al-Tirmidhi (3098).

I know that he can be forgiven if I beg (God) more than seventy times, I will do it'. And he prayed for him.

Not only that, the Prophet followed his funeral until the cemetery. He went down to his tomb, put his corpse on his own (i.e., the Prophet's) legs, blessed him with his own saliva, dressed him with his own gown, and then slowly lowered him to his tomb.²⁵¹

That is Prophethood

How amazing, how noble, how great is prophethood! Who was the man he treated with such grace? Take a look at his history to see his record and behavior. It is full of outrageous acts: 'If we return to Medina, surely the more honorable (people) will expel therefrom the meaner', 'Spend not on those who are with Allah's Messenger to the end that they may disperse (and quit Medina)', 'Back off, your donkey stinks; it bothers me!'²⁵²

To top it off, he went so far as to spread among people the horrible rumor that Aisha, the honorable lady of the Prophet's home, had committed adultery. That gossip spread among the society, and the Prophet's family went through a whole month of torment, until the revelation came down to honor Aisha, with verses in the middle of the chapter of al-Nur. The whole campaign of horror, anguish and gossip was plotted by Abdullah bin Ubayy.

All these felonies notwithstanding, the great heart of the Prophet was forgiving. I can say with confidence that it is impossible for any heart to be as noble and forgiving as the Prophet's, no matter how great the person in question – a king, a scholar, etc. – is. This standard, with its spontaneity, sincerity, and enormity, is simply unreachable among mortals, no matter how hard they try.

²⁵¹ Reported by Ahmad (95); al-Bukhari (1300); al-Tirmidhi (3097); al-Nassai (1966); and al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (2093; 11225) al-Baihaqi (16620).

²⁵² Reported by al-Bukhari (2691); Muslim (1799); Abu Yaala (4083); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (4672); al-Baihaqi (16481). Cf. also al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (26/128); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/250).

It is by forgetting all those ills, and treating that hypocrite the way he did – praying for him, dressing him in his own gown, and personally lowering him to his tomb, that the Prophet established this religion, unified this *Umma*, and won the praises of humanity.

This was just one of many people who did all they could to hurt the Prophet and fight Islam. This ‘leader’ perpetrated all kinds of malicious acts and conspiracies, using the dirtiest means and lies to hurt the Prophet personally and attempt to wreck him physically and morally.

That man was never a Muslim. Even in his death bed, he never showed any signs of inclination to Islam. The Prophet once went to visit him while he was dying and, hoping to see him convert to Islam, he said: ‘I used to tell you to stay away from the love of the Jews’. The local Jews were the ones who founded the hypocrisy movement and fed it, using it as the most effective means to destroy Islam and dispel its people. The Prophet told him while he was breathing his last: ‘I used to tell you to stay away from the love of the Jews’. But he said: ‘As’ad bin Zourara hated them, so what?’²⁵³

He was not keen on the Prophet’s prayer for him to be forgiven: he was never a Muslim, as the Koran stated. This is why the Koran later reprimanded the Prophet for praying for him: ‘And never (O Muhammad) pray for one of them who dies, nor stand by his grave. They disbelieved in Allah and His messenger.’²⁵⁴

This man’s destiny was to die a non-believer. But what is important for us is the Prophet’s behavior: it is just difficult to assess the splendor of this forgiveness and mercy for people who hurt him and fought Islam and plotted the worst conspiracies against it.

The Great Heart

Today we find many people expressing their pride to be related to this religion. Consequently, their hearts carry a feeling of grudge

²⁵³ Reported by Ahmad (21806); Abu Dawud (3094); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (390); al-Hakim (1/491).

²⁵⁴ Chapter of al-Tawba: 84.

and are anxious to triumph over the other people. This, however, will not open up people's hearts to the message of this religion. This kind of task requires a great deal of mercy, forgiveness, and patience. The Prophet was the archetype of these values throughout his mission, both in Mecca and Medina.

Another case was when the Prophet said to the residents of Mecca when he triumphed over them: 'What do you think I will do to you?' They said: 'Only good: (you are) a brother, son of a brother.' He said: 'You are free to go'.²⁵⁵

This is no doubt a unique wonderful heart. He forgets twenty years of pain, war, torture, chasing, and bloodshed. And instead of establishing courts and execution places, he forgives for God's sake, saying: 'I say what my brother Joseph said: 'He said: Have no fear this day! May Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy'.²⁵⁶

Another such story was the one with Umama bin Uthal, who fell captive in the hands of the Muslims, and who was tied and kept in the mosque. The Prophet went to him time after time, and finally said: 'Let go of him'. The man went away, cleaned himself, and returned to the mosque to declare that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

The story with Abdullah bin Ubayy bin Salul is particularly noteworthy. Every time I go over it I see extraordinary lessons. I wish every Muslim stopped at these lessons to draw wisdom from them. God prohibited him from praying for the hypocrites after that day. This was the limit of the prohibition, but beyond that the Prophet was the same forgiving, tolerant, patient, generous man: he gave the hypocrite his own gown, probably to soothe the son when he asked for it.

The Prophet carried the concern of the whole of mankind in his heart. He was unremitting in his endeavor to call them for God. His main worry was God's punishment, and he wanted them to be

²⁵⁵ Reported by al-Baihaqi (18055). Cf. also Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (5/74); al-Tabari's *al-Tarikh* (2/161); *Zad al-Ma'ad* (3/408); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/301).

²⁵⁶ Reported by al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (11298); al-Baihaqi (18054). Cf. also Ibn Saad's *al-Tabaqat* (2/142); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (5/58); *al-Issaba* (3/213); *al-Seera al-Halabiyya* (3/49).

saved from it. This is why he said: ‘O Quraish, save yourselves from Hell!’²⁵⁷

So to anyone who preaches, keep to the model of the Prophet! He was right! Do adopt his principles of tolerance and forgiveness! Do not favor grudge over guidance and grace: ‘They are those whom Allah had guided. So follow their guidance.’²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Reported by Ahmad (8383; 8711; 10736); al-Bukhari (with the expression ‘...bail yourselves out’ (2753; 3527; 4771); al-Tirmidhi (3185); al-Nassai (3644); Ibn Hibban (646).

²⁵⁸ Chapter of al-An’am: 90.

The Confident Prophet

The Imminent Help

In al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, Khabbab, a Companion of the Prophet, reports that 'we complained to the Prophet one day when he was lying on his cap against the wall of the Ka'ba in the shade. We said: 'Would you pray (to God) for help? Would you ask God for us? The Prophet then said: "Among those before you, men were brought forth and buried to the knees, and were sawn into two halves from the head down. And iron combs were used to comb their flesh off their bones. And none of that dissuaded them against their religion. By God, this mission shall be accomplished, until the traveler goes from Sanaa to Hadramout, fearing only God, and the wolf for his sheep. But you are too impatient."²⁵⁹

I often stop at this Hadith and take time to ponder over it with astonishment. What particularly dazes me is the impression one gets from the ostensibly contradictory sides of this story: on the one hand, the Companions come to the Prophet with broken, grief-stricken hearts to ask him for an invocation which would put an end to their suffering. On the other hand, the Prophet is described as lying on his top garment against the wall of the Ka'ba in the shade.

The Prophet was so concerned about this religion and his Companions that God soothed him on different occasions: 'Yet it may be that you (Muhammad) will torment your soul with grief over their footsteps.'²⁶⁰ Or 'Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they devise.'²⁶¹ Yet the Prophet was always in control of his composure and would not show his distress about the hard times he and the Muslims were going through.

²⁵⁹ Reported by Ahmad (21095; 27260); al-Bukhari (3612; 3852; 6943); Abu Dawud (2649); Abu Yaala (7213); al-Nassai (5320); Ibn Hibban (2897; 6698); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (3638-9; 3646).

²⁶⁰ Chapter of al-Kahf: 6

²⁶¹ Chapter of al-Nahl: 127.

Serenity in Crises

We have to learn great behavior from our Model. Furious and frustrated reactions do not yield any good results, whether in personal difficulties, i.e. linked to economic, social, psychological, health issues, or to the *Umma* as a whole – hence the importance of the spiritual attitude, which boosts the sense of serenity and balance in such situations. This is not to say that we should give in to facts however adverse they may be; on the contrary, a composed attitude guarantees a balanced mind in dealing with crises, which contributes to accurate solutions. Otherwise, that is when one loses control of one's senses, one loses the rational faculties to deal appropriately with crises. As some scholars put it, fury to the mind is like the eclipse to the sun.

The sun, which inundates the world with its light, and spreads beauty and warmth everywhere, is analogous to the mind which enlightens us about otherwise hidden things, and allows us to perceive the world properly. When an eclipse occurs, the sun loses all or part of its light, and so does the mind when rage hits it – it deprives it of all or part of its balance in dealing with crises. It no more acts correctly, and may do things which it may regret just moments after the anger subsides. This is why the Prophet said: 'No one should judge between two people while he is in a state of anger.'²⁶² Judging is a task which requires integrity and impartiality of the mind, which includes listening to both sides. Anger does reduce the chances of fairness.

It is very important to keep one's calm in crises. This is not to say that one should accept a hard situation without reacting, but look to it judiciously.

The Eclipse of the Mind

Life is full of suffering and problems which often lead to loss of control in difficult situations. So much so that these difficulties eclipse the minds and anger supersedes. All you see then is reckless reactions. It is so sad to see some people react so recklessly as a

²⁶² Reported by Ahmad (20395; 20541); al-Bukhari (7158); Muslim (1717); Abu Dawud (3589); Ibn Majah (2316); al-Tirmidhi (1334); al-Nassai (5406).

result of the suffering their hearts are subjected to. But it is all the more unfortunate to see how rage dwarfs those people's sense of balance, which makes the arising problems worse. Keeping control of one's balance increases the chances of an accurate approach to a problem. Rather than helping to find the right solution, losing one's temper results in becoming part of the problem itself.

The Hudaibiyya Peace Treaty

It is clear that throughout his life, the Prophet never lost this spirit. There are dozens of examples showing this; the Hudaibiyya treaty story is but one of these examples. Omar comes to the Prophet and says: 'Aren't you unquestionably the Messenger of God?' The Prophet replies: 'Yes, I am'. Omar says: 'Aren't we right and our enemy wrong?' The Prophet says: 'That is right'. And Omar says: 'So why do we humiliate ourselves in our religion!?'²⁶³

The Companions' morale was particularly low. And Omar was the most felicitous and the most audacious in expressing this morose mood. First he went to Abu Bakr, then to the Prophet himself and spoke in this language: 'Aren't we right and our enemy wrong?' and then said the remarkable expression: 'So why do we humiliate ourselves in our religion!?'

To Omar this was a kind of humiliation. The Prophet, however, dealt with the situation with absolute calm, not only verbally, but mentally as well. With confidence and peace he said: 'I am God's servant and Messenger. I will not disobey Him, and He will not let me down.' They were few words but carried great meaning. After fourteen hundred years we still analyze them and extract meanings about the personality of this great Prophet. The husband, the employee, the boss, etc. ought to exploit this spirit and nurture it in themselves. While an individual stays in control of his serenity, he has to keep distinct the issue of God's will and that of being complacent vis-à-vis what happens. In other words, he should accept destiny, as God said to the Muhammad: 'And if their

²⁶³ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (9720); Ibn Abi Shaiba (36847; 36855; 37914); Ahmad (16018); al-Bukhari (2734; 3182; 4844); Muslim (1785); Ibn Assakir (2/371-2). Cf. also al-Tabari's *al-Tareekh* (3/309); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (4/106; 148); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/175-6).

aversion is grievous to you, then, if you can, seek a tunnel in the earth or a ladder to the sky that you may bring to them a portent (to convince them all)! If Allah willed, He could have brought them all together to the guidance. So be not among the foolish ones.²⁶⁴ This means that whether you are satisfied or not, there is nothing you can do. Sheer anger will not change anything anyway!

Being Complacent with Facts vs. Being Complacent with Destiny

Many people have died with bitterness and sad feelings, and with suppressed things which died with their own death, so that no one will ever know about them. Meanwhile, there are others who have dealt with the facts of life rationally. With perseverance, they accomplished their goals. With His grace, God stands by those who strive.

It is a sin to go on accepting facts which are inconvenient. For example, disbelief in God or waging war against Him is not to be tolerated. Often destiny is defined as passively surrendering to facts, but this is false.

This is not the correct meaning of destiny. This concept implies facing destiny with destiny, as Omar said: ‘We run away from God’s destiny to God’s destiny.’²⁶⁵ In other words, we face the destiny of our sins with the destiny of good deeds, and the destiny of injustice with the destiny of equity and its endorsement, and the destiny of colonization with that of struggle, as God said: ‘And if Allah had not repelled some men by others the earth would have been corrupted. But Allah is a Lord of Kindness to (His) creatures’²⁶⁶, so that people should not be excessively angry or scared. And this verse shows that we have to fight these negative attitudes collectively.

²⁶⁴ Chapter of al-An’am: 35.

²⁶⁵ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (20159); al-Bukhari (5729); Muslim (2219); Abu Yaala (837); Ibn Hibban (2953); al-Baihaqi (14020).

²⁶⁶ Chapter of al-Baqara: 251.

Calm is Constructive

We learn from the master of preachers that as long as we keep our calm, we can realize great things. Reaction in the form of sheer commotion is never a rewarding approach. We have to turn the negative occurrences into positive programs. From experience we know that the people who possess the most productive programs for society are the most serene. The kind of work they engage in nurtures composure in them. It gives them a sense of self-assurance and the feeling that they are useful to people. They see that while there are destructive forces endeavoring to hamper progress, they represent the positive forces which press on ahead. Accordingly, they find the reward of their enterprise in their hearts. As the Koran says: 'He it is Who sent down peace of reassurance into the hearts of the believers.'²⁶⁷ Faith is a state which yields peace of mind, for when one acts constructively, a feeling of satisfaction comes about. On the other hand, if a person watches passively, without trying to do anything to correct the evil, the problems grow and remorse starts gnawing inside, blaming him for doing nothing to improve the situation.

Such person may end up losing hope altogether. Alternatively, he may even adopt bad attitudes by growing too much used to them, eventually altering his own criteria and adjusting to the wrong one. He can end up seeing corrupt work as the correct thing. Sometimes he would do weird things to cover up for his negative complacency, and the result is unfruitful, to say the least.

Finally, serenity is a condition to observe in the face of calamities whether at the personal or collective level. It is synonymous with self-control and balanced, rational reasoning. This in no way suggests that we have to give in to despair and accept facts no matter how negative they are. Nor does it imply that we have to accept our mistakes. On the contrary, it is the first step towards correcting those mistakes.

²⁶⁷ Chapter of al-Fath: 4.

The Patient Prophet

Won't You Pray (to God) for Us?

The Prophet was lying on his cap against the wall of the Ka'ba in the shade. His Companions came to him to complain about their agony, though it was not in the kind of disgruntled style we hear these days, with such outrageous expressions as 'enough is enough!', 'this is too much!', 'we just can't bear this anymore!', etc.

Patience is a necessary factor in life; without it, life loses its meaning. And faith rests on patience. Once it goes, faith goes, too. Therefore, patience has to be learned and adopted by all.

When the Companions came to the Prophet, they did not say that they had run out of patience, as many people would readily do today. All they said was 'Would you pray (to God) for help? Would you ask God for us?' They were very tentative in their request, not using any blunt or rough expression, avoiding even the imperative mood.

This indicates the following about the Companions of the Prophet:

1. They were respectful to God. They did not show any displeasure with fate as God decreed it. They patiently underwent the suffering, thus following in the footsteps of the Prophets before and their disciples.
2. Their behavior with the Prophet himself was exemplary: they came and talked to him with great respect about their ordeal, to which there were no limits. Some of them were tortured to death; others were coerced out of Islam. The revelation came down to say: '...save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with faith.'²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Chapter of al-Nahl: 106.

The Companions did no more than ask the Prophet gently to pray to God for assistance, though they were undergoing extreme persecution. They knew that destiny is in the hand of God, and that He was delaying assistance for a wise reason. And everything had a set time to come. So they were acting as humans when they approached the Prophet with infinite high regard, and said: 'Would you ask God for help? Would you pray to God for us?'

As for the Prophet himself, he sat up in respect for what they were saying and said: 'Among those before you, men were brought forth and buried to the knees, and were sawn into two halves from the head down. And iron combs were used to comb their flesh off their bones. And none of that dissuaded them against their religion. By God, this mission shall be accomplished, until the traveler goes from Sanaa to Hadramout, fearing only God, and the wolf for his sheep. But you are too impatient.'²⁶⁹

Some of the Aspects of Retreat

The Prophet adduced the model of the people before the Companions. He said that what happened to them did not enfeeble their will, as if warning them that fragile will can end up in going back on one's religion completely.

