

## SIGNS OF MIRACULOUSNESS



Signs of Miraculousness  
The Inimitability of  
The Qur'an's Conciseness

Bediuzzaman  
Said Nursi



Original title : Isharat al-Ijaz fi Mazann al-ijaz  
(First published 1918)

Translated by Şükran Vahide

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## Introduction

(Introduction to the first edition edited by Iḥsān Qāsim al-Ṣāliḥī, published in Baghdad: Dār al-Anbār, 1989.)

*All praise be to Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds, and blessings and peace be upon Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah, to whom the Qur’an was revealed, the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers, and upon his family and companions and those who came after them, till the end of time.*

VIRTUALLY ALL THOSE who have studied the circumstances of the Muslims in recent centuries agree that Ustad Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was an Islamic figure of great stature, of strong faith and complete sincerity; a person of great dignity who was cognizant of divine unity and its truths; one of the most distinguished men of his time, vastly knowledgeable, of penetrating thought, and a steadfast and perceptive caller to the way of Allah the Most High. From his youth he took it on himself to find solutions for the afflictions suffered by the Muslims, and passed his life tirelessly striving to expound the teachings of Islam and explain its beliefs and doctrines. Similarly, he refuted invalid thought and those inconsistent philosophies that denied Islam and schemed against it due to the inability of Muslims to withstand the stormy intellectual onslaughts to which it had been exposed since the beginning of the 14th century of the Hijra; indeed, since before that.

Nursi indeed undertook a difficult task and his reward is with Allah the Most High alone, Who sees His righteous servants and faithful friends and the scholars who strive in His way and are true to His covenant, and fear not the criticisms of their accusers.

This present book is truly of high worth, firmly founded and containing unshakeable proofs. It demonstrates clearly the extraordinary power and effectiveness of Ustad Nursi and contains many examples of the precise and subtle meanings to be found in all his writings, and of his specialist knowledge. His genius and talent were given to him by the Most High so that by means of them and his knowledge, and profound intuitive understanding, and appropriate rational method he might penetrate His Word and discover the truth, and assist others in gaining complete certainty concerning the Qur’an’s miraculousness. Just as before him the learned scholars and men of eloquence had understood the importance of belief and that the

Qur'an is the True Scripture revealed by the One All-Knowing of the Unseen to His Noble Messenger Muhammad, Upon whom be the best of peace and blessings, to set humanity on the path of truth and to illumine men's vision with the light of belief and the understanding and certainty to become sincere bondsmen of the Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds.

Ustad Nursi wanted to develop his unique gifts by studying the Islamic sciences, and ancient philosophy, and the humanities and modern sciences, as well as learning Arabic literature and rhetoric from the works of such masters as al-Jāhīz, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Sakkākī, and especially the outstanding works on grammar and rhetoric of Imam 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. For Nursi believed in his famous theory concerning the Qur'an's composition (*nazm*) and indicated his admiration for it in this work.

The theory of its composition was not new; al-Jurjānī did not invent it and it was not without precedents. For al-Jāhīz had turned his attention to it in his work *Nazm al-Qur'ān*, and so had al-Wāsiṭī, in his *I'jāz al-Qur'ān fī Nazmihi*, and al-Bāqillānī, in *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*; it was that al-Jurjānī, clarified it fully in respect of grammar and rhetoric and formulated a complete theory based on the absence of any disjunction between the words and their meaning and the form and its purport, and he established that the eloquence of the composition lay neither in individual words nor in detached meanings, but in what the words and phrases depicted. In consequence, he defined the composition as "some words being affixed to others and some being placed because of others; that is, words being positioned as required by the science of grammar, in accordance with its rules and principles, and methods, without deviation from them."

It seems to me that Ustad Nursi studied this theory of the Qur'an's composition thoroughly and then it became clear to him that the earlier commentators like al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and Abū Su'ūd had not attempted to apply it as a complete system treating all the suras, verses, and words one after the other, in all its details. So he wanted to emulate these great commentators, but to compose a commentary in which the theory was applied in detail and comprehensively in respect of the structures and meanings, and the wording and its related sciences, both rational and intuitive, universal and particular. He relied on all these while disclosing the Qur'an's systematic ordering, through which its miraculousness and inimitability become apparent. He disclosed too and elucidated the subtle qualities of the literary styles and devices of the Qur'an, which when it first appeared opposed some current usages of Arabic, and astounded the Arab orators and silenced their eloquent masters. It confronted them with the challenge of its miraculousness, and so it will till the Last Day.

It was not only to prove the Qur'an's miraculousness in respect of elo-

quence and rhetoric that Nursi directed his efforts towards explicating the theory of its composition; it was to penetrate into the meanings of the verses, for he wanted to expound them in detail in the light of reason in order to set forth the main beliefs of Islam and demonstrate their relations with the truths of existence.

It is quite obvious to anyone who studies this book and its arrangement that Nursi wanted to write a complete commentary of this sort. If he had been destined to do this, he would have produced a comprehensive commentary treating both rhetoric and eloquence and laying emphasis on reason, and this would have been fit to be his lifework. Certainly, it would have run to many volumes if he had continued to follow a method similar to that which we see here.

Allah the Most High, however, appointed for him something better than that; something higher and greater: to present the Qur'an to Muslims without distracting them with questions of rhetoric and the aspect of its miraculousness that pertains to its words, for the difficulties of the times prevented investigation of its finer questions, which could be understood only by a very few scholars. If it had been otherwise, the great majority of Muslims would have been unable to benefit from his unique talents and unrivalled zeal and faith. And then they would have been unequal to the awesome ongoing struggle of civilization and ideas, despite the attacks of atheistic materialism, which was bit by bit infiltrating the life of Islam, and in many Muslim countries the politics, economics, society, culture, and science, and their proponents.

Consequently, Nursi did not continue after this volume; the circumstances of the time and place thrust him into the thick of the fight, but with a new persona, called the New Said, the mark of which was calmness, gradualness, and holding out a constructive approach, and affecting the minds and hearts of Muslims without emotionalism, noisy agitation, confusion, confrontation, or striving for dominance. For the situation of Islam at the present time does not support such things; it does not have the power to face its powerful enemies, both external and internal.

With its decisive clarity, brilliant learned sedateness, highly pleasurable manner of expression, and cogent rational proofs, the *Risale-i Nur* replaces the former works the purpose of which was to prove aspects of the Qur'an's miraculousness pertaining to its words, rhetoric, and reason in the light of its composition. For now the Qur'an's enemies are not qualified to challenge its eloquence or dispute its properties related to its inimitability, or suras, verses, and words. So they have concentrated on launching a general assault on the foundations of belief and the principles of the Shari'a and have attempted to shatter the moral order that the Qur'an brought.

Ustad Nursi perceived the tremendous changes brought about by the new struggle and he faced them with the truths of the Qur'an which he presented in the light of natural, rational logic and the sciences of his time.