Quite a few people may leave their religion as a result of material, physical, or psychological pressure. Some may not leave Islam altogether for another religion, but they may drop some of its tenets. Indeed, an individual loses some of his religion to the extent he loses his patience.

Other people may react to suffering by seeking revenge in a violent way. This has nothing to do with religion. It is a response to a personal impetus. When the *shareea* allowed retaliation, it did not leave that unrestricted. For example, it did not allow harming those who have harmed you. The Prophet said: 'Return what you have been entrusted with, and do not betray those who have betrayed you.'²⁷⁰ You are not allowed to lie to those who lie to you. If

²⁶⁹ Cf. footnote 265.

²⁷⁰ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (22949); Ahmad (15462); al-Darimi (2597); Abu Dawud (3535); al-Tirmidhi (1264); al-Daraqotni (3/35); al-Hakim (2/53); al-Baihaqi (21091-2).

someone unlawfully infringes on your family honor, you are not allowed to do likewise to him. If someone spreads an injurious rumor against you, do not retaliate by spreading another injurious rumor against him. If someone treats you with injustice, do not treat him with injustice. This is one of the greatest values of Islam. When one goes against the above principles, one is certainly not on the moral way of the Islamic *shareea*.

Another image of retreat in religion is when a person gives up struggling when he sees that the response to what he preaches is meager. In fact, a true preacher never throws in the towel. He still has responsibility. This is what it means to be the heir of prophets. A preacher has to go on working hard as much as he can. This is part and parcel of religion, not an auxiliary element. The One Who commanded us to do the prayer is the same as the One Who commanded preaching with tact and method.

Therefore, a preacher has to cling to his religion in this endeavor. Shedding religious practice as a result of pressure is an appalling outcome, and no one has any excuse for that, particularly when one does so to get or keep a worldly kind of interest. There are organizations and associations which extort Muslims on the basis of the latter's difficult circumstances, such as poverty, illness, hunger, unemployment, etc. They try to manipulate them by altering their ways of thinking and their convictions. The true believer has to resist these kinds of extortion.

The Prophet described the haste of his Companions saying: 'But you are too impatient', just because they said: 'O Messenger of Allah, pray to Allah for us; ask Allah to help us'. He felt that behind that request was a feeling of impatience; i.e., that they felt they had waited for too long, and that it was time victory had come.

No haste! God has set dates for what He has decreed. Yet, do beg Him with a sincere heart, believing that when He delays something it is for a wise reason, and what He decrees immediately He decrees it for a wise reason, and that finally what He does is the perfect thing. God is more protective of His religion than we are. Indeed He is more protective of us than our own selves: 'Allah knows and you know not.'²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Chapter of al-Baqara: 216.

The Prophet and His Nearness to God

Your Lord has not Forsaken You nor Does He Hate You

Jundub bin Sufian, a Prophet's Companion, reported that the Prophet had a medical condition while in Mecca and did not leave home for two or three days. A woman came to him and said: 'Muhammad, I hope your demon has forsaken you. I have not seen him in your company for two or three days'. Then God revealed:

*'By the morning hours
And by the night when it is stillest,
Your Lord has not forsaken you nor does He hate you,
And verily the latter portion will be better for you than the former,
And verily your Lord will give you so that you will be content.'*²⁷²

The Prophet used to offer nocturnal prayers to appease the suffering of his daily life. It is such a wonderful experience to speak to God one-on-one! It helps to get rid of the distress which weighs down on the heart. The hearts which nurture a connection with God never lose hope and never grow weary.

The bitterness of life turns sweet when the heart is linked to God. But this connection is not necessarily attainable through the nocturnal prayers. It may be in the obligatory prayers as well. For example, when a praying person is prostrating himself to God, his heart follows suit. The prayer rinses his heart and helps him to renew his will. It is a chance for him to ask God to assist him in his long journey, so that eventually he overcomes the hurdles and enjoys life. It is no wonder that God says to His Messenger at the outset of the mission:

²⁷² Chapter of al-Doha: 1-5. The Hadith was reported by Ahmad (18818; 18823; 18826); al-Bukhari (1125; 4950-1; 4983); Muslim (1797); al-Tirmidhi (3345); Ibn Hibban (6566); al-Hakim (2/573); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (1711); al-Baihaqi (4496-7). Cf. also al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (30/339); al-Baghaoui's *Al-Tafsir* (4/497); al-Qortobi's *Al-Tafsir* (20/93-6).

*'O you, wrapped up in your raiment!
Keep vigil the night long, save a little'*²⁷³

Or:

*'O you enveloped in your cloak,
Arise and warn!
Your Lord magnify,
Your raiment purify,
Pollution shun!
And show not favor, seeking worldly gain!
And for the sake of your Lord, be patient!'*²⁷⁴

We are not talking about an idealistic condition. This is an extraordinary challenging religious one, however. Sometimes humans can surpass angels when they reach certain levels of faith – it is the case of the ‘Sadiqeen’ (the true believers) and the ‘Sabiqaen’ (the foregoing ones). But here we are talking about a simple believer’s rank – that of being connected to God in any crisis, like the man who came to the Prophet and said: ‘I am confused by the many rules of Islam, so show me something that I can cling to.’ The Prophet said: ‘keep your tongue saturated with prayers of remembrance of God.’²⁷⁵

Remembering God through prayers does not demand much – no waking up in the middle of the night and no special ablutions. It is so easy to say for example ‘Glory to Allah, praise to Allah, there is no god but Allah, and Allah is Greatest’.

The woman who said ‘I hope your demon has forsaken you’ came to the Prophet because she stopped hearing him read and say his prayers. She believed what the idol worshippers were saying – that the revelation which came to him was the art of a demon. But

²⁷³ Chapter of al-Muzzammil: 1-2.

²⁷⁴ Chapter of al-Muddaththir: 1-7.

²⁷⁵ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (29453; 35053); Ahmad (17716; 17734); al-Tirmidhi (3375); Ibn Majah (3793); Ibn Hibban (814); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (1441; 2268); al-Hakim (1/672); al-Baihaqi (6318); and al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (515).

God soothed him with this wonderful chapter, which starts with an oath by Him from above the seven Heavens, a particularly significant oath which goes thus: 'By the morning hours, and by the night when it is stillest.'²⁷⁶

A Great Oath

Swearing by the morning and the night together is swearing with the universe and life. The day and the night are the context of good and evil. This is tantamount to swearing by time, which is the context of man's deeds. Yet here we have a subtle meaning: it was when the night was stillest that the Prophet found it most opportune to worship with the most awe and humility. As for the morning, that was the time the Prophet offered the 'Doha prayer', or the morning prayer, as we know it. There is another subtle connotation to the above two verses: if one misses the nocturnal prayers, one can make up for them in the morning. It is recorded in *Sabih Muslim* that when the Prophet did not wake up for his night prayers or was unwell, he did the same number of prayers in the morning instead.²⁷⁷ He used to pray two Rak'at at a time, and if he did not pray the '*Witr*' (single *Rak'a* prayer) in the night, he prayed it in the day. As Abu Dawud reported, the Prophet said: 'He who misses his *Witr* prayer or forgets it should pray it once he recalls it.'²⁷⁸

All in all, the divine oath is an indication of the worth of these two times particularly. The word '*Saja*', used to describe the night, refers to the time when darkness coats the world. Then He says, 'Your Lord has not forsaken you nor does He hate you' in response to the woman who came to the Prophet and alleged that the demon had let Muhammad down. This verse affirms that God had never forsaken His Prophet at any time. The word '*Qalaa*' (forsake) was

²⁷⁶ Chapter of al-Doha: 1-2.

²⁷⁷ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (4714; 4751); Ahmad (24314; 24819); al-Darimi (1475); Muslim (746); Abu Dawud (1342); al-Tirmidhi (445); al-Nassai (1601; 1789); Ibn Khuzaima (1169-70; 1211); Ibn Hibban (2420; 2552; 2642; 2645-6); al-Baihaqi (4338; 4413; 4588).

²⁷⁸ Reported by Ahmad (11282); Abu Dawud (1431); Ibn Majah (1188); al-Tirmidhi (466); Abu Yaala (1114); al-Daraqotni (2/22); al-Hakim (1/443); al-Baihaqi (4310).

used without the direct object 'you', which is indicative of a more general meaning than if 'you' had been used. That is to say, the phrase covers, not only Muhammad per se, but transcends him to include his Companions, the mission, his religion, his actions, etc.

He Gave Him this World and the Hereafter

God says in the Koran: 'And verily the latter portion will be better for you than the former'.²⁷⁹ This implies that He had already given him in the first of the two portions. The good tidings showed that God would not leave him because He loved him. And God's love is the key to all good things. When God loves a person, this person will never suffer and will never be a loser, both in this world and in the hereafter.

Consequently, the person will experience peace, purity, and happiness in God's company. In that case, the heart will get a real taste of happiness, and if hard times should arise, they do not tarnish this bliss, for happiness is not derived from good food or good clothes, though these can help obtain happiness. The home of happiness is the heart. Once it dwells therein, comfort bolsters it, but misfortune does not spoil it. And the simplest blessings turn into a source of great pleasure. All of this is implied in 'And verily the latter portion will be better for you than the former'. In other words, although He has given you great happiness and its causes, the happiness to come in the hereafter will exceed this one by far. Muhammad is no doubt the happiest man who has ever lived, considering the great heart which God has given him, and the sense of complacency with God's fate and the satisfaction with what he has. And yet, what is to come is far greater, more beautiful, and more gratifying than what has already been given here. This is what the fifth verse of the same chapter says: 'And verily your Lord will give you so that you will be content'.

This satisfaction with the Lord did not dwindle in hardships, as when the Prophet went to Taef. As biographers say, the Prophet made a timeless invocation in which he addressed God saying among other things: 'If you are not angry with me, I do not care;

²⁷⁹ Chapter of al-Doha: 4.

but to have your blessing is my most ultimate yearning.²⁸⁰ But note how his God addresses him: 'And verily your Lord will give you so that you will be content'. He will bestow gift after gift on you. And the best gift, both here and in the hereafter, is the satisfaction with your Lord, the Almighty.

A Promise of What is to Be, and a Reminder of What has Been

In this chapter, God reminds his Messenger of His gifts in the past: 'Did He not find you an orphan and protect (you)?'²⁸¹ The Prophet was bereft of both parents as a child. He was brought up by his uncle Abu Talib and his grandfather Abdul Muttalib. But though these relatives did take good care of him, the real care was from his Lord, Who induced people to honor him and Who gave him a laudable status.

Then He reminded him of the grace of guidance: 'Did He not find you wandering and guide (you)?'²⁸² The Prophet knew little about religion. He was constantly searching. God eventually showed him the way, as He said elsewhere in the Koran: 'You knew not what the Scripture was, nor what was faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide such of Our servants as We will.'²⁸³

Then He said: 'Did He not find you destitute and enrich (you)?'²⁸⁴ The Prophet was poor, and he left nothing behind when he died – no penny, no estate, no possession of any kind. All which he left was science – the trade accessible to all people alike. Yet God addressed him saying: 'Did He not find you destitute and enrich (you)?' The real wealth is that of the heart and the soul, or alternatively, material wealth for the *Umma* as a whole. The Prophet once said: 'I had a vision in which I was given the keys of the world

²⁸⁰ Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/268); al-Tabari's *al-Tareekh* (1/554); *Tareekh al-Islam* (1/285); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/136).

²⁸¹ Chapter of al-Doha: 6.

²⁸² Ibid: 7.

²⁸³ Chapter of al-Shura: 52.

²⁸⁴ Chapter of al-Doha: 8.

in my hands'. Abu Huraira said: 'the Prophet is gone now, and you are extracting the wealth'.²⁸⁵

Now hundreds of years after this verse was revealed, we see its truth in the wealth found in the Muslim world. This is but part of God's promises and bounties, and a means of protecting the Muslim *Umma*, which is now present and influential at the international level, despite the fact that it is lagging behind politically, economically, and scientifically. God wanted it to have its value nonetheless.

With Gratitude God's Bounties Go On

God reminded the Prophet of all these graces for him and the *Umma* as a whole to assure him that He would care for him in the present life, and would grant him even more bounties in the life to come. This is why He said: 'Therefore treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse the petitioner, but the bounty of your Lord rehearse and proclaim.'²⁸⁶

This means that in return you have to be grateful by being merciful to the needy and orphans. Be kind to them because they are in a frail situation, and have nobody to care for them. When God says: 'nor repulse the petitioner', it is to indicate that this person deserves a humane treatment – no shouting or disdain. If you have what he needs, give it to him. If you do not, at least speak and treat decently.

²⁸⁵ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (31644); Ahmad (9867); al-Bukhari (2977; 6998; 7013; 7273); Muslim (523); al-Nassai (3087; 3089); Ibn Hibban (6363); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (139).

²⁸⁶ Chapter of al-Doha: 9-11.

The Prophet and Debate Etiquette

Wait Until He is Done

On the authority of Ibn Ishhaq and al-Baihaqi as well as others, Muhammad bin Ka'b al-Qaradhi reported that Quraish assembled in Mecca to debate on the issue of Muhammad and his criticism of their aspirations and their religion, and his mission, which was totally strange to them. A man among them, 'Utba bin Rabee'a, said: 'O men of Quraish, how about going to Muhammad and making suggestions to him, so that if he accepts them, we give him what he wants and he leaves us alone?' They said: 'That is a good idea, Abu al-Waleed. Go ahead and talk to him'. He went and sat next to the Prophet and said: 'Son of my brother, you know well your high social and blood status among us. And you have come to your people with a weighty thing with which you have split their unity, sneered at their aspirations, ridiculed their gods and religion, and treated as unbelievers their ancestors. I have some suggestions, so would you hear them?' The Prophet said: 'Say them, Abu al-Waleed; I am listening'. He said: 'If by your endeavor you aim to gain money, we can raise money until you are the wealthiest of us. If what you want is leadership, we make you our leader so that we do nothing except what you decide. If you want to be a king, we make you our king. If you are suffering from hallucination which you cannot prevent, we can do our best to find you medication, for some people do suffer until they are treated...' So he went on talking to the Prophet in a condescending way, eventually telling him that if he was possessed and was helpless, they were ready to find the right remedy for him.

Politeness with the Impolite

Supposing these suggestions were made to *you*, would you not be sickened to hear these things which accuse you of having grimy intentions, and of using deceitful means to get money or fame, or a wife, or leadership? Above all, you would be accused of using religion, morality, preaching good conduct, and using God to win that! Anyone of us would be disgusted to hear that; indeed we would not even let the man continue his speech. But the Prophet

was listening with utmost patience and respect, until the man finished. The Prophet asked: 'Are you done Abu al-Waleed?' He said: 'Yes, I am done'.

This shows the Prophet's respect for others. He did not even start answering right after the man finished; rather, he wanted to be sure that he had finished all that he had to say. And see how the Prophet addressed him saying 'Abu al-Waleed', a respectful way of using a nickname to show high regard and imply complete absence of tension, and total satisfaction and care. Then the Prophet said: 'So listen to me now: *'Ha, Meem*. A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful,'²⁸⁷ and he read the beginning of the chapter of Fussilat until 'But if they turn away, then say: I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt (which fell of old upon the tribes) of Aad and Thamud, When their messengers came to them from before them and behind them....'²⁸⁸ At that time, 'Utba stood up, placed his hand on the Prophet's mouth and said: 'Hush, for the sake of God and blood relations.'

A Profound Change

On hearing these powerful verses, 'Utba felt terrified. It looked as if he left with the sound of thunderbolts in his ears. When his men saw him, they said: 'We swear that Abu al-Waleed has returned with a face quite unlike the face he went with'. They did read the change in his features from the look and the way he was dragging his feet. When he arrived he said: 'I have heard a speech which, I swear, I have never heard before in my life. By God, it is not poetry or magic, nor is it witchcraft. O men of Quraish, follow my advice: leave this man alone and let him do what he is doing. By God, what I have heard from him will have extensive repercussions. If the Arabs hit him, they will exempt you from that. And if he turns out victorious, his rule will be your rule, and his glory will be your glory, and you would be the happiest people with him'.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Chapter of Fussilat: 1-2.

²⁸⁸ Ibid: 13-4.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Ibn Ishhaq's *al-al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (4/187-8); Ibn Hisham's *al-al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/130-1); *al-Baihaqi's Dala'il al-Nubuwwa* (2/204-5); *Tareekh Dimashq*

He went back to his people asking them to be neutral, and if the Arabs accepted him, it was to their benefit and glory, as God said: 'It is indeed a message for you and your people, and soon shall you be brought to account.'²⁹⁰

The Etiquette of Debating

The occurrence between the Prophet and 'Utba is pregnant with lessons. First and foremost, it teaches us how to proceed in a discussion. The Prophet waited until 'Utba finished, which teaches us never to interrupt the interlocutor no matter how hurtful his words are. Success in a debate does not come with shouting or quarreling. If such style were to guarantee victory in discussions, the ignorant would be the most successful. But the fact is that throughout history, success comes with evidence, reason, and intelligence. The Prophet did not interrupt the man but let him speak at great length. And he did not qualify what he was saying as nonsense, though he would have been right if he had. Once the man finished, the Prophet read out some verses and did not add anything.

The Conceding Methodology in Debating

This is a useful methodology in debating. The Koran says: 'Say: Who gives you provision from the sky and the earth? Say: Allah does. And we or you assuredly are rightly guided or in error manifest. Say: You shall not be asked as to our sins, nor shall we be asked of what you do.'²⁹¹ That is, each party are responsible for their own deeds. Note that God referred to their deeds thus 'nor shall we be asked of what you do', not qualifying them as sins. This is what scholars call the 'concession method', used with opponents. This style is a methodology used by God and by the Prophet. It rests on the premise of mutual respect and compromise. It does not rely on

(38/246); Ibn Kathiri's *Al-Tafsir* (4/92); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/63-4); *al-al-Seera al-Halabiya* (1/486).

²⁹⁰ Chapter of *al-Zukhruf*: 44.

²⁹¹ Chapter of *Sabaa*: 24-5.

interruption and rash discourse. This is the kind of style which should be adopted by our culture and our media.

The Debate in the Media

These days we are witnessing a revolution in the media. Many programs are about debating and arguing. Indeed we see a great deal of political, ideological, and cultural disputes. And each party has its own proponents.

While these people want the audience to see and believe them, their strategies in debating rest primarily on defamation and other sorts of abusive criticism, as well as on yelling. While the lookers-on watch these hot debates, they have the impression that wrestling encounters are going on. They may decide that one party has beaten the other one. But the question is what are the objective criteria for being a winner in a debate?

I believe that a person should not take part in a debate until he knows what kind of theme is going to be debated. The content has to be scientifically assessable. Moreover, the debate ought to go on calmly, and shouting should be proscribed and rational arguing should substitute for it. Above all, the ultimate goal should be the identification and championing of the truth.

Islam and Human Rights

The Prophet Blames Abu Jahl

Ibn Ishhaq relates an interesting story in his *al-Seera*. Aby Sufian al-Thaqafi reports that a man from a place called Irasha came with his camels to sell in Mecca. Abu Jahl bought them from him, but he kept delaying paying him subsequently. The man from Irasha came to a group of men from Quraish who were sitting together. He said: "O men of Quraish, who among you can help me with Abu al-Hakam bin Hisham? I am a stranger and a passer-by, and he is coercively taking my right, and he has bullied me'.

At that time, the Prophet was sitting at another place. Out of sarcasm, those men said to the man from Irasha: 'You see that man? He said, "I do." They said: 'Go to him; he will help you out with him'. They knew only too well the degree of hatred which Abu Jahl had for the Prophet. So the man went up to the Prophet and told him his story. The Prophet at once agreed to go with him to Abu Jahl. He did not apologize for not being on good terms with Abu Jahl. When the group who sent the man from Irasha saw the two going, they sent one of them to see what would happen.

The Prophet knocked on Aby Jahl's door. When he came out he was shocked to see the Prophet, who told him firmly to give the man from Irasha his due. He said: 'Yes. Don't go away; I will give it to him right away'. And so he did. Then the Prophet said to the man from Irasha 'Now you can go'. The man went to the group who had sent him to the Prophet and said: 'May God reward him (i.e., Muhammad) bountifully; he has given me what belongs to me'.

The man who was sent to spy on them returned. They were eager to know what happened. He said: 'I have seen something unbelievable: all he did was to knock on his door. He came out completely scared. He said: "Give this man his due". He said: "Yes. Don't go away; I will give it to him right away" '. He went in at once and came out with the man's money.

Soon Abu Jahl came to the men. They asked: 'Hey! What happened to you? We've never seen what you did before.' He said: 'Come on! As soon as I heard his knock, I was filled with terror.

When I went out to him, I saw above his head the head of a huge camel. I have never seen such a huge head and neck and canines. Had I refused, he would have devoured me.’ Another account reports that they said: ‘Were you scared of Muhammad to that extent?’ He said: ‘I swear I saw with him men with twinkling spears. And I was scared to be shot in the belly if I had not given that to him’.²⁹²

One of the principles the Prophet called for in his mission is the promotion of justice: giving people what belongs to them, and helping the wronged get their rights fairly, and getting in the way of wrongdoers. This is why he accompanied the man until he took his right.

The Pact of the Fadls

According to an authentic Hadith, the Prophet said about the Pact of the Fadls: ‘If I were asked to take part in it today, I would definitely answer’.²⁹³

The Prophet was then talking about what may be called in today’s terms ‘a human rights’ treaty’. This treaty was endorsed in the house of Abdullah bin Jud’an, one of the chieftains of Mecca, and in the presence of a huge crowd. He was known for his love of equity and good deeds. He had all the qualities of a noble man, including generosity and fortitude. In a word, he was a chieftain *par excellence* in that city, which was one of the capitals of civilization in the Arabian Peninsula at that time.

The pact, which the Prophet attended prior to his prophetic mission, consisted in defending the wronged, protecting the weak, inhibiting the abusers, and making sure that each right go to where it belonged.

²⁹² Cf. Ibn Ishhaq’s *al-Seera* (4/176); Ibn Hisham’s *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/234-5); al-Baihaqi’s *Dala’il al-Nubumma* (2/193-4); al-Asbahani’s *Dala’il al-Nubumma* (1/196-7); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/45).

²⁹³ Reported by al-Bazzar (1024); al-Baihaqi (6/367). Cf also Saad’s *al-Tabaqat* (1/129); al-Azraqi’s *Akhbar Makkah* (2/257); al-Fakihi’s *Akhbar Makkah* (3/320); *Sharh Mushkil al-Athaar* (5971); *al-Rawd al-Unuf* (1/248); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (1/213).

What is especially remarkable is that this kind of pact was endorsed in the Jahiliyya (i.e., pre-Islamic) era. They seemed to know that the basis of life and continuation is the safeguarding of rights. A state which cares for rights lasts, regardless of whether it is a Muslim state or not. On the other hand, a state which is not concerned about people's rights and bullies its citizens does not last for long, even if it is a Muslim one. As Ibn Taimiyya said in *al-Syasa al-Shar'iyya*, 'God helps the just state even if it is a non-believing one. And He does not help the unjust state even if it is a Muslim one'.

When the Prophet talked about this event, he said: 'If I were asked to take part in it today, I would definitely answer'. This comment by the Prophet shows that the Muslim *Umma* should have a leading role in preserving people's rights. If it does not assume this role, it should at least be predisposed to responding to what the others call for in terms of people's rights.

The human rights organizations in the West are constantly talking about such rights. Meanwhile, in the Muslim world you can hardly find such enterprise, unless it is a reverberation of, or response to, what is being said in the West. It is well to note that the question of human rights is central to the religion of Islam. A Muslim is supposed to be the first one to call for such rights and respond positively to the promotion of human rights which people's minds and religions assent.

Charters of International Rights

I am fully aware that in the Human Rights Charter issued by the United Nations there are clauses which need to be revised. They may contain what contradicts our religion, and we have to treat them with reservation. However, this should not entail a refusal of the principle as a whole. We have to endorse these rights and preserve them. More than that, we have to campaign for them.

Legitimate Rights for the Citizens

Omar used to send letters to the different provinces saying: 'By Allah, I do not send my governors to you so that they beat you or take away your money. I only send them to you so that they teach

you your religion and your Sunna. Whoever sees a different treatment should report it to me: I swear by Allah that I will punish the unjust for that'.²⁹⁴ Omar wanted to teach people about their rights, and wanted them to claim them.

The Rights and the Duties

Claiming rights does not turn into conflict within the Muslim society because a person claims his rights after doing his duties. And these two go hand in hand. After all one has to be fair: one should do one's duties and never deny others their rights.

A person may have a thousand employees, each suffering maltreatment from their employer, delays in their pay, health problems, etc. This person may also complain about the unfair treatment of the administration relating him to the authorities. If the Muslim society is just a chain of problems from top to bottom, which is in fact what we see, this means that this *Umma* is not worthy of glory or even survival. If, on the other hand, each one of us starts assuming his responsibilities conscientiously, and gives people what they deserve and is fair: within the family, with the spouse and the children, within the classroom, within the institution, the company; and if this extends to the society at large and the state, at that time this state would be worthy of power and survival.

Rights in the Developed World

The Western world speaks loud and clear about rights. It also respects many of those rights. The differences between us and the West with regard to creed and religion should not prevent us from being fair. Fairness is an Islamic quality, so we have to acknowledge that at least they have respect for their citizens and their rights.

True, outside their frontiers they can be racist and cruel, as we have seen during the European and other kinds of colonization. But we are talking about the respect of these rights in Islamic countries.

²⁹⁴ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (32961); Ahmad (2861/41); Abu Dawud (4537); Ibn al-Jarud (844); al-Hakim (4/485); (8356); al-Baihaqi (15796; 17626).

Indeed, we want to go even further and act as God wants us to act, according to the verse: ‘...and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just; that is next to piety’²⁹⁵; and the verse: ‘...and let not the hatred of some people on (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part).’²⁹⁶ So God prescribed that on us even with our enemies. The question now is ‘When shall we see the Muslim world back to this spirit of equity and respect of rights? When will the Muslims unite as individuals, as groups, and as institutions to found civil institutions in order to safeguard and defend the rights of the crushed people and stand in the way of the offenders?’ Should this come true, people and property will be saved.

²⁹⁵ Chapter of al-Maida: 8.

²⁹⁶ Chapter of al-Maida: 2.

And He Is as a Father to Them

The Prophet is Closer to the Believers than their Own Selves

God says: ‘Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets.’²⁹⁷ In this verse, God testifies that Muhammad is not the father of anyone, not even by adoption. He is only the messenger of God and the seal of prophets. As to the metaphorical fatherhood, which means only that he is in the symbolic position of a father in terms of respect, love, etc., he used to call many people ‘son’, as he did with Ibn ‘Abbas and Anas bin Malik. And they could also refer to him as a father. In the Koran, God says: ‘The Prophet is closer to the believers than their selves, and his wives are (as) their mothers.’²⁹⁸

Many specialists say that he is a father to them, but not in the biological or adoptive sense. He is a father to all believers only in that he cares for them, loves them, looks for their interest, prays for them, all of which is witnessed in his biography; but suffice it that God says about him that ‘There has come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto whom aught that you are overburdened is grievous’²⁹⁹, that is anything which hurts you hurts him all the more. And He says after this: ‘Full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful.’³⁰⁰ So God refutes that Muhammad be a father to any man. Incidentally, none of his sons lived to reach manhood. All of his four sons, Ibrahim son of Maria, Abu al-Qassim, al-Tayyib, and al-Tahir, died young.

The Revocation of Adoption

In the Jahiliyya (the pre-Islamic era), adoption was common: when a man adopted a child, this child became his heir. Islam revoked this with the verse: ‘Proclaim their real parentage. That will

²⁹⁷ Chapter of al-Ahzab: 40.

²⁹⁸ Chapter of al-Ahzab: 6

²⁹⁹ Chapter of al-Tawba: 128.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

be more equitable in the sight of Allah. And if you know not their fathers, then (they are) your brethren in the faith.³⁰¹ Accordingly, Zaid was no more called Zaid bin Muhammad, but Zaid bin Haritha, though he was dearly loved by the Prophet. The Prophet had Zaid marry Umm Ayman, his nursemaid. He had a son, Usama, from her. So the Prophet loved Usama and his father alike, and he used to carry Usama bin Zaid on his left thigh, and al-Hassan and al-Hussain on his right thigh, and would hug them all. He always expressed his love for Usama. When the Makhzoumi woman stole and they wanted her saved from punishment, they could not tell anyone to intervene but Usama, because he was so dear to the Prophet.³⁰²

A Great Love for a Great Conduct

A question may well be asked why did Zaid love the Prophet so much? And why did he prefer him over his own parents and his clan before even Muhammad was a Prophet? The answer lies in the great conduct of the Prophet. It is no wonder that God addressed him thus: 'And you stand on an exalted standard of character.'³⁰³ It is only normal, too, that the Prophet should sum that up saying: 'I was only sent to perfect noble conduct.'³⁰⁴

It is this nature which made the Prophet such a lovable person to all people. Even his enemies turned the best of supporters, ready to sacrifice their lives and the lives of their dear ones for him.

At the Hudaibiyya peace treaty negotiations, 'Urwa bin Mas'ood saw the Prophet with his Companions, and when he returned to his friends he said: 'I have been received by kings, and I have been received by Caesar, the king of Persia, and the Negus,

³⁰¹ Chapter of al-Ahzab: 5.

³⁰² Reported by al-Bukhari (3475; 3733; 6788); Muslim (1688); Abu Dawud (4373); Ibn Majah (2547); al-Tirmidhi (1430); al-Nassai (4899; 4901); Ibn Hibban (4402); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (7478); al-Baihaqi (16932; 17004; 17394).

³⁰³ Chapter of al-Qalam: 4.

³⁰⁴ Cf. footnote 166.

and I swear I have never seen a man venerated the way Muhammad is venerated by his companions.³⁰⁵

At the battle of Badr, 'Ubaida bin al-Harith was one of the men who went into a duel. When he was injured he was brought before the Prophet, bleeding. He said to the Prophet: 'I swear, Messenger of Allah, that if Abu Talib had seen me now, he would have known that I am more worthy of his words:

*We never hand him over,
Until we die before,
Oblivious to our children,
Oblivious to our wives.*³⁰⁶

The Companions sacrificed themselves for him: they would not bear to see the smallest thorn hit his foot.

Learn the Fundamentals of Good Conduct

Good conduct was one of the basic secrets of his persona. He went through different ups and downs – wealth and poverty, strength and weakness, health and ailment, home staying and home sickness, and all sorts of vicissitudes which happen to other people. And he was a model for good conduct at all times. As a poet said:

*And the conditions of time do change,
But you are the same anyway.*

The Prophet called for God, and his preaching was by means of refined conduct. That is why he was so successful in it, and his Companions were ready to sacrifice anything for him. God

³⁰⁵ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (9720); al-Bukhari (2734); Ibn Hibban (4872); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (20/9) and (13); al-Baihaqi (18587) and in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (1525).

³⁰⁶ Cf. Tareekh Dimashq (38/259); *Ussud al-Ghaaba* (3/548); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/334). The verse is in *Diwan Abi Talib* (p. 66).

describes his relation with people, saying: 'It was by the mercy of Allah that you were lenient with them (O Muhammad), for if you had been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from round about you.'³⁰⁷

Many people excel at speaking and morality – what is allowed from what is prohibited, what is right from what is wrong, what is true from what is false, what works from what does not, and so on. People need to acquire these through learning. But the most pertinent thing which people have to acquire is the morals which the prophets of God and the divine religions are unanimous about, and the holy books abound with. The last and most thorough of these scriptures is the Koran, which has conserved the foundations of morals.

The acquisition of morals is not just a matter of curricula. There is more to morals than syllabi which define and expose morals and expound their details and divisions. To understand and memorize lists of morals falls too short to realize the final target.

Morals are, first of all, actions. They are an applied behavior. Their objective gauge is concrete exercise. And what we really need in our time is indeed archetypes for people to emulate. All too often, people attend a lecture on morals such as virtue, faithfulness, charity, etc., and they appreciate their beauty. But where is application?

A person cannot be influential until he is the first to put into practice what he preaches. Shu'aib, the messenger referred to as the 'Orator of Prophets', once said: 'I desire not to do behind your backs that which I ask you to refrain from doing.'³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Chapter of Aal 'Imran: 159.

³⁰⁸ Chapter of Hud: 88.

Have You Seen Him Who Dissuades?