Nursi was able to prove the Qur'an's miraculous nature on the basis of the completed section of his commentary comprising this present work, and to demonstrate to his readers and students that it is easy to adhere to his rational, learned, pleasurable way. He saw that it was appropriate and sufficient, so he dedicated the rest of his life to the most pressing question, that of saving the belief of Muslims at the time of an awesome worldwide struggle. As a result he wrote more than ten books and numerous treatises, which represented a new way, in order to inflict intellectual defeat on the atheistic enemies of Islam and those pursuing Westernization.

It would be an injustice to the present work to suggest that it contains nothing of the method Ustad Nursi developed for the new struggle; indeed, I can claim here from what I have learnt about his thought through reading his works of the later period, that there is no idea that he expounds, explains, and expands in those works but it is found in concise and essential form, or is elaborated, in this learned and substantial book, especially his presenting the fundamental Islamic beliefs in a contemporary scientific style. However in this book he was addressing his select students, combining the terminology of classical *kalām* and the beginnings of his new method, which found its definitive form in the *Risale-i Nur*.

Perhaps it was because it is a true commentary on the Qur'an that the *Risale-i Nur* was given this name, and in truth Nursi persisted in expounding the Qur'an and teaching its verses to Muslims until the final moments of his life, so full of tribulations and sorrows, and knowledge and learning and calling others to adhere to Allah's Book and the Sunna of His Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace).

The publication of this book in new form offers a fresh analysis of rhetoric and eloquence to those concerned with the critical study of contemporary works on the Qur'an's miraculousness, inimitability, and eloquence - especially scholarly circles. They will find expositions of the beliefs of Islam that utilize logical reasoning, augmented by the profound rational and scholarly discussions that Ustad Nursi appends to his analyses of the first part of Sura al-Baqara. (...)

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## Reminder

THE QUR'ANIC commentary *Signs of Miraculousness (Ishārāt al-I'jāz)* was written on the front in the first year of the Great War when no books or sources were available. Apart from the War, there were four reasons for its being written extremely concisely. Sūra al-Fātiḥa and the first half are more concise and succinct.

*Firstly:* The time did not permit elucidation; the Old Said expressed what he intended succinctly and briefly.

*Secondly:* He had in mind his students' level of comprehension, and they were highly intelligent; he did not give thought to others understanding it.

*Thirdly:* Because he was expounding the miraculousness of the Qur'an's composition, which is of the greatest conciseness and subtlety, the Old Said wrote briefly and to the point. But I have reread it now with the New Said's eyes: in truth, notwithstanding all the Old Said's faults, with its elevated discussions this work is a masterpiece. Since when he wrote it he was in a constant state of readiness to fall in battle; and since his intention was pure and he wrote it in conformity with the rules of rhetoric and the sciences of Arabic, I [now] have been unable to refute any part of it. If Allah so wishes, He will accept the work as atonement for the Old Said's sins and will raise up people who will understand it completely.

If obstacles had not arisen such as the First War, and other fascicles and letters had included other exegetical truths similar to the miraculousness of the Qur'an's composition – one aspect of its miraculousness – which is expounded in this first volume, a fine comprehensive commentary would have been produced on the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition. Perhaps in the future, taking this partial commentary and the sixty-six, rather, one hundred and thirty parts of *The Words (Sözler)* and *Letters (Mektûbat)* as its source, a fortunate committee will write such a commentary, God willing.

*Said Nursi*

## The Author's Note to the Turkish Edition (1955)

EXPLAINED below in three points are the reasons many minor points about the relations [between the words in the light of the science] of rhetoric, which will not be comprehensible and profitable for many people, are mentioned in this commentary interspersed among the detailed explanations of the twelve verses about dissemblers and two verses about unbelievers, while in the rest of the verses the nature of disbelief and the doubts clung on to by the dissemblers are touched on only briefly; and why the elucidation of the subtle indications and allusions of the Qur'an's words is emphasized.

*First Point:* Inspired by the Qur'anic teachings, the Old Said perceived that something would emerge at this time similar to the obdurate, unlettered unbelievers of the early years of Islam and the dissembling members of former religions, and he expounded the verses about the dissemblers in explanatory and detailed fashion. But so as not to cloud the readers' minds, he mentioned only briefly without explaining them the nature of their way and its bases. In any event, contrary to other *'ulama*, it is the way of the *Risale-i Nur* not to mention the doubts of opponents lest they taint the readers' minds, and to give such answers that no place remains for suspicion or doubts. Like in the *Risale-i Nur*, so as not to confuse the readers' minds, the Old Said only gave importance in this commentary to the indications and allusions of the words in respect of eloquence.

*Second Point:* Since the Qur'an's letters are so valuable that the reading of a single letter may yield ten, a hundred, a thousand, or thousands of merits and everlasting fruits of the hereafter, certainly the Old Said's expounding in this commentary points as fine as a hair or an atom related to the Qur'an's words, is not wastefulness or irrelevant, but as valuable as the lashes are to the eye and atoms are to the eye's pupil. He must have felt this, for the enemy's bullets in the skirmishing lines in that terrible war did not confuse him or make him abandon his writing and thinking.

*Third Point:* The Turkish translation [of the author's brother, Abdülmeçid]<sup>1</sup> has not preserved the fluency, eloquence, and extraordinary value

of the Arabic, and it is also sometimes abbreviated. I had therefore intended not to publish part of the lengthy discussion about the dissemlers. But since it is about the Qur'an, and even an atom about the Qur'an has high value, it will perhaps be useful for some people. God willing, if no obstacles arise, the Arabic commentary will be published following this translation and will complete its deficiencies. Moreover, there are some wonderful instances of 'coincidences'<sup>2</sup> in the Arabic in which human will has not intervened. So as far as it is possible the attempt should be made to produce it similarly to that printed copy, so that those wonders, a sign of its acceptance, are not lost.

*Said Nursi*

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1. Abdülmecid ('Abd al-Majīd) was Said Nursi's younger brother. He was a teacher of the religious sciences, then a Mufti, and translated parts of the *Risale-i Nur* in Arabic, and *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* and *al-Mathnawī al-'Arabī al-Nūrī* (*Mesnevî-i Nûriye*) from Arabic into Turkish. He died in 1967. (Tr.)

2. Coincidence (T. *tevâfûk*; Ar. *tawâfuq*) refers to the unintentional correspondence of letters or words in lines or patterns on one or several pages. (Tr.)

## Statement of Purpose

THE QUR'AN OF MIGHTY STATURE is an all-embracing divine speech and universal dominical address delivered from the Sublime Throne that addresses all the classes, nations, and members of mankind in every age. So also, and especially at this time, does it encompass many sciences and branches of learning related to the physical aspects of the world, knowledge of which is beyond the capacity of a single person or small group. Therefore, a commentary issuing from the understanding and imaginative power of one person the scope of whose comprehension is very narrow with regard to time, place, and specialization, cannot truly expound the Qur'an, for he cannot be acquainted with and be an expert in all the exact sciences and the branches of knowledge concerned with the spiritual and material states of nations and peoples, all of whom the Qur'an addresses. And he cannot be free of bias towards his own profession and discipline that he might explicate the truths of the Qur'an impartially. Also, a person's understanding is peculiar to him and he may not call on others to accept it – unless it is affirmed by a consensus of some sort. And his findings [and judgements] related to actions are binding only on himself and no one else, again unless approved by a consensus.