The Humans' Warning and God's Warning

It was reported that Abu Jahl once asked: 'Does Muhammad stain his face with earth among you?' They said: 'He does'. He said: 'I swear by al-Lat and al-'Uzza that if I see him do that I will tread on his neck, or sully his face with earth.' In effect, he went to the Prophet and found him praying, with the intent to execute his vow. But to their surprise, they saw him quickly back off, protecting his face with his hands. When he went back to his clique, they were curious to know about that. He said: 'I saw a pit of fire between him and me, and I saw horrifying things and wings.' The Prophet said: 'If he had moved closer, the angels would have seized and ripped him organ by organ.' Then God revealed (about Abu Jahl):

*'Nay, but verily man is rebellious
That he thinks he is self-sufficient!
Indeed, to your Lord is the return.
Have you seen him who dissuades
A slave when he prays?
Have you seen if he (relies) on the guidance (of Allah)
Or enjoins piety?
Have you seen if he denies (Allah's guidance) and he turns away?
Is he then unaware that Allah does see?
Nay, but if he cease not, We will seize him by the forelock
The lying, sinful forelock
Then let him call upon his henchmen!
We will call the guards of hell.³⁰⁹*

³⁰⁹ Chapter of al-'Alaq: 6-18. The whole Hadith was reported by Ahmad (8817); Muslim (2797); Abu Yaala (6207); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (11683); Ibn Hibban (6571). Cf. also al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubunna* (2/189); al-Asbahani's *Dala'il al-Nubunna* (1/56; 192); *Tareekh*

This occurrence was a sample of the arrogance and tyranny of Abu Jahl. We see the absurdity of his acts: what could his intended plan have benefited anybody?! Such is the type of vicious and tyrannical character which would not put up with any degree of morality and purity, to the extent of threatening to step on the noble neck with his filthy foot. But God would never allow that – it is He Who protected him. And when Abu Jahl went through this and his clique did witness everything which happened, he had to tell them everything: that there was a pit full of fire, and horrors and wings, and that if he had approached further, he would have fallen in and got burned.

But what is noteworthy is that though the Koran recorded this occurrence so wonderfully, it did not make clear mention of the individual in question: ‘Have you seen *him* who dissuades’. Although it is known that the intended person is Abu Jahl, his name was avoided, the intent not being a particular individual per se, but the behavior or attitude in general.

Admitting Slavery to God is a Kind of Worship

In the verse ‘...a slave when he prays’,³¹⁰ God describes His Messenger as a ‘slave’, to indicate that it is the finest achievement one can reach in the relation with God. There is no higher rank for a human to realize vis-à-vis God, Who created him, fashioned him perfectly, and gave him due proportion. So the verse ‘A slave when he prays’ criticizes Abu Jahl for intervening between a man and being a slave to God Almighty. A person should be left to enjoy his total freedom to worship his Lord. Besides, he was in no way wrong to worship God, his Great Lord. This is why He says after that verse: ‘Have you seen if he (relies) on the guidance (of Allah)’. This is a refined method in arguing: he did not say for example ‘He is guided’ but ‘...if he is guided’, that is, ‘suppose he is guided...’: in case you took this into consideration, would it be fitting to act that way and deprive him of his right? And what if in addition, as He said after this verse, ‘he enjoins piety’?

al-Islam (1/152); Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s *Mukhtasar al-Seera* (p. 83); *Sabeeh al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (p. 145).

³¹⁰ Chapter of al-‘Alaq: 10.

Then He switches focus to the other man, who persists in his error, and says after: 'Have you seen if he denies (Allah's guidance) and he turns away? Is he then unaware that Allah does see?' Allah knew that Abu Jahl would die an unbeliever and sinful. He knew that he would be killed at the battle of Badr. He had left his home proud and defiant to God. But God had him slain in that place. He was breathing his last when Ibn Massood went to kill him at that battle. When Ibn Massood stepped on his chest, he said: 'You have climbed up a high and tough cliff, O contemptible shepherd'³¹¹

So God knew of the bad end of this man, and with such high style and elegance, the Koran said about him: 'Have you seen him who dissuades a slave when he prays?' thus avoiding his name, as if to show that Islam is not such a religion as would fabricate wars against people, but one which intends to raise man to the highest positions, call for refined morals, and establish the best of social relations in society.

No Grudge in Religion

Begrudging people has no place in religion. There are thousands of cases speaking of the Prophet calling for God, and facing bitter resistance and belligerence from people. Yet he never bore any grudge against them. Rather, he was patient and forgiving with those who entered into Islam. He never had any sessions with those who accepted Islam to make them accountable of the ills of their previous years as non-Muslims. More than that, when the Muslims fled to Medina and left behind their assets in Mecca, some of which were loans to people, the Meccans appropriated them. The Prophet regarded that as a sacrifice in the way of God. And when he re-conquered Mecca, he never claimed those assets back or even asked the Meccans about them, nor about all that which they had done to the Muslims now that they accepted Islam too.

A saying goes: 'build a bridge for the fleeing enemy.' That is, do not try to stop or besiege him; help him to run away, for life is not a constant place for revenge. Life has more room for mutual

³¹¹ Cf Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (3/184); al-Tabari's *Tareekh* (2/37); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nabuwva* (3/86); *al-Muntadham* (3/116); *al-Kamil fi al-Tareekh* (2/24); *al-Rawd al-Anaf* (3/80); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/288; 296); *al-Seera al-Halabiya* (2/419).

forgiveness and overlooking the ills of others. There is no way people can live together without these values. Indeed, these values make the very basis of cohabitation between people. Accepting Islam must by no means entail dragging people and confiscating their dignity; on the contrary, entering into Islam should be understood as having more dignity and freedom, justice, and equity.

Safeguarding their Dignity and Property

When Mecca was conquered, the Prophet sent a caller saying: 'He who enters Abu Sufian's house is safe; he who throws down his weapon is safe; he who goes home and closes his door is safe; and he who walks into the Sacred Mosque is safe'.³¹²

Abu Sufian's house was limited in space and not many people would go there. So the Prophet gave people the alternatives of going home and closing their doors or going to the main Mosque. But the mention of Abu Sufian at that particular time meant to soften his heart vis-à-vis Islam. It meant to tell him that embracing Islam would in no way devalue his status as a chieftain. His past glory and leadership would be sustained in Mecca. People have to be aware of this: their past achievements would not be thwarted. Islam does not stand in the way of success or improvement.

Some people would say: 'Mr. so and so had a bad attitude to Islam, and now he has to declare in public that he has abandoned it.' The question is why should he do so in public? If God has granted him guidance to see a truth which he had failed to see, and he strongly believes in it and is calling for it now, is that not enough? Why should we create more obstacles between people and Islam or the Sunna?

When the Prophet sent Mu'adh to Yemen, he said: 'You are going to People of the Book. So ask them to bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that I am the Messenger of Allah. If they accept, tell them that Allah has enjoined five prayers on them in each day and night. If they accept, tell them that Allah has enjoined

³¹² Reported by Abdurrazzaq (9739); Ibn Abi Shaiba (36900; 36923); Ahmad (7909; 10961); Muslim (1780); Abu Dawud (3021-2); al-Nassai (11298); al-Bazzar (1292); Ibn Hibban (4760); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (6419; 7267); al-Daraqotni (3/60); al-Baihaqi (10961; 18053; 18056-7).

a charity which is taken from the wealthy and given to the needy among them.³¹³

Preaching Step by Step

Note the gradual strategy which the Prophet recommends to his missionary Mu'adh bin Jabal. First he reminded him that the people of Yemen were People of the Book, Christians or Jews, who had a previous scripture. So the first recommendation call would be that they declare that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Only then could they be informed of the prayer, then the alms. Presenting them with a bunch of religious facts and information and a list of rulings and morals at once would not help them to accept the invitation.

Changing abruptly and completely from one state to another is not easy for anyone. Gradual evolution is easier to undertake. Therefore, we have to see it that the doors of Islam be wide open to people and make life easy for them. Setting obstacles before people, consciously or unconsciously, does not help in any way.

³¹³ Reported by Ahmad (2071); al-Bukhari (1395; 1458; 7372); Muslim (19); Abu Dawud (1584); Ibn Majah (1783); al-Tirmidhi (625); al-Nassai (2435; 2522); Ibn Khuzaima (2275; 2346); Ibn Hibban (156; 2419; 5081); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (12207); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (2789); al-Baihaqi (7968; 12907; 12915); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (88; 3292).

A Duty Over Every Muslim

Before the Prophetic Mission

It was a historic event which was engraved in the history of mankind – the revelation occurrence. Before the revelation, every year the Prophet used to take food and water provisions and go to the Hira cave and worship and meditate for days and nights on end. Then he would go back for more provisions for more meditation and worship.

God selected and protected this noble Prophet at a time of utter ignorance, referred to in Arabic as *Jabiliya*. He never did what the people of Jahiliya did: he never laid his hand on an idol or faced it with awe or made any sacrifice for it. He never went to the fun places which the youth of Mecca used to frequent. Nor did he ever take part in the entertainment nights of those youths.

Muhammad was indeed purer than purity itself, and cleaner than cleanliness. He was naturally predisposed to rebuff anything which was in conflict with this untarnished propensity. His Lord protected him; He was preparing him. At that time he did have a sense of God's divinity. He would step out of Mecca and seclude himself from people. He withdrew to the cave of Hira for whole successive days and nights to worship God in the Hanifi religion fashion, praising God and praying to Him, and asking Him for forgiveness as he could.

Far from the commotion of the city, he would withdraw to this cave to seek God's company and purify his heart. In Mecca, he was loath to idol worship in and around Mecca. He was appalled by the low standard of morality and by injustice. So he ran away from that atmosphere to a worshiping atmosphere for days.

A Surprise

While he was immersed in his worship, someone suddenly emerged in the cave, dissipating his seclusion. It was an awe-inspiring encounter. It was not a human; it was a noble angel. It was Gabriel. The Prophet was terrified because that was the very first

encounter between the two. The angel said: 'Read!' The Prophet responded: 'I cannot read'.

The Prophet was illiterate. This was part of the protection of the Prophet by God, Who knew that the disbelievers would provoke many tempests about His Messenger; therefore, He protected him with illiteracy. God says: 'And you (O Muhammad) were not a reader of any scripture before it, nor did you write it with your right hand, for then might those have doubted, who follow falsehood. But it is clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge.'³¹⁴

When the Prophet said: 'I cannot read' Gabriel stifled him until he (the Prophet) was out of breath, then he released him. The Angel said again: 'Read'. And the Prophet repeated: 'I cannot read.' And the Angel stifled him again. The third time, Gabriel said:

*Read: In the Name of your Lord Who created,
He createth man from a clot.
Read, and your Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who taught by the pen,
He taught man that which he knew not.*³¹⁵

The Prophet read it and rushed to Khadija, his wife, shivering all over. He said 'Wrap me in garments, wrap me in garments'. So she did. Once he was no more terrified, he told her his story, saying: 'I am worried'. Putting more garments on him, Khadija softly assured him and soothed him saying: 'Surely, God will never fail you: you keep family ties strong; you help people out; you provide the needy; you are generous with the guest; and you stand by people for their right'.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Chapter of al-'Ankaboot: 48.

³¹⁵ Chapter of al-'Alaq: 1-5.

³¹⁶ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (9719); Ahmad (26001); al-Bukhari (4; 4954; 6982); Muslim (160); al-Hakim (3/202); Ibn Hibban (33); al-Baihaqi (17499). Cf. also al-Tabari's *Tareekh al-Islam* (1/531); *Tareekh al-Islam* (1/26); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/2); Al-Sahihal-Seera al-Nabawiyya (p. 84).

The First Command: Read!

A big question may well be asked what is the significance behind the fact that the mission started with 'Read'? The first order to come from heaven bid Muhammad to read, hence the scholars' conclusion that the first obligation on the adult Muslim is to seek knowledge.

'So know (O Muhammad) that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for your sin and for believing men and believing women.'³¹⁷

Life is entirely useless except with science. This *Umma* of ours rests on science for its movement and progress. And science is the basis of worship. It is the basis of work and business. It is the basis of struggle and politics. It is the basis of social relations. It lies at the core of everything in every domain.

I often stop in amazement at this simple yet serious point. It is that paradoxically the *Umma* of 'Read' lies at the very rearmost of the caravan. It is among the last nations to take care of science and learning at a time of revolution in knowledge and technology, which bring up new facts and fantastic theories every moment. It is these theories and this scientific revolution which have allowed the West to lead the world and impose its hegemony over its wealth. Meanwhile, the Muslim *Umma* will not give up the hindmost ranks.

While the citizen in Europe or Japan waits for the bus, he reads. While he is going from one place to another, he reads. Meanwhile, it is so sad to see the *Umma* of 'Read' pay little heed to reading.

I often ask myself and others how the nations which have no sacred text to tell them to read have reached such high standards, while the first command the Muslim *Umma* received from God was 'Read', and yet it has abandoned it.

Seeking Knowledge is an Obligation

The Prophet says: 'Seeking knowledge is obligatory to every Muslim.'³¹⁸ Note that in Arabic the word 'Muslim' refers to both

³¹⁷ Chapter of Muhammad: 19.

genders, though these can otherwise be distinguished. The reason behind this is that Islam does not make a difference between the two genders with regard to obligations, including seeking knowledge.

People in the West do not have a scripture starting with 'Read'. However, they realized, both based on their commonsense and experience, that it is vital to read. Consequently, they reached high standards. The Muslim *Umma*, on the other hand, is still groping in a world of ignorance even though it has a holy Book which guides and helps it.

The Medical Sciences

One really stands in awe at the Hadith which says: 'Whatever ailment God has created, He has created a cure for it: some people will know it; others will not.'³¹⁹ In some Hadith versions, it is said that 'when the cure is found, the recovery comes with the will of God.'³²⁰

It transpires from this Hadith that any ailment has a cure. No cure is impossible, including health problems still resisting therapy. This Hadith clearly guarantees a solution to any medical problem; only that it has to be found. And I think that this Hadith prompts the Muslims to go ahead and work hard in the field of medicine as well as other scientific fields to serve humanity.

We are supposed to be active not only in the medical domain, but in every single domain related to nature and its laws in this universe. We have been given the power of the mind to look into all these areas. But where are the Muslims?! Does it make any sense to

³¹⁸ Reported by Ibn Majah (224); Abu Yaala (2837); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (1037); Ibn Abd al-Barr in *Jami' Bayan al-Ilm wa Fadlih* (15). Cf. also a discussion on the report of the Hadith 'Seeking knowledge is obligatory to every Muslim' by al-Suyuti.

³¹⁹ Reported by Ahmad (3578; 3922; 18479); al-Nassai (4/194); Ibn Hibban (6062); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (10331); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (2534; 7036); al-Hakim (4/218; 441; 445); al-Baihaqi (19344). The essence of the Hadith was in al-Bukhari's *Al-Sahih* as 'Whatever ailment God has created, He has created a healing for it'.

³²⁰ Reported by Ahmad (14637); Muslim (2204); Abu Yaala (2036); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (7556); Ibn Hibban (6063); al-Hakim (4/445); al-Baihaqi (19342).

say that these sciences are exclusively in the hands of the West?! Is it fair to say that the West deprives us of those sciences and means?!

This is absolute nonsense! Even if the West did not allow us to take them, there would still be ways to acquire them. For example, Japan, which was completely crushed in the Second World War, was able to overcome many difficulties and reach a level which allows it now to compete with the West itself. So does it make any sense to say that the West deprived Japan of technology?

As the Lord said: ‘Say: it is from yourselves.’³²¹ When we have sincere will, and we understand what it means to have ‘Read’ as the first and foremost commandment from God, only then will we be able to get our hands on these sciences and tame them.

³²¹ Chapter of Aal ‘Imran: 165.

To Science!

A Virtuous Science

God says in the Koran: 'Read in the Name of your Lord Who created'.³²² This was the very first divine call in the ear of the Prophet. Note that when God sent this call, He linked it to His Name, saying: 'Read in the *Name* of your Lord'.

Thus, this is no material rule-ungoverned science. It is not a science which would thrive by hands rebellious to God and His signs. Nor is it a science which would call for the destruction of human life and unforeseeable results, eventually leading to complete chaos. For example, it is not a science which would encourage armament and the invention of such tools as would destroy humans without affecting buildings, though the ideal is to protect them and provide them with maximum happiness, since humans are supposed to be the masters of all other creatures.