In consequence of this, a commentary should be written after minute studies and researches by an elevated committee of authoritative scholars each of whom is a specialist in a number of sciences, proving the Qur'an's subtle meanings and its fine points to be found scattered through other commentaries, and its truths, which become manifest in time due to the discoveries of science. Just as its legal ordinances have to be ordered and regulated, not according to the thought of a single person, but by such a committee after being scrutinized and studied minutely by it. Thus, gaining the trust and confidence of the mass of the people, the committee will implicitly assume responsibility for them and be an authoritative source for the Muslim community.

Indeed, one who expounds the Qur'an should possess high intelligence, penetrating independent judgement, and a high degree of sainthood. But in these times in particular, such conditions can be met only by the brilliant

collective personality born of the co-operation of an elevated, esteemed committee and the uniting of the minds of its members, of their assistance for one another and harmony of spirit, and of their freedom of thought, and, being free of bias, of their complete sincerity. Only a collective personality such as this can expound the Qur'an. For in accordance with the rule, "What is not found in the parts is present in the whole," these qualities which are not to be found in any one person are present in the group.

While awaiting, as I had for many years, the appearance of such a committee, I had a premonition that we were on the eve of a terrible earthquake that would lay waste the country.<sup>1</sup> And so, in accordance with the rule, "It is not permissible to abandon a thing completely even if it is not wholly obtained," despite my impotence, faults, and difficult style of writing, I started to set down on my own some of the Qur'an's truths and some indications of the miraculous inimitability of its composition. Then, on the Great War breaking out I found myself in the mountains and valleys of Erzurum and Pasinler. Whenever the opportunity arose while I was performing the duty of jihad in the midst of those tumultuous conditions, I used to write what occurred to my heart in phrases that did not always match one another. Since it was not possible to have any books or commentaries to refer to, what I wrote consisted only of what occurred to my heart. If these inspirations of mine are appropriate for a commentary, light of lights; if they contain contradictory aspects, these can be referred to my own defects. Certainly, there are places in need of correction, but since it was written with complete sincerity in the front lines of war among the slain, like it is not permissible to change the clothes and wash off blood of martyrs, I could not permit the ripped phrases in which it was clothed to be changed; my heart would not consent to it. And now it does not consent to it, for now at this time, I cannot find that utter sincerity and purity of heart.

Furthermore, I did not write this work of mine, called *Signs of Miraculousness (Ishārāt al-I'jāz)*, with the intention of its being a true commentary; only, in the event of its being well received, I wrote it as a model and source for a commentary to be written in the future, that treated a few aspects of Qur'anic exegesis. My eagerness drove me to what was beyond my power; if it is found acceptable it will give me the courage to continue.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Yes, our master said while teaching us on the roof of the Horhor Medrese in Van that there was going to be a terrible earthquake, and exactly as he predicted, a short time later the Great War broke out.

(His students of the time) *Hamza, Mehmed Şefik, Mehmed Mihrî*

2. See, the author's note at the end of the work.

## What is the Qur'an? How is it defined?

THE QUR'AN is the pre-eternal translator of the mighty book of the universe; the post-eternal interpreter of the various tongues reciting the verses of creation; the commentator of the book of the Worlds of the Seen and the Unseen; the revealer of the treasures of the divine names hidden in the heavens and on the earth; the key to the truths concealed beneath the lines of events; the tongue of the Unseen World in the Manifest World; the treasury of the post-eternal favours of the Most Merciful and of the pre-eternal addresses of that Most Holy One, that come from the World of the Unseen beyond the veil of this Manifest World; it is the sun, foundation, and plan of the spiritual world of Islam; the sacred map of the worlds of the hereafter; the expounding word, lucid exposition, decisive proof, and clear interpreter of the divine essence, attributes, names, and functions; it is the instructor of the world of humanity; the light and water of Islam, the macroanthropos; the true wisdom of humankind; and the true guide and leader urging humanity to prosperity and happiness; it is both a book of law, and a book of prayer, and a book of wisdom, and a book of worship, and a book of command and summons, and a book of invocation, and a book of thought; it is a unique, comprehensive sacred book comprising many books to which recourse may be had for the needs of all humankind; it is a revealed scripture resembling a sacred library that offers treatises suitable for the various ways and different paths of all the saints and the veracious ones and the wise and the learned, which is appropriate for the illuminations of each way and enlightens it, and is suitable for the course of each path and depicts it.

Since the Qur'an has come from the Sublime Throne and the greatest name, and from the highest degree of each name, it is Allah's Word in regard to His being Lord and Sustainer (*Rabb*) of all the worlds; it is a divine decree through His title of God of All Beings; it is an address in the name of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth; it is a conversation in respect of absolute dominicality (*rubûbiyet*); it is a pre-eternal discourse on account of universal divine sovereignty; it is a notebook of the favours of the Most Merciful from the point of view of all-embracing, all-

encompassing divine mercy; it is a collection of addresses at the start of which are certain ciphers related to the tremendousness of divine majesty; and through its descent from the comprehensiveness of the greatest name, it is a holy scripture full of wisdom that looks to and inspects all sides of the Sublime Throne.

It is because of this mystery that with complete fitness the title of the Word of Allah has been given to the Qur'an, and is always given. After the Qur'an comes the level of the books and scriptures of the other prophets. However, those other innumerable divine words are each in the form of inspiration made manifest through a special regard, a partial title, a particular manifestation, a specific name, a special dominicality, a particular sovereignty, a special mercy. The inspirations of the angels and man and the animals vary greatly with regard to universality and particularity.

The Qur'an is a revealed scripture which contains in summary the books of all the prophets, whose times were all different, the writings of all the saints, whose paths are all different, and the works of all the purified scholars, whose ways are all different. Its six aspects are all brilliant and free of the darkness of doubts and scepticism; its point of support is certain heavenly revelation and the pre-eternal Word; its aim and goal is self-evidently eternal happiness; its inner aspect is clearly pure guidance; its upper aspect is necessarily the lights of belief; its lower aspect is undeniably evidence and proof; its right aspect is evidently the surrender of the heart and conscience; its left aspect is manifestly the subjugation of the reason and intellect; its fruit is indisputably the mercy of the Most Merciful and the realm of Paradise; and its rank and desirability are assuredly accepted by the angels and man and the jinn.