A science which is motivated by religion is one which benefits man and grants him comfort, as well as raising him closer to his Lord. In actual life, however, we have seen how far science has led us. We have seen how man has found his way through space and set foot on the moon, but lost his way on earth itself! This same man now tends to run away from his own self, as it were, so that the highest suicide and depression statistics are found in the most scientifically and technologically advanced societies, and the countries where the highest economic standards and incomes are found.

When science is linked to God, it is a constructive science, whether in worldly matters or religious ones, which connect man's heart to his Lord. Thus, this science cannot be an expression of rebellion to God in any way, as the old Greeks thought. Their myths claimed that God kept science for Himself away from people, but people were able to break into the 'safes' of knowledge. Hence the acquisition of science was a matter of revolting against the Supreme Being. In Islam, we have quite the opposite of this belief: it is our

³²² Chapter of al-'Alaq: 1.

Lord Himself Who bids us to seek knowledge, bids man to spread his supremacy over the world, instructing him to figure out the rules of the universe and its principles and put them to maximum use.

Making Use of the Mind

God created man as a blank slate, as He said: ‘And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers knowing nothing.’³²³ However, He equipped him with a mind and perceptive powers to allow him to perceive the world, which is one of the sources of knowledge, through the revelation.

But though the mind may guide one to God in general, it does not guide one to the minutest details of the attributes of God, His rights over us, and the details of rituals such as prayers, fasting, alms, pilgrimage, etc. So the mind receives via the revelation what corroborates to the intelligent individual the truthfulness of the Prophets’ message.

The mind also perceives the world around it and exploits the incoming data as best it can. It thinks and contemplates, and analyses and experiments, and accumulates experience. God creates man knowing nothing, and provides him with sight, hearing, and the mind as tools of perception and knowledge. This is why He said: ‘Read in the Name of your Lord Who created; He created man from a clot’.³²⁴

Reading Again and Again

God says in the Koran: *‘Read: and your Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who taught by the pen; He taught man that which he knew not.’*³²⁵ Note that He repeated the ‘Read’ command in the same context, at the same time for a specific purpose:

1. No one understands that the reading time is a transient one. Many people think that once they reach a certain level of education, it is the end of the process. But science keeps changing, and man

³²³ Chapter of al-Nahl: 78.

³²⁴ Chapter of al-‘Alaq: 1-2.

³²⁵ Ibid: 3-5.

has to update his knowledge day by day. With the ongoing publications and ideas and theories, we have to keep polishing our knowledge, looking into everything new and assessing it, making the difference between the accurate and the inaccurate, and distinguishing the useful from the worthless.

‘There is no ‘final statement’ in the world of science! Remember the verse: ‘And serve your Lord till the inevitable comes to you.’³²⁶ Seeking knowledge is a kind of worship, nay, one of the best kinds of worship. Imam Malik went so far as to say that: ‘Seeking knowledge is better than the non-obligatory ritual acts, to him who is sincere.’ And Imam Ahmad used to go to the circles of knowledge with the pen and paper to write down knowledge. Then some people asked him: ‘Are you doing this in spite of your old age?’ He said: ‘(I’ll stay) by the inkwell till the grave.’³²⁷

Those people did not consider the quest for knowledge a temporary matter; to them it represented a whole-life affair, as put by Imam Ahmad. It is, therefore, a big mistake to believe that after graduation, even with a doctoral degree, the time of seeking knowledge is over. This is why the command ‘Read’ is repeated in verse 1 and verses 2-3 of the chapter of al-‘Alaq (cf. footnotes 330-1).

2. The repetition of the command to read suggests the importance of precision and reviewing. One reading may not yield its fruit. A repeated reading is more likely to clarify and fix the information. As some sages said: ‘I’d rather read a book three times than read three books one time each’. Besides, some sciences in particular require reviewing time and time again. In the Koran we find: ‘...Then turn your vision: can you see any flaws? Again turn your vision a second time: (your) vision will come back to you dull and discomfited, in a state worn out.’³²⁸

3. The command to repeat the reading suggests, inter alia, that the first reading is for yourself, while the second reading is for people. That is to say, the first reading allows you to discover and

³²⁶ Chapter of al-Hijr: 99.

³²⁷ Cf. *Talbees Iblees* (p.400); *al-Aadaab al-Shar’iya* (2/58).

³²⁸ Chapter of al-Mulk: 3-4.

understand your duties, and perhaps merely for the fun of discovering science. But the second reading enables you to transfer the knowledge to people and to instruct them.

A Muslim is not selfish: he reads not just for himself, but for others as well. He has to pass on the information to them. The Koran says: 'Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation.'³²⁹ That is, whatever you learn, do transmit it to others so that they can benefit from it and thereby enlighten their souls. This is why the Companions of the Prophet did not stay within their own cities or the Peninsula; they were lights which illuminated the world. Their tombs are found in Turkey, Iraq, Levant, Egypt, and other parts of the world.

Thus, the instruction to read again and again suggests that the reader first does it for himself, then for others.

Science and Faith

The great message which heads this chapter – the first chapter to be revealed in the Koran – must not be passed unheeded: every Muslim has to stop at it and question himself as to how much consideration he has shown for it. When shall we stop considering the activity of reading a mere fun?! When shall we look to reading and science as holy?!

Every one of us has to learn, and then teach his children the value of reading. A child who sees his/her mother play with him/her while a book is in her lap, or sees his/her father sitting and reading will definitely be constructive in the future. Staying away from books will lead us nowhere. We will only be talking about science without ever gaining anything from it.

So I call on all Muslims, males and females, to:

*Read: In the name of your Lord who created,
He createth man from a clot.*

Read: And your Lord is the Most Bounteous,

³²⁹ Chapter of al-Nahl: 125.

Who taught by the pen,

*He taught man that which he knew not.*³³⁰

Read in order to be close to your Lord. And remember that this chapter ended with the following verse: ‘Nay, heed him not, but prostrate yourself and draw near (to Allah).’³³¹ Science and knowledge go hand in hand. Science leads to worship, and to God’s grace. It leads to Paradise. Without any science, we will neither build up our worldly life nor perfect our religion. Learning is primary and essential if our goal is really to improve our life and perfect our religion.

³³⁰ Chapter of al-‘Alaq: 1-5.

³³¹ Ibid: 19.

Hold Your Tongue

Images of Siege and Tyranny

While in Mecca, the pure and blessed land, Prophet Muhammad was establishing the beginnings of this great mission. This light of faith, which departed from this exalted land, had a moral basis. If you were to go back in time fourteen hundred years, you would see what was going on in the space around the shrine of the Ka'ba. At one corner, you see the Prophet, praying and prostrating himself. A little farther, the idol worshippers are plotting something sordid. One of them comes along and throws the afterbirth of a she-camel on the back of the Prophet. The Prophet lingers in his prostrating position, and no one dares to remove the dirt from his blessed back, until Fatima, his daughter, comes and takes it away. When he finishes his prayer, the Prophet raises his hands imploring God and saying: 'O Lord, let your misfortune befall Quraish, and Abu Jahl, and 'Utba bin Rabee'a, and Shaiba bin Rabee'a, and al-Waleed bin 'Utba, and Umayya bin Khalaf, and Umayya bin Abi Mu'ait, and 'Imara bin al-Waleed'.

Abdullah bin Mas'ud, a witness and the reporter of the story, said: 'I swear that I witnessed their demise on the day of the Badr battle. They were then hauled to the pit of Badr'.³³² They were killed in that battle as adamant ruthless disbelievers waging war against God and His Messenger.

When the Prophet was subjected to cruel acts, he did not react by taking his revenge. He just suffered them with patience, and gave moral examples to others.

Those were harsh occurrences which unfortunately took place at their time and place. but they were left behind as history. And those people who wanted to extinguish God's light died as idol worshippers.

³³² Reported by Ahmad (3722; 3962); al-Bukhari (240; 3185; 3854); Muslim (1794); Abu Dawud (2681); Abu Yaala (5312); al-Nassai (307); Ibn Khuzaima (785); Ibn Hibban (6570); al-Baihaqi (17507). Cf. also Ibn Ishhaq's *al-Seera* (4/192); Ibn Sa'd's *al-Tabaqat* (2/23); al-Baihaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubumma* (2/279-80); al-Asbahani's *Dala'il al-Nubumma* (1/46); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/217); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/44; 6/170; 262-3); *Sahih al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (p. 146).

Those people plotted against the Prophet and wanted to kill him. In fact they did kill some of his followers, like Sumayya and Yassir, and tortured others, like ‘Ammar and Bilal. They hurt the Muslims. They chased many of them out of Mecca. They tracked them to Abyssinia. They attempted many assassinations, including that of the Prophet himself. They did all they could to encircle the mission with an iron wall. Consequently, the Prophet went different ways to ask different people and tribes to endorse him. He never let any occasion pass without asking tribes for backing – in market gatherings, at pilgrimage, etc. and his uncle, Abu Lahab, was following him like his shadow, dissuading people and tribes from accepting him, and telling them that his people knew him better.³³³ But the Prophet was as firm as mountains in his determination, patience, and serenity. And he took his time.

Do not Curse the Dead!

One of the things which often fascinates me is the instruction which the Prophet used to issue to his Companions on the dead, as Aisha reported: ‘Do not curse the dead: they are gone to what they did in life’³³⁴, or ‘Do not curse the dead lest you harm the living’.³³⁵

Such is the meaning of being a Prophet. And such is the honesty which derives therefrom. Theirs is the behavior of mortals who eat like ordinary people and walk in market places like ordinary people, but with divine guidance. Those dead died as non-Muslims, and they were at the top of sworn enemies to God and His Messenger. Some of them were personally involved in cruel treatment of the Prophet in person. And some of them died while fighting Islam and Muslims. Yet the Prophet’s legacy is: ‘Do not curse the dead lest you harm the living.’

Those dead left behind them children, brothers and sisters, wives, relatives, etc. who embraced Islam. Talking about the latter’s parents will hurt them. To say the least, it is decent to avoid talking

³³³ Cf. *This is the Messenger* (p. 4).

³³⁴ Reported by Ahmad (25509); al-Bukhari (1393; 6516); al-Nassai (1936); al-Hakim (1/541); al-Baihaqi (6979); al-Baihaqi in *Shu’ab al-Eeman* (6678).

³³⁵ Reported by Ahmad (18234-5); al-Tirmidhi (1982); Ibn Hibban (3022); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (7278; 20/420; 1013).

about the dead in a negative way even if what we know about them is true. That may unnecessarily hurt the living, and keeping the living unscarred is a priority in religion. Besides, it is not something which the religion requires.

Worshipping and Abusing

On that basis, if a person never curses, say, pharaoh and Haman, except to read what the Koran says about them, it will not affect his records in any negative way. Similarly, if he spends all his life cursing them, that will not improve his records. Therefore, cursing has never been a means of gaining virtue in religion. Even when the Texts of the Koran and the Sunna speak of those people as misguided, sinful, and as idol worshippers, it should not follow that they (i.e. the texts) instruct us to indulge in criticism and gossip about the others.

It is quite unfortunate to see some people indulge in criticizing the others. They seem to take pleasure in saturating their discussions with defaming. What is worse, they legalize it on religion, pretending that it is a way to combat *Bid'a* (renovating in religion) or deviance, or that it is a matter of historical analysis!

This kind of conduct only adds to the division of the Muslims and to hatred among them. It opens the way to base defaming which destroys rather than contributing to the construction and perfection of the self.

As for the scholars who used criticism in the authentication of Hadiths, they had special conditions: they were acknowledged as great and honest men who had won public esteem. But when you hear some unaccredited individuals judge people, you hardly turn to them, for they themselves need to be accredited. They are anonymous, and by defaming the others, they suffer the loss of their reputation and their interests, and their hearts and conscience degrade.

Muslim is reporting that one day the Prophet asked the Companions: 'Do you know who a bankrupt is?' They said: 'A bankrupt among us is one who has no money and no possession'. He said: 'The bankrupt in my *Umma* is one who comes along on the Day of Resurrection with a prayer, a fasting, and a zakat (alms), but

he had cursed someone, wrongly accused another one, extorted the money of another, spilled the blood of another, and beaten yet another. Each one of these is given from his (i.e. the bankrupt's) good deeds. If he runs out of good deeds before he pays all the damages, bad deeds are taken from them and added on his, and then he is thrown into Hell.³³⁶ So 'Do not curse the dead lest you harm the living.' This indicates that even the people who died as non-believers should not be cursed. When it was revealed that: 'Perish the hands of Abu Lahab, and perish he; no profit to him from all his wealth and all his gains; burnt soon will he be in a fire of blazing flame'³³⁷, and the damnation of Abu Lahab was confirmed, the Prophet cautioned his Companions against indulging in criticizing him, and told them to limit themselves to what was revealed. He said: 'No Muslim should be hurt because of a non-believer',³³⁸ because some of his children accepted Islam, and they felt sorry to hear people speaking ill of him and going over what he had been doing, which was not necessary. So a Muslim should be content with reading the Koran which speaks of Abu Lahab, getting a reward thereby, and abandoning the rest.

Do Not Interfere in the Day of Resurrection

The second meaning of 'Do not curse the dead; they are gone to what they did in life' is that now that they are in God's hands Who knows every secret about them, He will deal with them: it is He Who owns Paradise and Hell. It is He Who rewards or punishes. Therefore, do not put yourself in His place, distributing judgments on people – 'sending' some to Paradise, condemning others to Hell. I have personally seen some people on the internet who look to themselves as sages and successful preachers deciding that some people will definitely go to Paradise while others will unquestionably be thrown in Hell. For example, when a sinful

³³⁶ Reported by Ahmad (8016; 8395; 8829); Muslim (2518); al-Tirmidhi (2418); Abu Yaala (6499); Ibn Hibban (4411; 7359); al-Baihaqi (11284); and al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (33).

³³⁷ Chapter of al-Massad: 1-3.

³³⁸ Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Hilm* (111-2); Abu Nu'aim in *Ma'rifat al-Sahaba* (6988); Ibn 'Assakir (41/16; 67/172). Cf. also *Sharh Mushkil al-Aathaar* (14/469); al-Tabarani's *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer* (20/206); *al-Durr al-Mantbur* (8/668); *Ruh al-Ma'ani* (30/273).

Muslim dies, they will write: ‘Mr. So and So has died. To Hell! What a final torment!’ This is disturbing! Are these people sure that their statements will not condemn *them* in this world and in the hereafter? Are they not afraid that God say to them: ‘I have forgiven *him* and cancelled all *your* deeds’?!³³⁹

It is the Subject Matter, not the Person Per Se

What gives a person a feeling of pride and flawlessness? What gives him the impression that he lies at the top of purity and virtue, while the others are deviant and misguided?! It is these people who God addresses when He says:

Those in sin used to laugh at those who believed;

And whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at each other (in mockery);

And when they returned to their own people, they would return jesting;

And whenever they saw them, they would say: “These people are truly astray!”

*Yet they were not sent as guardians over them.”*³⁴⁰

You are not a guardian! You are not responsible for them! So leave them to their Lord.

This is not to say that no mention whatsoever should be made of the dead. There are people who passed away, but their accomplishments are much alive. Though they are in their graves, their acts, good or bad, still speak for them. People can still be under the influence of, say, a kind of conduct, a political position, a scientific construct, and so on. This is not what Islam condemns; it is the abject treatment of individuals and personal points which is blamed. As for previous people’s experiences and other nations’ accomplishments, whether from the political, economic, scientific, educational, etc. perspectives, these are recommended, and there is

³³⁹ As in the Hadith reported by Muslim (2621).

³⁴⁰ Chapter of al-Mutaffifin: 29-33.

nothing wrong with tackling them. The higher one goes on the moral scale, the cleaner his discourse and actions.

The Sanctity of the Muslims

As if He Were Seeing Us

One of the miracles and great secrets of Prophethood transpires from what the Prophet said to one of his Companions: ‘Ask people to listen (to me)’. There was serious talk about to be said. The Prophet stood and spoke as loudly as he could: ‘Do not return non-believers after me, murdering one another.’³⁴¹ This was a hint that some Muslims would allow themselves to shed the blood of their fellow Muslims on the least excuses. They would interpret the Text to fit their own objectives, although the texts, when assembled together, do not leave the slightest probability for their aberrant interpretations: ‘As long as there is no bloodshed, the believer will have ample indulgence in his religion’³⁴², ‘Cursing the believer is like killing him.’³⁴³

It is grave enough for the Prophet to equate killing a Muslim with disbelieving to dissuade people from it. This is not to say that whoever kills is a disbeliever, but the Prophet did liken one to the other. Prior to Islam, the Arabs used to kill each other, enslave each other, and keep age-long grudge, enmity, and thirst for revenge toward each other. The war of Dahis and al-Ghabra and the war of al-Bassoos are just two examples of such years. The people who understood the Prophet’s message were hyper-sensitive to other Muslim’s blood and honor – even participating in that through a word or a gesture.