(from The Twenty-Fifth Word, written 1927)

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ \* الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِیْنَ \*  
 الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ \* مَالِكِ یَوْمِ الدِّیْنِ \* اِیَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَاِیَّاكَ  
 نَسْتَعِیْنُ \* اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِیْمَ \* صِرَاطَ الَّذِیْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ  
 عَلَیْهِمْ غَیْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَیْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّیْنَ

*In the Name of Allah, the Merciful the Compassionate. \* All praise be to Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of All the Worlds; \* The Merciful, the Compassionate; \* Master of the Day of Judgement; \* You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help; \* Guide us to the Straight Path; \* The path of those whom You have blessed, not of those who earn Your anger, nor of those who go astray. (Bismillāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm; \* al-Hamd li-llāh Rabb al-‘ālamīn, \* al-Rahmān al-Rahīm, \* Mālik yawm al-dīn; \* Iyyāka na‘budu wa iyyāka nasta‘īn; \* Ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, \* al-Ṣirāṭ alladhīna an‘amta ‘alayhim, ghayr al-maghḍūb ‘alayhim, wa lā ḍāllīn.)*

# Sūra al-Fātiḥa

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.*

*The Most Merciful. \* It is He who has taught the Qur'an. \* He has created man. \* He has taught him [articulate thought and] speech. (55:1-4)*

*We offer Him praise and thanks, and seek His blessings for His Prophet, whom He sent as a mercy to all the worlds, and through its signs and indications made his greatest miracle encompass the universe's truths, so to remain permanently through the passage of time till the Day of Requital, and for all his Family and Companions.*

**S** O KNOW *firstly* that our aim from these indications, is a commentary on a number of the symbols of the Qur'an's ordering and composition (*naẓm*), for [one aspect of] its miraculousness is manifested in its composition. Indeed, the embroidery of its composition is its most brilliant [form of] miraculousness.

And know *secondly* that the fundamental aims of the Qur'an and its essential elements are fourfold: divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), prophethood (*al-nubūwwa*), the resurrection of the dead (*al-ḥaṣhr*), and justice (*al-'adāla*).<sup>1</sup> For when mankind, like a successive caravan and procession, departs from the valleys of the past and its lands, travels in the deserts of existence and life and proceeds towards the heights of the future, facing towards its

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1. In the Turkish translation (1955), the author added "worship (*ibâdet*)" to the fourth aim, making it "justice and worship."

gardens, events shake men and the universe turns its face towards them. It is as though the government of creation sends natural philosophy [or science] (*fann al-ḥikma*) to interrogate and question them, saying: “O mankind! Where are you from? Where are you going? What are you doing? Who is your ruler? And who is your spokesman?” At one time during this conversation there stood up one from among mankind – as did those like him of the prophets with authority – the lord of mankind Muhammad al-Hashimi (UWBP), and said through the tongue of the Qur’an: “O philosophy! All of us beings we come forth emerging by the power of the Pre-Eternal Ruler from the darkness of non-existence to the light of existence, and all of us, we sons of Adam, are sent as officials privileged above our brother creatures in bearing the Trust; we are on our way, journeying on the road of the resurrection towards eternal felicity; and we are busy in this world in preparation of that felicity and the development of the potentialities that are our capital; and I am their master and their spokesman. Here it is before you, my manifesto, which is the word of the Pre-Eternal Ruler on which sparkles the stamp of miraculousness.” Thus, the answerer of these questions, the correct answer, is none other than the Qur’an, that book – the answer is those four fundamental principles.

Just as the four aims are seen in the whole of the Qur’an, so they are manifested in every sura; indeed, they are hinted at in every phrase or alluded to in every word; because each part is like a mirror to the whole ascending, just as the whole is seen in each part successively. And by this point I mean that by this participation of the part (*al-juz’*) in the whole (*al-kull*), the Qur’an is made known as a totality (*al-kullī*) with constituent parts (*al-juz’iyyāt*).<sup>2</sup>

• *If you were to ask:* Show me these four aims in “*Bismillāh – In the Name of Allah*” and “*al-ḥamdulillāh – all praise be to Allah*.”

*You would be told:* Since “*Bismillāh*” was revealed in order to instruct [the Most High’s] servants, ‘Say!’ (*Qul*) is implicit in it and essentially it is implied by [all] the words of the Qur’an. So according to this, there is in ‘Say!’ (*Qul*) an indication to prophethood; and in “*Bismillāh*” a sign to the Godhead; and in the prefixing of [the preposition] “*bi-*” of “*bismillāh*” a sign to divine unity;<sup>3</sup> and in “*the Most Merciful (al-Raḥmān)*” an allusion

2. That is, every part of the Qur’an is a whole Qur’an. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Turk. trans. Abdülmecid Nursî] (Istanbul: Zehra Yayıncılık, 1999), 22.

3. The genitive construction here (*jārr wa majrūr*) expresses restriction. See, Abdülmecid, 23.

to the order [of the universe, and therefore to] justice and beneficence; and in “*the Most Compassionate (al-Rahīm)*” a hint to the resurrection of the dead. Likewise, in “*all praise be to Allah (al-ḥamdulillāh)*” is an indication to the Godhead; and in the *lām* of specification (the “*li-*” of “*li-llāh*”) a sign to divine unity. And in “*Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds (Rabb al-‘ālamīn)*” is a hint to justice, and also to prophethood, for the prophets are the educators of humankind. And in “*Master of the Day of Judgement (Mālik yawm al-dīn)*” is an explicit statement of resurrection. Likewise, the shell of *Innā a‘ṭaynāka’l-kawthar*<sup>4</sup> contains these pearls [of the Qur’an’s four main aims]. This is an example, so carry on in the same way.

“*In the name of Allah (Bismillāh)*” is like the sun, which illumines itself as well as others and is self-sufficient. Thus, the “*In (bi-)*” is related to the verb that is implicit in its meaning; that is, “I seek help from it;” or the meaning usually associated with it; that is, “I swear by it.” Or it is related to the implicit ‘Say!’ (*Qul*), which necessitates a subsequent ‘recite!’ or ‘read!’ (*iqrā’*) to denote sincerity and divine unity.<sup>5</sup>

As for “*name (al-ism)*” know that Allah has names pertaining to His essence, and names pertaining to various sorts of action, such as Forgiving, Provider, Giver of Life, and Dealer of Death, and so on. They are various and numerous because of the multiplicity of the relations of His pre-eternal power with the different kinds of beings. Therefore, “*Bismillāh*” is an invocation, seeking the agency and connection of divine power, that its connection might be a spirit for man and a help for him in his actions.

“*Allāh:*” the proper name of Allah is a comprehensive summary of all the attributes of perfection, for it implies the Essence, unlike other proper nouns, in which there is no necessary implication of attributes.

“*The Most Merciful, the All-Compassionate (al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm)*” .

**The positioning (*naẓm*):** just as divine glory (*jalāl*) and its concomitants are manifested in sequence from the name of “*Allāh*,” so too divine beauty (*jamāl*) and its concomitants appear in sequence from “*the Most Merciful, the All-Compassionate (al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm)*.” Since Glory and Beauty are two sources, there appear in sequence from them by virtue of their being manifest in every world, branches like command and prohibition,

4. Sura 108, Sūra al-Kawthar, one of the shortest of the Qur’an’s suras.

5. Related to and following the genitive construction, these implied verbs denote restriction, which in turn denotes sincerity and divine unity. See, Nursi, *Iṣṣârâtü’l-İ‘caz* [Abdülmeçid], 24.

reward and punishment, inducement and threat, glorification and praise, and fear and hope, and so on.

Also, just as the name of “*Allāh*” indicates the attributes that are identical with His Essence and indicate His freedom from defect (*al-ṣifāt al-‘ayniyya wa’l-tanzīhiyya*), so “*All-Compassionate (al-Raḥīm)*” hints at the attributes that are other than His Essence and pertain to action (*al-ṣifāt al-ghayriyya al-fi’liyya*). As for “*Most Merciful (al-Raḥmān)*,” it indicates the seven attributes that are neither identical with nor other than His Essence (*lā ‘ayn wa lā ghayr*), since it has the meaning of the Provider (*al-Razzāq*) and consists of the bestowal of continuance. For continuance is the repetition of existence; and existence necessitates a distinguishing attribute, a specifying attribute, and an effectuating attribute, and these are Knowledge, Will, and Power. Continuance, which is the result of the bestowal of sustenance, entails the certainty of Sight, Hearing, and Speech, for necessarily the Provider has sight in order to see the need of the recipient of providence if he does not seek it; and He has hearing in order to hear the recipient’s word when he asks; and He has speech in order to speak through intermediaries, when there are some. And these six necessitate the seventh, which is Life.

• *If you were to ask:* The precedence of “*Most Merciful (al-Raḥmān)*,” which indicates great bounties, over “*All-Compassionate (al-Raḥīm)*,” which indicates minute bounties, is the art of descending from great to small (*ṣan‘at al-tadallī*). While eloquence (*al-balāgha*) requires an ascent from lowest to highest (*ṣan‘at al-taraqqī*)?

*You would be told:* The latter is appended to the former in order to complete it, like eyebrows complete the eyes and the bridle the horse. Similarly, when the great depends on the minute the minute gains the superiority, like the key to the lock and the tongue to the spirit. Furthermore, this context (lit. station – *al-maqām*) being one of drawing attention to the bounties [rather than enumerating them or evoking gratitude for them], to alert [the reader to this fact since it is] less obvious is more appropriate. So the art of descending from great to small when (lit. in the context of) enumerating bounties and evoking gratitude for them becomes the art of ascending from small to great when alerting [the mind to them] and pointing them out.

• *If you were to ask:* Like such concepts as tender-heartedness, Merciful and Compassionate cannot be used in reference to the Most High. If what is meant by these is their results, which here would be the bestowal of bounty, what is the reason for such figures of speech (*al-majāz*)?

*You would be told:* The reason is that of the allegorical verses (*al-mutashābihāt*):<sup>6</sup> it is divine condescension to human intellects; making something familiar to the mind and inducing it to understand, like one speaks to a child in terms he is accustomed to and familiar with. The mass of the people gather their information from their senses and they do not look at sheer truths except in the mirror of what they imagine them to be and from the point of view of that to which they are accustomed. Moreover, the aim of the phrase is to convey the meaning, and this is not achieved except by affecting the heart and emotions, and by clothing the truth in a style familiar to the one addressed; in this way his heart is prepared to accept it.

“[All] *praise* (*al-Ḥamd*)”

#### **Its positioning as regards what precedes it**

Since “*the Most Merciful* (*al-Raḥmān*)” and “*the All-Compassionate* (*al-Raḥīm*)” indicate the [divine] bounties and favours, they necessitate praise. Furthermore, “*All praise be to Allah* (*al-ḥamduli’llāh*)” is repeated in four suras in the Qur’an,<sup>7</sup> each repetition referring to one of the principal bounties, which are the first creation and the continuation of it, and the last creation and its ensuing continuation.

#### **Its positioning here**

[“*All praise be to Allah* (*al-ḥamduli’llāh*)”] being put at the opening of the *Fātiḥa* of the Qur’an is like putting the conception of the Qur’an’s ultimate purpose in the forefront of the brain, for praise is a concise form of worship, which is the result of creation, and of knowledge of Allah, which is the purpose and aim of the universe. So to mention praise is to conceive of the Qur’an’s ultimate purpose. Indeed, Allah (May He be exalted and glorified) says: “*I created not the jinn and men except that they might worship.*” (51:56)

Furthermore, there is the well-known meaning of praise: the display of the attributes of perfection.

***How this is achieved:*** Allah created man and made him a comprehensive summary of the universe and an index of the book of the world, which comprises eighteen thousand worlds, and lodged in his essence a sample from each, in which is manifested one of His names. If man spends all of what is bestowed on him in the way of that for which he was created, for

6. Meanings that cannot be applied literally to God Almighty, such as “the hand” in the verse, “The hand of Allah is over their hands.” (48:10) See, Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ’caz* [Abdülmeçid], 26.

7. Suras al-An‘ām, al-Kahf, Sabā’, al-Fāṭir.

the purpose of offering thanks, a sort of praise, and obeying the Shari‘a, which removes the rust of nature, each of those samples becomes a map [illuminating] his world, and a mirror reflecting it and the attribute manifested in it and the name it displays. In this way, with both spirit and body, man becomes a summary of the worlds of the seen and unseen, and manifests what is manifested in them. Through offering praise he becomes both a place of demonstration and a demonstrator of the attributes of perfection. This is implied by what Muḥyī al-Dīn al-‘Arabī<sup>8</sup> said in explanation of the Hadith: “I was a hidden treasure, so I created creation that they might know Me.”<sup>9</sup> That is, I created creation to be a mirror in which I might observe My beauty.

“**[Be] to Allah (li’llāh)**”

That is, praise (*ḥamd*) is particular to and fitting only for the Most Pure and Holy Essence, who although specified is described by the concept of the Necessarily Existent One. For sometimes something specific may be thought of in general terms. The letter *lām* (the *li-* of *li’llāh*) here is dependent on the verb implied by its meaning, as though it had absorbed the verb’s meaning.<sup>10</sup> In the *lām* is also a sign to sincerity and divine unity.

“**Lord and Sustainer (Rabb)**”

That is, He who raises and sustains the universe with all its component parts, each of which is a world like the greater world, with all its atoms, like its stars dispersed, in motion, in order.

Know that Allah (May His glory be exalted) appointed for everything a point of perfection and deposited in each an inclination towards it, as though commanding it through this inclination to set out for the point of perfection. In its journey each thing stands in need of what will help it and what will repulse the things that hinder it, and this is the sustaining of Allah. If you study the universe, you will see that it resembles human groups and

8. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) was born in Andalus. He earned the title ‘al-Shaykh al-Akbar.’ Of his numerous works and treatises the most famous are *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. For further details, see, Nürsī, *Ishārāt al-I’jāz fī Maḥānn al-Ījāz*. Ed. İḥsān Qāsim al-Şālīḥi (Istanbul: Sözlük Yayınevi, 1414/1994), 27.

9. See, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durar al-Muntathira*, 125; ‘Alī al-Qārī, *al-Āthār al-Marfū‘a*, 273. This Hadith’s line of transmission is not known, but according to the latter it is sound in meaning, based on the verse, “I created not the jinn and men except that they might worship,” (51:57) that is, “that they might know Me;” as expounded by Ibn ‘Abbās. See, al-‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khafā’* ii, 132. As cited in, Nürsī, *Ishārāt al-I’jāz* [İḥsān Qāsim], 27.

10. That is, “Praise is particular to Allah” has become “[All] praise is Allah’s.” See, Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ‘câz* [T. tr. Bahaeddin Sağlam] (Istanbul: Tebliğ Yayınları, 2001), 26.

nations, with each thing individually and collectively employed in the duties its Maker has appointed for it, striving diligently, obeying the laws of its Creator. How surprising therefore is man, in his being an exception!