When a man maliciously said to the Prophet: ‘Be a good Muslim’, a man said to the Prophet: ‘Messenger of Allah, let me kill him.’ The Prophet said: ‘No, he may be a person who does his

³⁴¹ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (37174; 37176; 37266); Ahmad (2936; 19237); al-Bukhari (121; 7078; 7080); Muslim (65-6); Abu Dawud (4686); Ibn Majah (3942-3); al-Tirmidhi (2193); al-Nassai (4125-7; 4129; 4131); Ibn Hibban (187; 5940).

³⁴² Reported by Ahmad (5681); al-Bukhari (6862); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (19/14; 21); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (1401); al-Hakim (4/390-1); al-Baihaqi (15536; 15636); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (5338).

³⁴³ Reported by al-Tayalisi (1197); Ibn Abi Shaiba (15984; 19715); Ahmad (16432); al-Darimi (3261); al-Bukhari (6047; 6105; 6653); Muslim (110); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (5153; 6665); al-Baihaqi in *al-Kubra* (15654; 19619).

prayers.³⁴⁴ So the prayer is a barrier against killing Muslims – there is no other interpretation for this statement.

One day some youths told me: ‘Those people are hypocrites.’ I said: ‘Suppose they were; did the Prophet kill them? Of course he did not. On the contrary, he protected them and forbade their killing. He said: “I do not want people to say that Muhammad kills his companions.”’³⁴⁵

But whoever reads the Islamic history finds that aside from those who understood what the Prophet said, and considered spilling a Muslims’ blood a deadly sin which leads to Hell, as the Texts mean on aggregate, there are cases of people who looked with derision to the Muslims’ blood and honor. They would hold in contempt the Muslim’s blood on the basis of countless interpretations, often for pure material interests. The divergences which marked Islamic history often turned into wars between sects, tribes or states. This led to huge losses in lives for the wrong issues.

Signs of this appeared when that rude man addressed the Prophet most vulgarly and said: ‘Muhammad, be just!’ Or when a man came to the Prophet while he was dividing the booty and said in the most offensive way: ‘This division is not done for the sake of God!’ But the Prophet responded: ‘God bless the soul of Moses: he was hurt by worse things but he was patient.’³⁴⁶

On another occasion, the Prophet said: ‘Would you not trust me, though the One in Heaven trusts me? I receive the Message from Heaven morning and afternoon.’ Then a man stood up and said to the Prophet: ‘Beware of God!’ The Prophet said: ‘Watch your language! Am I not the most worthy on earth to beware of God?’ Khalid bin al-Waleed, who was there, said: ‘Messenger of Allah, let me kill him’. The Prophet said: ‘No, he may be a person who does his prayers. Khalid said: ‘There are so many people who

³⁴⁴ Reported by Ahmad (11021); al-Bukhari (3451); Muslim (1064); Abu Yaala (1163); Ibn Hibban (23).

³⁴⁵ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (18041); Ahmad (14862; 15260); al-Bukhari (3518; 4905; 4907); Muslim (2584); al-Tirmidhi (3315); Abu Yaala (1957); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (8863; 11599); Ibn Hibban (5990; 6582); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (7295; 8100); al-Baihaqi (17644).

³⁴⁶ Reported by Ahmad (3608; 3902; 4148; 4204); al-Bukhari (3150; 3405; 4336); Muslim (1062); Abu Yaala (5206); Ibn Hibban (4829).

pray but say what is not on their heart.' The Prophet said: 'I was not bidden to dig into people's hearts or open their bellies.'³⁴⁷

This is why Omar used to say: 'Some people were uncovered by the revelation at the time of the Prophet. But now that the revelation has stopped, we rely on what their acts betray. So whoever shows good things, we trust him and consider him close. And whoever shows evil things, we beware of, and do not believe, him even if he says that his inside is noble.'³⁴⁸

The Sanctity of Blood and Honor

People have no more excuses. Everything is crystal clear now. It is no more acceptable to yield to the whim of assaulting the others verbally, taking the liberty to defame them morning and afternoon, or physically, hurting, killing, or carrying out any other harm for that matter. And it makes no difference if this comes about in the name of a ruling authority or religion. None of that is acceptable. In fact, religion has come with the principal aim to put an end to it all. Those who persist in it have to know that they are outrageously trespassing God's limits. And the Prophet unequivocally and irrevocably stipulated it: the honor and blood of all Muslims is a red line which must not be crossed by any means!

Beware, brother in Islam, of the day you meet God with the responsibility, direct or indirect, of causing bloodshed among Muslims. And do not get involved in conflicts among Muslims, especially when you have no evidence to support your position. Needless to say, if every Muslim decided not to be involved in any dispute except with evidence from God, many people would stay clear of mistakes and conflicts. What is so unfortunate, however, is that egoism and craving for bullying and for evil deeds combine to deprive many people of the faculty to see.

³⁴⁷Reported by Ahmad (11021); al-Bukhari (3451); Muslim (1064); Abu Yaala (1163); Ibn Hibban (23).

³⁴⁸ Reported by al-Bukhari (2641); Abu Nu'aim in *al-Hilya* (9/253); al-Baihaqi (16627).

The Holy Ka'ba

A Dispute about the Black Stone

One of the stories well recorded in biographies is that about the Black Stone. When Quraish finished re-building the Ka'ba, the laying of the Stone at its original place remained to be done. Each clan wanted to have the honor of this privilege. Discord arose and there was no sign of any compromise, so much so that some of them dipped their hands in blood as a sign of readiness to get into an armed conflict.

A Prophetic Wisdom to Settle the Problem

People think differently. Each of those tribes reasoned egocentrically. If only they had approached the issue in a logical, collective way, each tribe would have had its own share of the honor, and the problem could have been solved peacefully. But the way some people are brought up, particularly in backward societies, makes them think in an ill-tempered and selfish way, thinking that only specific individuals are entitled to some privileges.

In disputes, therefore, the only wise way out is by seeking a collective settlement. Thus would unity be preserved rather than split. The tribes of Quraish were on the verge of fighting, but God saved them thanks to Muhammad. They conceded to take as a judge the first person to enter the Mosque. They were nervous in the wait. But the first person to walk into the Mosque was a mercy from God well before the revelation. When Muhammad appeared, they were all thrilled and shouted with glee: 'That is the Trustworthy.' Muhammad was the ideal man to be accepted by the whole community for the task!

In effect, Muhammad was designated as a judge. So he took his cap, laid it on the floor, put the Black Stone on it, and asked the head of each tribe to come and pick up the cap from one part of it. When they carried the Gem next to its place, Muhammad picked it up and fitted it in its final resting place. Thus, they all participated pacifically in the placement of the Stone without losing their unity.

It was all thanks to the grace which God bestowed on Muhammad even before the advent of Islam.³⁴⁹

The Sanctity of the Ka'ba

When Islam arrived, it only added to the holiness of this shrine. God finally bid the Muslims to face it in their prayers. This came after a long yearning by the Prophet, who raised his face in his prayers beseeching his Lord to give him a Qibla (orientation in the prayer) which would please him, and it was the Ka'ba. Moreover, He made the Ka'ba the holiest shrine, walking around it one of the best acts of worship and made it a basic component of the big pilgrimage (Hajj) and the small pilgrimage ('Umra). No shrine in the world can be walked around and saluted except this one.

A Hadith recounts that the Prophet said to Aisha: 'Come with me so that I show you.' He took her out and stopped at the Ka'ba. He showed her that the area within the 'Hijr' (the little wall built to the north of the Ka'ba but not joined to it) is in fact part of the Ka'ba. When Quraish wanted to re-build the Ka'ba, the amount of money which they could collect fell too short to build the Ka'aba as it originally was, so they built what they could, and they put the wall outside of it as a sign that that is the real limit of the Ka'ba. The wall is about 3 to 3.5 meters long. The Prophet said to Aisha: 'Had your community not been fresh from the Jahiliya³⁵⁰, [and I am afraid their hearts might find it objectionable,]³⁵¹ I would have had the Ka'ba raised to the ground, re-joined to it what was taken out of it, leveled it with the ground, and opened one door to the east and one to the west.'³⁵² In another report, the Hadith goes: 'and I would

³⁴⁹ Cf. Al-Tayalissi's *Al-Musnad* (113); Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/19); al-Baihaqi's *Al-Sunan* (8990); al-Asbahani's *Dalail al-Nubunwa* (1/204); *al-Tambeed* (10/45); *Tarikh al-Islam* (1/67); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (2/300-3); Ibn Katheer's *al-Tafseer* (1/182); *Umdat al-Qari'* (9/217); *al-Seera al-Halabiyya* (1/236); Ibn Abd al-Wahhaab's *Mukhtassa ral-Seera* (p. 67); *Sahihal-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (p. 44).

³⁵⁰ I.e., the pre-Islamic era.

³⁵¹ The part between square brackets is an addition reported by al-Darimi (1869); al-Bukhari (1584; 7243); Muslim (1333); al-Baihaqi (9098).

³⁵² Reported by Ahmad (25477; 25502; 26071); al-Bukhari (1586); Muslim (1333); al-Tirmidhi (875); al-Nassai (2903); Ibn Khuzaima (3020); Ibn Hibban (3816-8); al-Tabarani in *al-Ansat* (7379); al-Hakim (1/652; 1764); al-Baihaqi (9100-1).

have made one door to walk in, and the other door to walk out.³⁵³ And in another version, we find: ‘...and I would have thereby joined it to the foundation laid by Abraham.’³⁵⁴ In another report, the Hadith adds: ‘Do you know why your community raised its door?’ She said: ‘No.’ He said: ‘They decided that only those they wanted would be allowed in. When somebody they did not want in it walked up, they waited until he was at the top and then toppled him.’³⁵⁵ In another report, the Hadith goes: ‘Your community did that so that they let in those who they liked, and refused those they did not like.’³⁵⁶

These explanations, which the Prophet gave Aisha, have several morals:

1. The Prophet left the building of the Ka’ba as it was before Islam, justifying it by saying that ‘I am afraid their hearts might find it objectionable.’ He was keen on people’s faith and serenity of their hearts. This was one of the talents which he possessed, and which made people love him so much. He did not want them to have any negative feelings towards changing the aspect of the Ka’ba or to think of that as an act of arrogance, which was absolutely unthinkable of him. Therefore, he simply dropped the idea of restoring the Ka’ba to its original form.

This also points to the wisdom of choice. Here the Prophet was faced with the option of re-building the shrine, which was acceptable from a religious legal perspective, and leaving it as it was, which was also acceptable from a religious legal perspective. The Prophet explained the facts for information, but in practice went for the second option. Thus the rule which the Prophet established by means of this story shows that if a person is in a dilemma, in which both possibilities are legal, he should go for the one which fits people’s interests.

³⁵³ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (14109); Ahmad (25092); Muslim (1333); al-Nassai (2910).

³⁵⁴ Reported by Ahmad (25477; 25502; 26071); al-Bukhari (1586); Muslim (1333); al-Tirmidhi (875); al-Nassai (2903).

³⁵⁵ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (9150); Muslim (1333); Ibn Khuzaima (2741).

³⁵⁶ Reported by al-Tayalissi (1393); al-Darimi (1869); al-Bukhari (1584; 7243); Muslim (1333); al-Baihaqi (9098).

The same rule applies to the Prophet's refraining from allowing people to kill the hypocrites. He justified it by saying that: 'I do not want people to say that Muhammad kills his companions.'³⁵⁷

The importance of this rule lies particularly in the fact that God knows about the vicissitudes of life – nations change from civilization to backwardness and weakness; from great numbers to small numbers; from wealth to poverty and scarcity; and so on, so that one rigid way would not be appropriate for different people. This is why in the chapter of al-Zumar, verse 18, we have 'Those who hear the Word and follow the best thereof'.

It is safe, therefore, to say that some of the best jurisprudence one can possess is the skill of choice, that is, making the right choice among the different opinions, situations, and acts depending on the circumstances. One may face different instances of truth. But it is the top of wisdom to perceive the great importance of the verse 'Those who hear the Word and follow the best thereof'.

The 'Word' here may refer to the Revelation, all of which is good. However, it is a special blessing to discern the applicability of this Revelation as to the circumstance, environment, people and their interests, etc. '...and none is granted it save those of the greatest good fortune.'³⁵⁸

2. The Prophet showed that the Ka'ba was wider than it looked, and that the Hijr area was part of it – the reason why people walk around the Ka'ba outside of the wall. This means that it is wrong to walk between the Hijr wall and the Ka'aba.

3. The Prophet said: '...and I would have made one door to walk in, and the other door to walk out'. This shows one of the basic values of the religion of Islam since its start – equality among people. This does not mean that special people should not be treated as they should be. God created people different in minds, shapes, values and righteousness. But the decisive factor in raising some over the others is virtue; otherwise, there is absolutely no difference between people – between an Arab and a non-Arab,

³⁵⁷ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (18041); Ahmad (14862; 15260); al-Bukhari (3518; 4905; 4907); Muslim (2584); al-Tirmidhi (3315); Abu Yaala (1957); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (8863; 11599); Ibn Hibban (5990; 6582); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (7295; 8100); al-Baihaqi (17644).

³⁵⁸ Chapter of Fussilat: 35.

between a rich person and a poor one, or between a black and a white person. Only virtue can make any difference at all!

So the Prophet thought of leveling the Ka'ba with the ground so that all people would walk into it through one door, pray in it, and then leave it through the other door.

Muslim scholars have decided that the Ka'ba be left as it is, so that kings would not take it as a toy, each destroying and re-building it at will. Their consensus is to leave it as it is, and the above Hadith is enough as evidence for that. The maintenance of the Hijr wall as it is, i.e., with an opening on either side, also allows for the application of the wish in the Hadith, that people walk in, pray as if inside the Ka'ba, and leave through the other opening.

In a word, the Prophet was keen to annihilate all sorts of segregation, including that which Quraish conferred on itself to remain distinguished from the rest of the people, even in matters of worship. For example in Jahiliya, Quraish refused to stand at 'Arafa like the rest of the pilgrims. They said 'We are the residents of God's House and *Haram* (i.e. holy zone); we will not step out of the *Haram* to the *Hil*.' So they would stand at Muzdalifa and not go past it.

When Muhammad came, he did not agree with Quraish and stood with ordinary people at 'Arafa in his pilgrimage before Islam. Then the Koran came consistent with that, saying to Quraish and all people: 'Then depart from the place whence the multitude depart.'³⁵⁹ That is, stand at 'Arafat as the rest of the people stand, and depart to Muzdalifa as they depart. And especially do not single yourselves out from the rest of the people in any way: this is no such a religion as would differentiate between people on any basis except that of virtue. And the more virtuous and knowledgeable a person, the more humble, sociable, tolerant, and conscious of his real place and his flaws. This is what Islam promotes. And such were the morals of the Prophet.

³⁵⁹ Chapter of al-Baqara: 199.

To You We Have Granted the Abundant

Such an Abundant Grant...Until You are Satisfied

*To you We have granted The Abundant (River),
Therefore to your Lord turn in prayer and sacrifice;
It is he who insults you who will be cut off (from future hope).³⁶⁰*

Al-'Aas bin Wail and a gang of unbelievers from Quraish stood and looked at the Prophet while he was praying at the Ka'ba. They said to each other: 'He disrupted our unity and scattered us. He came with what no one has ever come to us with.' And they started condoling with each other. Finally, al-'Aas said: 'OK, leave him alone: he's cut off; he will have no progeny. Once he dies, he will be forgotten once and for all.'

This talk hurt the Prophet profoundly. But to soothe him, God revealed the chapter of al-Kawthar.³⁶¹

The observer today clearly sees who has really been cut off. Who were al-'Aas bin Wail and the others? Who knows them? How many people have heard of Abu Jahl? And who is proud of being a descendant of Abu Jahl? On the other hand, who does *not* know of Muhammad the Prophet? His name is on every tongue. And his homage is in every heart. He was loved by the friend, and feared by the enemy. His name is linked to God's Name: when God's Name is mentioned, the Prophet's name is mentioned, too – in the *Shahada* (the testimony of faith), which is the key to Islam, in the *Adhaan* (the call to the prayer), and so on. In fact, the believer's life as a whole is built on the obedience of God and the obedience of the Prophet!