“*Of all the worlds (al-‘ālamīn)*”

The *yā* and *nūn* [that is, the two final letters] denote either a grammatical ending as in the numbers twenty (*‘ishrīn*) and thirty (*thalāthīn*), or the [sound] plural. For the components of the worlds are worlds, or the world is not limited to the solar system. As the poet<sup>11</sup> says:

*Praise be to Allah, how numerous are His celestial spheres!  
Among them circulate the stars, and the sun and the moon.*

The sound plural, [properly used] for rational beings, as in the verse “*Ra’aytuhum lī sājidīn (I saw them prostrate themselves before me),*”(12:4) indicates that [the science of] rhetoric conceives of all the components of the world as living and rational, speaking through the tongue of disposition. For the world (*‘ālam*) is so-called because through it the Maker is known (*yu‘lam*), and it bears witness to Him and points to Him. Thus, the raising and sustaining of beings and their making known their Maker indicate, like the prostration, that they are as though conscious.

“*The Most Merciful, the All-Compassionate (al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm)*”

**Their positioning:** they point to the two fundamentals in raising and nurturing. For in its meaning of Provider (*al-Razzāq*), Most Merciful infers the attraction of benefits, while in its meaning of Oft-Forgiving (*al-Ghaḥfār*), All-Compassionate is conformable with the repulsion of harm, and these are the two basic principles of raising and sustaining.

“*Master of the Day [of Judgement] (Mālik Yawm al-Dīn)*”

That is, the day of resurrection and requital.

**The positioning:** it is as though it is the result of what precedes it, for mercy (*raḥma*) is one of the proofs of resurrection and eternal felicity. For mercy can only be mercy, and bounty can only be bounty when the Resurrection arrives and eternal felicity comes about. Otherwise, on thinking of eternal separation, intelligence, which is one of the greatest bounties, would be a calamity for mankind, and affection and compassion, which are the most refined kinds of mercy, would be transformed into severe pain.

11. Abū'l-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī. The original is:

*Yā ayyuhā'l-nās kam li-llāh min falak \* Tajrī'l-nujūm bi-hi wa'l-shams wa'l-qamar.*

• *If you were to ask:* Allah is always the owner of everything, so why is the Day of Requit specified?

*You would be told:* It is specified in order to indicate that apparent causes, which Allah the Most High has put in the world of change to demonstrate His sublimity – lest the direct functioning of the Hand of Power be seen by the mind’s eye in matters that appear to be lowly in their outward (*mulk*) aspect, will be raised on that day, and their inner aspect (*mal-akūtiyya*) will be manifested clearly and transparently. Then all things will see and know their Lord and Maker without intermediary.

And in the term “*the Day (al-yawm)*” is an allusion to one of the conjectural signs of the resurrection, related to the evident correspondence between a day and a year, and the life of man and the cycle of the earth. So it is between the hands of a clock that count the seconds, the minutes, the hours, and the days. Thus, the person who sees that one hand has completed its revolution will surmise that the others will complete their revolutions too, even if with delay. Similarly, the person who sees the repeated resurrections of the species in the examples of the day and the year will surmise that the spring of eternal felicity will be born on the morning of the Day of Resurrection for mankind, one individual of which is like a species.

What is meant by “*al-Dīn*” is either requital, that is, the day of requital for good deeds and bad, or of the truths of religion; that is, the day they will rise and be totally manifested, and the sphere of belief will prevail over the sphere of causes. For by relating causes to effects, Allah has deposited an order in the universe through His will, and obliged man through his nature, illusions, and imagination, to comply with the order and be bound to it. Moreover, He directed all things towards Himself and is far above the effect of the causes in His dominions (*mulk*). He charged man in belief and faith, to comply with this sphere with his conscience and his spirit, and be bound to it. For in this world, the sphere of causes predominates over the sphere of belief, while in the next world the truths of belief will be manifested as supreme over the sphere of causes.

Know too that each of the two spheres has its appointed position and particular rules, so each should be given its due. Thus, the person who looks from the position of the causal world with his nature, delusions, and imagination and the criteria of causes towards the sphere of belief is forced to be Mu’tazilite, while a person who looks from the position of belief and its criteria with his spirit and conscience towards the sphere of causes will end

up displaying a lazy sort of trust and obstinate opposition to the will of the Orderer.<sup>12</sup>

“*You alone do we worship (Iyyāka na‘budu)*”

Two points may be made concerning the letter *kāf* [in the detached accusative pronoun *iyyāka*]:

*The first* of them is that by reason of the direct form of address [that is, the change to the second person after the use of the third],<sup>13</sup> the pronominal suffix “-ka – you” implies the attributes of perfection mentioned previously. For the previous mention [of the attributes] one after the other stimulates the brain, preparing it, filling it with enthusiasm, and directing the attention to the One described. Thus, “*You alone (iyyāka)*” means “O You Who is qualified by these attributes!”

*The second point*: the use of the second person indicates that according to the science of rhetoric the meanings should be dwelt on, for then it will be read as it was revealed, and this will lead the person to make the address naturally and enthusiastically. Hence, “*You alone (iyyāka)*” implies compliance with [the Hadith] “Worship your Lord as if you were seeing Him.”<sup>14</sup>

The use of the first person plural in “*do we worship (na‘budu)*” has three aspects: *firstly*, we worship, all of us members and atoms of the microcosm that is myself, by offering the thanks expressed by all these members and atoms complying with that which they have been commanded. *Secondly*, all of us monotheists, we worship You through obedience to your Shari‘a. *And thirdly*, all of us beings, we submit totally to your Supreme Shari‘a of Creation, and we prostrate in bewilderment and love at the throne of your awesomeness and power.

**The positioning:** “*Do we worship (na‘budu)*” elucidates and expounds “*praise*” (*al-ḥamd*). [That is, it explains the form praise should take.] It is the result of “*Master of the Day of Judgement (mālik al-yawm al-dīn)*” and necessitates it. [That is, “We worship Him alone because He is the Owner of all things.”]<sup>15</sup>

Know too that the precedence of “*You alone (iyyāka)*” infers sincerity, the essence of worship, while the use of the second person indicates the

12. This refers to the Jabriyya (Predestinationists).

13. This refers to the widely used rhetorical device called *iltifāt*.

14. See, al-Ṭabarānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1049. It’s complete form is narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim. See, Nūrsī, *Ishārāt al-I‘jāz* [Iḥsān Qāsim], 30.

15. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü l-İ‘câz* [Sağlam], 31.

reason for worship, for the One qualified by these attributes, which call for direct address, is worthy of worship.

**“And from You alone do we seek help (wa iyyāka nasta’īn)”**

In respect of the three groups mentioned above, this is the same as “*You alone do we worship:*” all of us members of man the microcosm, and us monotheists, and us beings, we seek help and assistance from You for all our needs and aims, the most important of which is worship. The “*You alone (iyyāka)*” is repeated to increase the pleasure of the address and sense of presence; and because the station (*maqām*) of meeting face to face is higher and more exalted than the station of proof [in the absence of the one addressed]; and because presence calls for truthfulness and not for lying; and because worship and the seeking of help are two different, independent aims.

**The positioning** of “*do we seek help*” and “*do we worship:*” you should understand that the relationship between them resembles the relationship of wages with service. For worship is Allah’s right over His bondsman [worship is a form of service], and the help is His bountiful bestowal [or reward].

In the exclusivity implied by the precedence of “*You alone*” is an indication to the fact that through the noble relation that is worship and the service of Allah, the bondsman is raised up from subjection to causes and intermediaries; indeed, the causes become his servants, and since he recognizes the One alone, [for him] the sphere of belief and conscience will come to dominate, as mentioned. The person who is not truly Allah’s servant becomes a slave to causes and is abased by intermediaries. However, while in the sphere of causes the bondsman should not neglect causes altogether lest he comes to rebel against the order established by divine wisdom and will, for misplaced reliance on Allah while in the sphere of causes is laziness, as discussed. This is like the relationship of the antecedent and the aim, for help and grace are the preliminaries of worship.

**“Guide us (Ihdinā)”**

**The positioning:** it is the bondsman’s reply to Allah’s question, as if He asks: “What aim is closest to your heart?” and the bondsman replies: “Guide us!”

Know that because of its several levels of meaning, it is as if “*Guide us*” is derived from the four sources [or verbal nouns – *maṣdar*] of the act of guidance. For its recipients may be divided into those who are guided, those who seek guidance, and those who seek increase in guidance. So

“*Guide us*” means: make us firm in guidance if we are a society; increase us in guidance if we are a community; make us successful in guidance if we are a tribe; give us guidance if we are a group.

Also, according to the verse, “*Who gives unto every thing [that exists] its true nature and form, and thereupon guides it,*”(20:50) Allah guided us by giving us external and inner senses; then He guided us by placing evidences in the outside world and in ourselves; then He guided us by sending prophets and revealing books. And then He guided us with the greatest guidance, which was that by removing the veils from the truth, it appeared as truth and falsehood appeared as falsehood.

*O Lord! Show us what is indeed the truth and empower us to follow it, and show us the false for what it is, and enable us to avoid it.*

“***The Straight Path*** (*al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*)”

Know that the Straight Path is justice, consisting of the blending and summary of wisdom (*ḥikma*), chastity (*‘iffa*), and courage (*shajā’a*), which are the mean or middle way of the three degrees of man’s three powers.

To explain: When Allah (May He be exalted and glorified!) housed spirit (*rūḥ*) in man’s body, which is changing, needy, and exposed to dangers, He deposited three powers in it to ensure its continued existence.

*The First:* The power of animal appetites to attract benefits.

*The Second:* The power of savage passion to repulse harmful and destructive things.

*The Third:* The power of angelic intellect to distinguish between benefit and harm.

However, since His wisdom necessitated that humanity should achieve perfection through the mystery of competition, Allah placed no innate limitation on these powers, as He did on those of other living beings. He did however limit them through the Shari‘a, for it prohibits excess (*ifrāt*) and deficiency (*tafrīt*) and enjoins the middle way (*wasaf*). This is what is inferred by the verse “*Pursue then the right course as you have been bidden.*”(11:112) In the absence of any innate limitation, three degrees arise in the three powers: the degree of deficiency, which is negligence; the degree of superabundance, which is excess; and the middle way, which is justice.

Thus, deficiency in the power of intellect is stupidity and foolishness, and its excess, perfidious deception and over-meticulousness in trivialities, and its middle way is wisdom. “*He who has been given wisdom, has been given great good.*”(2:269)

Know that just as the power varies in these degrees, so does each of its branches vary. For example, in the question of the creation of actions, the middle way is that of the Sunni School between the Jabriyya and the Mu'tazila, and in the question of doctrine, the school of divine unity is the middle way between the denial of the divine attributes (*ta'tīl*) and anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). You can make further examples in the same way.

Deficiency in the power of animal appetites is apathy and want of appetite, while its excess is profligacy, which is to desire whatever is encountered whether lawful or unlawful. Its middle way is uprightness, which is desiring what is licit and shunning what is illicit. You may apply the principle applied to this power to any of its branches, such as eating, drinking, dressing, and so on.

Deficiency in the power of savage passion is cowardice, that is, fear of what is not to be feared and delusive imagining. Its excess is uncontrolled anger, which is the progenitor of despotism, domination, and tyranny. And its middle way is courage, which is giving freely of oneself with love and eagerness for the defence of the laws of Islam and the upholding of the word of divine unity. Apply this same principle to each of its branches.

The six extremes are thus tyranny and the three middle ways are justice, which is the Straight Path and is to act in accordance with "*Pursue then the right course as you have been bidden.*"(11:112) Whoever passes along this way will cross the bridge suspended over the Fire.

***"The path of those whom You have blessed (Ṣirāṭ alladhīna an'amta 'alayhim)"***

Consider this: The positioning of the Qur'an's words like pearls is not on one string, but in a multiplicity of embroideries resulting from the interweaving of lines of different relationships, close and distant, apparent and hidden. For the basis of the miraculousness after the conciseness is this embroidery.

For example, "*The way of those whom You have blessed (Ṣirāṭ alladhīna an'amta 'alayhim)*" has a relationship with "*All praise be to God*" because bounty (*al-ni'ma*) is the corollary of "*praise*;"

- and with "*Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds*" because perfect sustaining and raising is through the continual bestowal of bounties (*al-ni'am*);

- and with "*the Most Merciful, All-Compassionate,*" because the recipients of bounty – I mean the prophets, the martyrs who witness to the

Truth, and the righteous – are a mercy to the worlds and evident exemplars of mercy;

- and with “*Owner of the Day of Judgement (mālik al-yawm ad-dīn)*,” because religion (*dīn*) is the perfect bounty;
- and with “*do we worship*,” because they are foremost in worship;
- and with “*do we seek help*,” because they have been graced with success in response to their request for help;
- and with “*Guide us*,” because according to the meaning of “*Follow then their guidance*,”(6:90) they are the finest models;
- and with “*the Straight Path*,” because clearly the straight path is confined to their way. This is an example, so carry on in the same way.

In the word “*path (al-ṣirāṭ)*” is an indication that their way is passable, and has restricted sides so that those who travel down it will not stray from it.

In “*those whom (alladhīna)*” – since it is a relative pronoun and it is the function of the relative pronoun to describe things known to the listener – is an indication to the exaltedness of their rank, and their refulgent shining in the darkness of mankind, as if they are obvious to all listeners even if they do not search or enquire. While its being plural indicates the possibility of following their way, and corroborated by the constant consensus concerning it, its rightness, since “Allah’s power is with the community.”<sup>16</sup>

In the use of the perfect tense for “*You have blessed (an‘amta)*” is a hint to the means of requesting further bounty. And its use of the second person, addressing Allah directly, indicates that it is an intercessor, as though one is saying: “O my God! You are the bestower of bounty and in Your grace have bestowed it before; so bestow it on me again, even though I am not worthy.”