³⁶⁰ Chapter of al-Kawthar.

³⁶¹ Cf. Ibn Ishhaq's *al-Seera* (5/252); Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/239); al-Baghawi's *al-Tafseer* (4/534); Ibn Kathir's *Al-Tafsir* (4/560); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/104); *Saheeh al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (p. 219).

Those who classify people, and who are not even among his followers, count him among the one hundred most influential people in human history. This is certainly a truth! He is *the* greatest history and life maker. Since Adam was created and sent down on this planet, no mortal has ever, nor will ever be of the greatness of Muhammad: he was great in his conduct and morals, great in his reasoning, great in his heart, great in his character, great in his impact, and above all, great in being an apostle of God whose heart received the revealed Scripture: ‘Allah knows best where to place His Message.’³⁶²

God selected him as the best of the best. He also made him the seal of prophets and messengers. It is my ultimate wish that God resurrect us with him and treat us to his water place.

Divine Gifts

‘To you We have granted the Abundant (River).’ The unbelievers cursed and defamed the Prophet because his sons die, though this was God’s will, and no one should be cursed because of fate. In fact that was part of God’s wisdom. His pure and noble daughters lived into adulthood, but his sons died young. The Prophet suffered the pain and cried, but never said except what pleased God. He was called names for that, but God compensated him in great abundance: is He not the Most Generous! He said: ‘We have granted you’. The source of the grant was God Himself – the Greatest and the Highest of all! As people say, the grant depends on the grantor. So if the grantor is God Almighty, imagine the extent of greatness of this grant! God started the message in this way: ‘We have granted you’, and the Prophet understood best what that meant. Even before God mentioned the granted thing, the Prophet knew it could only be a wondrous gift, and an exceptional honor. He also knew that God had mentioned him to the angels in the heavens, and gave him what He gave no other creature ever.

The wording of the verse indicates that the gift is specially for him, but the effects of the Abundant extend to his *Umma* as well due to his generosity. Other expressions, otherwise synonymous,

³⁶² Chapter of al-An’am: 124.

were used elsewhere to indicate that the gift was his *and* other people's as well: for example, 'We have given you seven of the oft repeated (verses) and the great Koran.'³⁶³

What is the Abundant?

Many scholars say that it is a river in Paradise³⁶⁴ which is God's promise to his Prophet.³⁶⁵ It has as many utensils as there are stars in the sky.³⁶⁶ Whoever drinks of it never feels thirsty afterward.³⁶⁷ All this is true and authenticated in the Sunna. But the Arabic word 'Kawthar', translated here as 'Abundant', may also refer to abundance in general.

So God says to His Prophet that He has given him great abundance, and the Abundant – the River in Paradise – is but one of God's many gifts to His Prophet Muhammad. He brought him good tidings of this River at a time when the unbelievers were scoffing at him and his mission. They said that he was a man with no progeny. His death would mark his end and no trace would be left of him whatsoever. Then their unity would be recovered. The Kawthar refers to that River in Paradise, but also to other bounties such as the great number of his followers. No other prophet had had such a huge following. Muslims make up a fifth of the inhabitants of the globe. And Islam today is the fastest growing religion. Throughout history, this religion has been transcending boundaries with its power, though its people may fall too short to influence now.

³⁶³ Chapter of al-Hijr: 87.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Abdurrazzaq's Al-Mussannaf (31662; 34098); Ahmad's Al-Musnad (5355; 6476; 12013); Ibn Majah's Al-Sunan (4334); al-Tirmidhi's Al-Jami' (3361); Abu Yaala's Al-Musnad (3953); Ibn Hibban's Al-Sahih (6471); al-Tabarani's Al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer (13306); al-Tabarani's Al-Mu'jam al-Waseet (9246).

³⁶⁵ Cf. Ibn Abi Shaiba's Al-Mussannaf (31655; 34097; 37178); Ahmad's Al-Musnad (12013); Muslim's Al-Sahih (400); Abu Dawud's Al-Sunan (784; 4747); Abu Yaala's Al-Musnad (3953); al-Nassai's Al-Sunan (904); al-Baihaqi's Al-Sunan (2208).

³⁶⁶ Cf. Ahmad's Al-Musnad (12015; 23498); al-Bukhari's Al-Sahih (4965); Muslim's Al-Sahih (247; 400; 2300; 2304); Abu Dawud's Al-Sunan (4747); Ibn Majah's Al-Sunan (4301-2); al-Tirmidhi's Al-Jami' (2445); al-Nassai's Al-Sunan (904).

³⁶⁷ Cf. Ahmad's Al-Musnad (3787; 22873); Muslim's Al-Sahih (2290; 2299; 2300); Ibn Majah's Al-Sunan (4303); al-Tirmidhi's Al-Jami' (2444).

This is What God has Promised Us

One day I stood at Mecca, the sacred land. I had a panoramic view at the far horizon from one of its balconies. I saw waves after waves of people, like the waves of the sea, constantly moving. They were all celebrating the Name of God, and the place became tighter and tighter with them. And the more space was added to the Mosque, the more people filled it. If all Muslims were to go on pilgrimage, the space would not have sufficed them, even if the area around Mecca were all added to the Mosque.

This is part of the abundance meant in the verse above. If the Prophet were brought back to life and saw Mecca, where he was hurt so much, he would see that the memory of those who insulted him has been completely wiped out, unless they are mentioned as wicked people. As for himself, he has gained eternal glory, and his name is remembered and venerated in this world. Now that he did die, that is God's will and the nature of humans: 'Surely you will die, and surely they will die.'³⁶⁸ However, his religion is much alive.

The Prophet was granted generously in this world and in the hereafter. And one of the gifts God has given him is that his religion is here to stay forever, and that it is triumphant despite the refusal of the idol worshippers.

³⁶⁸ Chapter of al-Zumar: 30.

God Loves Those Who Do Good

When Acknowledged, Gifts Endure and Grow

God often links His gifts with thankfulness for them. The chapter of al-Nahl is one of the long chapters where God enumerates the various gifts which He has bestowed upon mankind. He ends it with: ‘Abraham was a model leader, obedient to Allah, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolaters, thankful for His bounties.’³⁶⁹ The chapter of Luqman, a smaller model of the chapter of al-Nahl in that it is full of examples of God’s bounties, may be called the smaller ‘chapter of bounties’, as compared to the longer one – al-Nahl.

For Muhammad himself, the chapter of al-Doha lists some of God’s graces upon Muhammad. It ends thus: ‘Therefore treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse the petitioner, but the bounties of your Lord rehearse and proclaim.’³⁷⁰ In the chapter of al-Takathur, God mentions the great bounties He has granted his Prophet, including the great number of his followers and the huge amount of sciences and other benefits which constitute his legacy. Then He mentions the Abundant (River), and said thereafter: ‘Therefore to your Lord turn in prayer and sacrifice.’ When we ponder over these two rituals, the prayer and the sacrifice, we conclude two things:

1. The relation between the Prophet and his Lord: he ought to perfect it with prayers;
2. The relation with humans, especially the needy: he ought to sacrifice beasts (camels, cattle, etc.) for the sake of God, and provide the needy and feed the hungry.

That is exactly what he did in the best possible way, and in total submission to God.

³⁶⁹ Verses 120-1.

³⁷⁰ Verses 9-11.

While performing the prayer, the Prophet was at the zenith of elation. Once he was praying, he was oblivious to the world, and everything other than his concentration on his submission to God was behind him. He once said: 'The prayer does carry one away.'³⁷¹ While prostrating, not only his body, but his heart prostrated itself, too. He praised and venerated God. And experienced the awe and cried and earnestly felt the closeness of his Lord, just as he was bidden by God: 'But prostrate yourself, and draw near (to Allah).'³⁷² All in all, his prayer was not just physical; his heart, his mind, his soul, and everything in him prayed.

He would pray in the night until his feet swelled and went sore. Aisha once asked him: 'Why do you do all this after Allah forgave you all your sins, past and to come?' He said: 'Should I not be a grateful servant?'³⁷³ He expressed his gratitude to God as he was instructed: 'Work you, O family of David, with thanks.'³⁷⁴

And gratitude is expressed with the tongue, the limbs and the heart. Therefore, he thanked God in prayers; he thanked Him verbally; he thanked Him through different actions – all in response to his Lord's instruction in 'Therefore turn to your Lord in prayer and sacrifice'³⁷⁵, and in 'And pray in some parts of the night: an additional prayer for you: soon will your Lord raise you to a station of praise and glory.'³⁷⁶

Aisha said that one day she missed the Prophet. 'I looked for him and found him in the mosque praying. I fumbled and my hand fell on the bottom of his feet, which were upright. He was saying in his prayer: 'O God, I seek refuge in your satisfaction from your dissatisfaction; and in your grace from your punishment; and in

³⁷¹ Reported by al-Bukhari (1199;1216;3875); Muslim (538); Abu Dawud (923); Ibn Majah (1019); al-Tirmidhi (390); Ibn Khuzaima (855; 858).

³⁷² Chapter of al-'Alaq: 19.

³⁷³ Reported by Ibn Abi Shaiba (34348); Ahmad (18223; 18269); al-Bukhari (4837); Muslim (2819-20); al-Nassai (1644); Ibn Khuzaima (1183-4); Ibn Hibban (620).

³⁷⁴ Chapter of Saba': 13.

³⁷⁵ Chapter of al-Kawthar: 2.

³⁷⁶ Chapter of al-Israa: 79.

You from You: I can in no way achieve perfection in praising You as You have praised Yourself.³⁷⁷

The verse ‘Therefore turn to your Lord in prayer and sacrifice’ highlights in its second part the importance of being good to God’s servants: worshiping God can only be complete if it is supplemented by being good toward people. A heart which humiliates itself to God is necessarily one which is kind vis-à-vis the people. Such are the hearts which carry enough mercy to heed the needy, the widow, the weak – all persons in need of support in cases of injustice. These hearts have enough room in them for the concerns of these people, and have enough magnanimity to share with the others in need of food, clothing, housing, money, etc. This is all included in ‘Therefore turn to your Lord in prayer and sacrifice’. So prayer and sacrifice are two facets of the same coin.

And when God blamed those who are lazy and careless about their prayers, He added: ‘...Those who do good things only to be seen, yet refuse even small neighborly kindness.’³⁷⁸ They would be stingy with people, even the closest ones to them, e.g., their spouses, their own children, and those who directly depend on them.

Being Useful to People is a Kind of Worship

At times of worship, such as the prayer and fasting, we evoke the greatness and power of God. We thereby learn to love Him and endeavor to gain success in the hereafter. We also learn that being merciful to God’s creatures is as much worship as prostrating ourselves to God. We have to be generous and give the needy before they petition for help, for the best gift is that which conserves the dignity of the one in need. And a gift must not be followed by expressions or acts of bragging. It must not be conditional, and must keep self-respect unscratched.

³⁷⁷ Reported by Abdurrazzaq (2883); Ibn Abi Shaiba (29140; 29711); Ahmad (751; 907; 25696); Muslim (486); Abu Dawud (879; 1427); Ibn Majah (1179; 3841); al-Tirmidhi (3492; 3566); al-Nassai (169; 1100; 1130; 1747); Ibn Khuzaima (655; 671); Ibn Hibban (1932); al-Hakim (1/449).

³⁷⁸ Chapter of al-Maa’un: 6-7.

The inter-related character of the different components of Islam is one of the reasons of its strength. A gift should not be for worldly objectives or for being pointed to or written about as a generous person. That may happen without being targeted, which is a good sign of God's satisfaction. Doing good to others should be done because it is a means to God's satisfaction and Paradise. It can also be looked to as a means to worldly blessings. For example, charitable people live the longest, are the healthiest, the most successful, moneywise, the happiest, and the farthest from melancholy.

Just as you worship God by prostration, and by moving your heart to get closer to Him, yearn for Him by aspiring to be good to people. 'The best people to God are those most useful to His needy creatures.'³⁷⁹ Although the wording of this Hadith was not authenticated, its meaning is correct. All creatures are in need of God's sustenance. And anyone who gives people what they need wins God's love, because he gives them of what God gives him, and protects them from using foul means to get what they need. Once again, 'Therefore turn to your Lord in prayer and sacrifice' combines the two aspects – complete submission to God and being sincerely good to His servants.

Then He concludes the three-verse chapter with the verse 'It is he who insults you who will be cut off (from future hope).' So be thankful to your Lord for all His bounties – what He has granted you and your mission and religion, so that Mecca has turned the capital of Islam, nay of the world from all perspectives: it is the city to which people from all races and nations converge: 'And proclaim to mankind the Pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine, that they may witness things that are of benefit to them.'³⁸⁰ So God has granted you all these graces about yourself, your religion, and your land. And this will occur in all circumstances.

³⁷⁹ Reported by Abu Yaala (3315; 3370; 3478); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (10033); Abu Nu'aim in *al-Hilya* (2/102; 4/237); al-Baihaqi in *Sbu'ab al-Eeman* (7444-7).

³⁸⁰ Chapter of al-Hajj: 27-8.

A Divine Miracle

‘It is he who insults you who will be cut off (from future hope).’³⁸¹ It is those who fought you and stood in your way who were cut off. That which they were wishing to hit you has hit *them*. They died and finished. But Islam is here to stay. It is strong by its followers, its glory and history, and its civilization, which every human is familiar with.

Those people had great wealth and many children: ‘Leave Me (to deal) with him whom I created alone, and then bestowed upon him ample means, and sons abiding in his presence, and made (life) smooth for him, yet he desires that I should give more.’³⁸² But where is all that? Where are the children? And the money? And the glory? And their trace? On the other hand, the Prophet remained, and so did his religion and glory, exactly as God wanted and informed us.

This latter verse was revealed in Mecca while the Prophet was on his own and besieged by hostile powers. Yet he believed in it, which was a testimony that he was a real Prophet who received the revelation from God: ‘Nor does he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration sent down to him.’³⁸³ God achieved His promises to him. Those people disappeared for good, and God’s miracles stayed, one of which is the Koran. And part of the miracles of the Koran is that people still read it today, and witness the truth in what has been realized throughout the centuries, and in many places. This certainly points to the truthfulness of this religion, its greatness and timelessness. Unsurprisingly, this enhances the faith of the believers: ‘Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy: therein let them rejoice. It is better than what they hoard.’³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Chapter of al-Kawthar: 3.

³⁸² Chapter of al-Muddaththir: 12-5.

³⁸³ Chapter of al-Najm: 3-4.

³⁸⁴ Chapter of Yunus: 58.

Would That I Had Never Taken Such a One for Friend!

The Evil Friend

Biographies and exegeses say that ‘Uqba bin Abi Mu’ait was a close friend to Ubayy bin Khalaf in the pre-Islamic era. Ubayy was a hardliner and he resisted any tendency to loosen the tense and hostile grip of the Meccan disbelievers on Muslims. He headed the arrogant clique of idol worshippers and was especially tyrannical toward Muslims.

As for ‘Uqba bin Abi Mu’ait, he was more lenient than that. For example, when Omar bin al-Khattab converted to Islam and people rushed to ‘Uqba to inform him of that, he (i.e., ‘Uqba) told them that Islam reached a degree of firmness and acceptability with which it was no more possible to stop it. If a man chose a religion, he said, that was totally up to him.

So neither of them accepted Islam, but Ubayy was more aggressive against Islam. One day a man came along to Ubayy and told him that ‘Uqba, his intimate companion in travels and gatherings, went to Muhammad and spoke to him softly, and Muhammad invited him over and was generous with him. He added that by then possibly ‘Uqba was already into Islam. Ubayy immediately went to ‘Uqba in extreme rage and arrogance. He said: ‘I have heard such and such about you. My face and yours shall never meet again until you go to Muhammad and spit on his face.’ Having such a lenient character, as opposed to Ubayy, ‘Uqba quickly gave in and said: ‘I will.’ And he went to execute what he had been told to do. The revelation came down thus: ‘On the day when the wrongdoer gnaws his hands, he will say: “Ah, would that I had chosen a way together with the Messenger (of Allah)! Alas for me! Ah, would that I had never taken such a one for friend! He did lead me astray from the Reminder after it had reached me.” Satan is ever man’s deserter in the hour of need.’³⁸⁵

³⁸⁵ Chapter of al-Furqan: 27-9. Cf. Ibn Hisham's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/207); al-Tabari's *Al-Tafsir* (19/8); al-Qortobi's *Al-Tafsir* (16/109); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (3/89); Ibn Kathir's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (2/51); *Sahih al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (p. 200).

Interestingly, this story portrays the life of the Arabs prior to Islam in that it exemplifies the hostile position of some of the arrogant figures of Quraish, who interfered with people's choice of religion. They would persistently stand in the way of any moderate position relative to the divine call. This kind of attitude is found in all times and all places. There are some people who will not only refuse the divine invitation, but prevent the others from accepting it as well.

The story also speaks of the generosity of the Arabs before Islam. They were known for their legendary altruism. They celebrated those values and composed refined poetry for that. It was common among them to praise their ancestors on the basis of those noble values.

So both antithetical attitudes existed at that time. While they treasured the values of generosity and nobility, Ubayy went so far as to urge 'Uqba to go and spit on the Prophet's face!

But none of them doubted at any time that Muhammad was the noblest and the greatest of all men. They all knew that his conduct and his personality led him to the top rung of glory, and that no mortal, whether at that time or at any other time, would ever be comparable to him. But it was blind hatred which ravaged their hearts and deprived them of the faculty to discern the truth. They just could not put up with the mission of the Truth.

The Man Who the Prophet Killed

Ubayy bin Khalaf always vowed to the Prophet that he would kill him some day. In retaliation, the Prophet said: '*I will kill you with the will of Allah*'. Then the battle of Uhud came and the disbelievers' army came to attack the Muslims. On his return, Ubayy swore not to leave until he killed the Prophet. Ubayy, protected by an armor which hid every part of his body but tiny openings, charged. Seeing him coming straight to him, the Prophet grabbed a spear and shot at him. He hit him at a small breach in his neck, making a little slit there. Ubayy returned to his people roaring with pain. When they saw the cut, they said: 'Such a petty cut that would not hurt even if it was in your eye!' He said: 'I swear if Muhammad

spat on me, he would kill me. Didn't you hear him say he would kill me?'

In effect, that was his end. He was the only person the Prophet killed. He killed him in self defense, not because he had said he would. The Prophet was the most generous and forgiving of all men. Thus did God put an end to Ubayy's viciousness.

The Only Unfortunate Man

Indeed Ubayy was the only person killed by the Prophet. It is important to emphasize that a man with the greatness of Muhammad killed just one person in his whole life.³⁸⁶ With a notable degree of felicity, Ibn Taymiyya said that the Prophet killed just one man in his whole life: much killing is not something we praise kings, rulers, governors, army leaders or prophets with. We praise people on how many they have given life to, not taken it away from.³⁸⁷

The Prophet Muhammad was sent by God to give life to whole nations and save them from ignorance, disarray, injustice, and loss. His mission consisted in giving a real sense to their lives. He breathed new life into their once meaningless existence. Now they turned into leaders of superlative quality. As God said, 'As for that Abode of the Hereafter, We assign it to those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption. The sequel is for those who ward off evil',³⁸⁸ and 'And We willed to do a favor to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them leaders and to make them the inheritors.'³⁸⁹

The Western opponents of the Prophet keep ignorantly portraying him as a killer who was thirsty for blood. Let them see in this account who he was: he had the obligation, not the desire, to kill a man who charged him vowing to murder him in front of

³⁸⁶ Cf. Abdurrazzaq's *Al-Musannaf* (9731); al-Tabari's *al-Tareekh* (2/67-8); al-Qortobi's *Al-Tafsir* (7/385); Ibn Kathir's *Al-Tafsir* (1/416); *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (4/23); Ibn Kathir's *al-Seera al-Nabawiyya* (3/42).

³⁸⁷ Cf. *Minhaj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*.

³⁸⁸ Chapter of al-Qassas: 83.

³⁸⁹ Ibid: 5.

others. Let them see how many people he saved – the never ending fortunate people who he has given life to.

To return to the verse, God says: ‘On the day when the wrongdoer gnaws his hands, he will say: “Ah, would that I had chosen a way together with the Messenger (of Allah)!”’³⁹⁰ When a person is angry, he often bites a finger. This verse speaks of biting both hands in turns. And he would add: “Alas for me! Ah, would that I had never taken such a one for friend! He did lead me astray from the Reminder after it had reached me.” Satan is ever man’s deserter in the hour of need.’³⁹¹

So there are two disappointments: that he did not take the way of the Messenger, and that he did not pick up the good friend who would help him to do good. Therefore, we have to be carefully selective in choosing friends. The regret which this man will express when it is too late comes from the fact that often the heart tends to side with virtue and lean towards faith-motivated enterprise. But the companions of evil inhibit such inclinations, and the individual in question misses that righteous opportunity. So we had better be highly selective of friends, for they write with us our present and our future.

³⁹⁰ Chapter of al-Furqan: 27.

³⁹¹ Ibid: 27-9.

Covering the Private Parts

Protected Well Before Prophethood

In the Sahih, a Companion of the Prophet called Jabir reports that in the Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic era), Muhammad was lending a hand by carrying building stones for the Ka'ba. His uncle, al-'Abbas, said: 'Nephew, why don't you undo your cover cloth and protect your shoulder with it against the stones?' So he did, but immediately collapsed, losing consciousness. That was the last time he was seen naked.³⁹²

This happened in the Jahiliyya. It shows how God protected His Messenger early in his life. It is mentioned in many parts of the Sunna that the Prophet did not do what other youths did, e.g., drinking or even sitting with people who were drinking. God was preparing him for Prophethood. Thus Muhammad had an early tendency to prefer worshiping and purifying his soul. He looked for opportunities to serve God and serve people. Any refined thought or act was within his area of interest. You would never find him in places contradicting these values. God purified him and perfected all aspects of his life.

Another meaning suggested by the aforementioned Hadith is that he passed out because it was not common for him to uncover himself, and he was never seen bare after that again. As for Quraish, they gave little importance to the principle of covering themselves, particularly in some cases. For example, they used to walk naked around the Ka'ba, claiming that they should not walk around it in clothes in which they had sinned. But the Prophet never consented to that even before he was formally revealed to: His Lord was always protecting him.

The Civilization of Nudity

This is an age of civilization. Obviously, part of a true civilization is to safeguard man's humanness, which distinguishes

³⁹² Reported by Ahmad (14371; 14618); al-Bukhari (364); Muslim (340); Abu Yaala (2243); al-Baihaqi (3042); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (7755); Abu Nu'aim in *al-Hilya* (3/349).

him from beasts by means of the mind, morality, decency, etc. Therefore, clothing and look are among the refined aspects of a decent culture in a decent civilization. God says in the Koran: 'We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is best.'³⁹³

It is God's grace to grant clothing to people – men and women. In the jungle, people give little importance to clothes: they do not mind uncovering their private parts without any reservation. But the more a person learns and gets refined, the more embarrassed he feels to see or let others see what he should not. Yet it is amazing to see today that the clothes, which are supposed to conceal the private parts of the body, are now used as a tool to attract people to the very parts of the body they are supposed to cover. Clothes are now among the means to call for indecency and promiscuity. Many fashion houses in the world trade on the woman's body, so that the more exhibitionistic the woman, the more warmly she is welcomed in fashion houses and on satellite channels.

Exhibitionism, employed to arouse people's sexual desire through all possible means (e.g., satellite channels, web sites and other technological means) is a satanic method. It was Satan who did or tried to do that with our parents in Paradise: he was 'stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame. He and his tribe are watching you from a position where you cannot see them: We made the devils allies (only) to those without faith.'³⁹⁴

The different channels of information which technology offers are supposed to instruct people and talk to their minds and souls to help them with their social, economic, and other problems. Their primary role is expected to be the guidance to a decent life. In actual fact, however, they compete to attract the most viewers by relying on the most exciting licentious programs. They particularly target the youths who lack prospects in life – those who find refuge in television, and spend all their time chained to it, content with watching naked bodies, and succumbing to the addictive programs

³⁹³ Chapter of al-A'raf: 26.

³⁹⁴ Chapter of al-A'raf: 27.

which do more harm to the heart than anything good. As a result, these poor youths lose any sense of striving to improve, and eventually collapse and give in once and for all. The destructive Zionists who possess the material means and the media in the West and their delegates in the East are behind this enterprise.

Where have all the instructive programs gone? Where are the serious youth programs? Television programs concerned purely with religious counseling are not the only useful thing to present. We need programs which deal with the daily issues of life; programs which prepare our young to face the challenges of life and equip them with the means to be responsible at home, at school, as civil servants, etc.

There is a category of people who have fallen victim to these media, and are controlled by their desires: they are badly and urgently in need of help. Such people, who have not been prepared to face life as they should, are largely responsible for the backwardness which the Muslim society has been living in for a while. And this has to stop now!

We are Accomplices

The values related to protecting and covering the body should be learned by all. Decency is part of our nature, particularly for women. The more bashful a woman, the better for her, and the more indicative of her femininity.

A girl has to safeguard her future, not only in her twenties, but also in her thirties, forties, fifties, and even as an elderly woman. This will help her to carry the beautiful and chaste history along with her, so that she has nothing to be ashamed of in front of her children and grandchildren.

Many of us will say that these media offer people what the people want. This is largely true. This means that there is something wrong with the viewer and with society. Many of us criticize these satellite channels in public, but they stay up until the small hours watching them. Many will curse sex channels in the day, but sneak away to watch them in the night. Of course, there is a significant difference between the programs which advertise some kinds of arousing clothes which may be used by women with their husbands

on the one hand, and, on the other hand, erotic television presentations to encourage prohibited relations.

The truth of the matter is that we, the viewers, are to blame. We are happy with those channels. We call them and send messages to them. If we had refrained from watching them and rebuffed everything which is at odds with our values and religion, we would have forced them to offer us what suits us.

Before Muhammad was a Prophet, he was never seen naked. When he was about to undo his cap and uncover his body, he collapsed so that none of his private parts were seen after that. What is weird, however, is that some people do follow him and wish to be resurrected with him and come upon his drinking place and see him. Yet they go against his way by exposing that of their bodies which should not be seen, or they enjoy watching that of other people's bodies which they are not allowed to see!

The Secure City

First House, Last House

God says in the Koran: "The first house (of worship) appointed for mankind is that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples, wherein are signs manifest, where Abraham stood. Whoever enters it attains security."³⁹⁵

God creates what He wills and chooses. And He chose this particular safe city to be a place for recurrent visits and safety. He chose His favorite house of worship here over the whole world. It is the purest and dearest of all lands to God. It is the land which He allowed people to face in the prayer and perform pilgrimage in. He selected it for the final revelation. The Prophets and messengers visited it for pilgrimage, performing the different rituals and responding to the call of God to go there. This holy place and ancient house of worship, chosen by God from above the Heavens, was also the site of other prophetic missions.

God swears by figs and olives, by Mount Sinai, and by this secure city. The figs and olives refer to the fig and olive trees at Levant, the prophethood site of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus (peace be upon them all). Mount Sinai is the mountain where Moses received the Revelation from God.

And the oath joins to them 'This secure city', where Muhammad received the Revelation. The demonstrative 'this' is most emphatic in the phrase '...And by *this* city of security'³⁹⁶. It is a land which you do see and feel, as in the verse '...And you are a free dweller in *this* city.'³⁹⁷

So you are arriving in this land and stopping at it, seeing it and perceiving what is in it. And it is the land with which people are the most familiar, the special land which God made the center of the world and the starting place of the revealed Message.

³⁹⁵ Chapter of Aal 'Imran: 96-7.

³⁹⁶ Chapter of al-Teen: 3

³⁹⁷ Chapter of al-Balad: 2.

The Prophet said: 'Islam started a stranger and will end up a stranger. It will retreat between the two Mosques as the serpent retreats to its hole.'³⁹⁸

As said above, this is the land of total safety, and the land which God protected. Even when all lands around it are unsafe, it remains safe, so that at the pre-Islamic period, a man would see the killer of his father but would not pose any threat to him there. Thus has the House of worship remained: a place of safety and peaceful retreat for all people.

This is the *Maqaam Ibrahim* (the standing place of Abraham), where there is a trace of a footstep of Abraham. The *Maqaam* may be the Mosque place itself or the city as a whole.

With the will of God, this was the last land to be conquered by the Prophet. The city was opened, and it regained its once unblemished purity when all aspects of Jahiliyya and idol worship disappeared from it. Now it was only Allah Who was worshiped, and all signs of ignorance were gone, so that all people were equal again, and virtue was the only factor making the difference.

Help from God and an Imminent Conquest

This city was conquered, the whole of Arabia was now Muslim, and the Revelation came thus:

*When the help of Allah comes and victory,
And you see people enter Allah's Religion in crowds,
Celebrate the praises of your Lord and ask for His forgiveness,
For He is ever ready to show grace and accept repentance.*³⁹⁹

The Prophet entered Mecca on his she-camel, bowing humility and total submission to God. He was not a king-prophet; he preferred to be regarded as a servant-prophet.

³⁹⁸ Reported by Ahmad (1604); Muslim (146); Abu Yaala (756).

³⁹⁹ Chapter of al-Nasr: 1-3.

It was God's triumph, not anybody else's. The Religion is God's, and the decisions are His. It was but a renewal of the previous Prophets' mission – the reason why He called it God's Triumph (cf. the first verse above). The help came from God to open Mecca, but the triumph was much broader than that. It was a long series of unwavering wide-ranging efforts. These were not merely military; they also concerned preaching on lenient and friendly bases, which employed the wisest methods and softest expressions. Fighting came only when necessary, as indicates the verse: 'Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities or transgress. Truly, Allah loves not aggressors.'⁴⁰⁰

The help came from God, the triumph did too and 'you see people enter Allah's Religion in crowds'. The aim was never to sequester people's possessions. The Prophet did not question what people owned. Besides, when the Prophet was asked if he would rest in his own house in Mecca, he said: 'Did 'Aqeel leave any houses for us!'⁴⁰¹

So the Muslims forgot about the houses and possessions which they had been dispossessed of, and they relied on God to recompense them. It was not a matter of worldly domination. This is the greatest hallmark of Islam. 'And you see people enter Allah's Religion in crowds' suggests that it was only a matter of calling people to God, Who knew that it was common for people to bully the weaker among them. But with the fear of God, these tendencies are restricted, and the believer acts according to God's instructions. This comes with patience, exercise, and struggle.

And this is exactly how the Prophet behaved with his Companions, particularly those who led armies, and the early believers, i.e., the *Muhajirun* (those who migrated from Mecca to Medina) and the *Anssar* (the residents of Medina who welcomed the *Muhajirun* in their city). Those were indeed the pioneers of mankind.

⁴⁰⁰ Chapter of al-Baqara: 190.

⁴⁰¹ Reported by al-Bukhari (1588); Muslim (1351); Ibn Majah (2730); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (4255); Ibn Hibban (5149); al-Tabarani in *al-Kabeer* (413); al-Daraqotni (3/62); al-Hakim (2/658); al-Baihaqi (12006; 18063).

They turned from shepherds to leaders of nations. They became the teachers of the human race over history.

Here was a mission whose aim was to remove all barriers inhibiting the instinctive, total and unconditional submission to the Exalted Lord.

The Beautiful Finale

*Celebrate the praises of your Lord and ask for His forgiveness,
For He is ever ready to show grace and accept repentance.*⁴⁰²

This was a hint to the Prophet that his end was drawing near. Once the Triumph was fulfilled as God had promised, it was time for exalting Him and asking Him for forgiveness, which is the way any activity should be ended: the prayer is ended with asking forgiveness; pilgrimage is completed in the same way, and so are all good deeds. Life as a whole should be concluded by asking forgiveness, too. The Prophet used to ask God to forgive him seventy times every day⁴⁰³, and according to another report, a hundred times every day⁴⁰⁴.

*Celebrate the praises of your Lord and ask for His forgiveness,
For He is ever ready to show grace and accept repentance.*

After a life of abnegation and struggle, that was how Muhammad ended his life – celebrating God’s majesty and pleading his forgiveness.

⁴⁰² Chapter of al-Nasr: 3.

⁴⁰³ Reported by Ahmad (7780; 8474); al-Bukhari (6397); Ibn Majah (3816); al-Tirmidhi (3259); al-Nassai in *al-Kubra* (10267; 10273); Ibn Hibban (925); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (2397; 4222; 8770); al-Baihaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eeman* (638-9).

⁴⁰⁴ Reported by al-Tayalisi (427); Ibn Abi Shaiba (29442; 35071); Ahmad (17881; 23410; 23469); Muslim (2702); Ibn Majah (3815); al-Tirmidhi (3259); al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* (3173); al-Hakim (1/691; 2/496).

May the Lord's eternal blessing be upon His Messenger and his family.