And in “*on them (‘alayhim)*” is an indication to the heavy burden that is divine messengership and the bearing of the Trust, and a sign that the Messengers are like high mountains on which pour down torrents of rain so that the plains may be flooded. As one part of the Qur’an expounds another, how beautifully “*Those whom You have blessed*” is expounded by “*[they] are in the company of those on whom is the grace of Allah – of the prophets, the veracious, the witnesses, and the righteous*”(4:69)!

- *If you were to ask*: The outlooks of the prophets are all different and their ways of worship are diverse. What is the reason for this?

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16. This is a Hadith the original of which is given by al-Tirmidhī as “The hand of Allah is over the community,” al-‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khafā’*, ii, 391. For more details, see, Nūrsī, *Ishārāt al-I’jāz* [Iḥsān Qāsim], 34.

*You would be told:* The prophets are all followed in the principles of belief and fundamental rules, for these are constant and fixed; unlike secondary matters, the nature of which is to change in the course of time. Just as the four seasons and the stages in a person's life warrant different remedies and clothing – what is a cure at one time may cause illness at another – so the stages of the life of humanity necessitate differences in rules of secondary importance, which are healing for spirits and nourishment for hearts.

**“Not of those who earn Your anger (ghayri'l-maghdūbi ‘alayhim)”**

**The positioning:** Know that in being a station of fear and flight, this station has a relationship with those preceding it. For a person looks in bewilderment and terror towards the station of dominicality signified by Glory and Beauty; he looks seeking refuge towards the station of worship in “*do we worship;*” in his impotence he looks towards the station of reliance in “*do we seek help;*” and seeking consolation he looks towards its constant companion; that is, the station of hope and relief. For what occurs first to the heart of one who sees something terrifying is a sense of bewilderment, then he wants to flee, then having realized his impotence it occurs to him to rely on Allah, and then he receives solace.

- *If you were to ask:* Allah (May He be exalted) is All-Wise and Self-Sufficient, so what is the wisdom in the creation of evil, ugliness, and misguidance in the world?

*You would be told:* Know that perfection, good, and beauty are essentially what are intended in the universe, and are in the majority. Relatively, defects, evil, and ugliness are in the minority, and are insignificant, secondary, and trivial. Their Creator created them interspersed among good and perfection not for their own sakes, but as preliminaries and units of measurement for the appearance, or existence, of the relative truths of good and perfection.

- *If you were to ask:* So what is the importance of the relative truths for the sake of which partial evil is approved?

*You would be told:* Relative truths are the ties between beings and the threads with which their order is woven. They are the rays from which is reflected each unique being of the species in the universe. Relative truths are thousands of times more numerous than real truths, for if the real attributes of a person were sevenfold, the relative truths would be seven hundred. A lesser evil may therefore be forgiven, approved even, for the sake of the greater good. For to abandon the greater good because it contains

some lesser evil, is a greater evil. And in the view of wisdom, if the lesser evil encounters the greater evil, the lesser evil becomes a relative good, as has been established in principle in *zakāt* and *jihād*, for example. As is well known, “things are known through their opposites,” which means that the existence of a thing’s opposite causes the manifestation and existence of its relative truths. For example, if there were no ugliness and it did not permeate beauty, the existence of beauty with its infinite degrees would not be apparent.

• *If you were to ask:* What is the reason for the different forms of the following three words: “*an‘amta – You have blessed*” being a verb, “*al-maghḍūb – earn [Your] anger*” being a passive participle, and “*aḍ-ḍāllīn – those who go astray*” being an active participle? Also, what is the reason for the following differences being mentioned: the attribute of the third group, the outcome of the second, which is the result of its attributes, and the exact terms of the first?

*You would be told:* The term bounty (or blessings) is chosen because bounty is a delight to which the spirit inclines, and it is in the past tense because this intimates that it is the mark of the Absolutely Generous One not to take back what He gives. By drawing attention to this practice of the Bestower of Bounty, it also suggests a way of reaching what is requested, as if one was saying: “Since it is Your practice to bestow bounties and You have bestowed them previously, bestow them on me too.”

As for “*Not of those who earn Your anger,*” by it is meant those who exceed the limits of the power of passion, and have committed injustice and depravity by abandoning the rules. Since there is in the essence of depravity and injustice an evil pleasure and vicious pride that do not sicken the soul, the Qur’an mentions a consequence that does sicken it, and that is the descent of divine wrath. The fact that a passive participle has been chosen implies continuation and this is an indication that rebelliousness and evil become ineradicable characteristics if they are not halted by repentance and forgiveness.

**“*Nor of those who go astray (wa lā ḍāllīn)*”**

This refers to those who have strayed from the path because delusion and passion have overridden the intellect and conscience, and they have fallen into hypocrisy through false belief. The Qur’an has chosen to describe it thus because misguidance is itself pain; the soul is sickened by it, and the spirit avoids it even it has not seen its result. And the active participle has

been chosen because misguidance will be misguidance so long as it is not halted.

Know too that all pain lies in misguidance and all pleasure is found in belief. If you wish, consider the state of a person whom the Hand of Power has taken out of the darkness of non-existence and flung into the world, that vast and frightening desert. When he opens his eyes seeking compassion, he sees afflictions and calamities besetting him like enemies. Seeking mercy, he looks to the elements and natural causes, and finds them stony-hearted and relentless, baring their teeth at him. Seeking help he raises his gaze to the celestial bodies and sees them awesome and bewildering; threatening him as though they were projectiles of fire issuing from huge mouths and encircling him. In bewilderment he lowers his head, and shielding it, starts to ponder. Then he hears the thousand screams of his needs and the moaning of his wants. Fearfully, he looks to his conscience seeking relief, and is met with thousands of vast and overwhelming hopes which cannot be satisfied in this world. For God's sake, what is the state of this person if he does not believe in the first creation and the resurrection of the dead, and in the Creator and Last Judgement? Do you imagine the sufferings of Hell would be severer for him, searing his soul more terribly? For his state is one of compounded anxiety, terror, impotence, trembling, fearfulness, orphanhood, and despair. If he considers his power, he will see himself to be impotent and weak. If he tries to quieten his needs, he will realize that they cannot be quietened. If he shouts and calls for help, he will not be heard and he will not be helped. He supposes everything to be hostile. He imagines everything to be strange, so feels no familiarity. He does not look to the revolutions of the celestial bodies except with fear, bewilderment, and fright, which disturbs his conscience.

Now consider the state of this person if he is on the Straight Path and his conscience and spirit are illuminated with the light of belief: you will see that when he enters this world, opens his eyes, and beholds the assaults of all the things around him, he discerns a support on which to lean in the face of these onslaughts, and this is recognition of the Creator, so he will find rest.

Then if he examines his innate disposition, potentialities, and hopes, which extend to eternity, he will perceive a source of assistance. He seeks help from it for his hopes, for from it is drawn the water of life, which is knowledge of eternal felicity. And if he raises his head and looks at the universe, he will feel a familiarity with everything; he will sense familiarity

and affection coming from every flower. He will see in the motions of the heavenly bodies the wisdom of their Creator, and he will receive pleasure from their progress. Gazing on them, he will take a lesson and reflect. It is as if the sun is beckoning to him, saying: “My brother! Don’t be frightened of me, I welcome your arrival. Both of us are servants of the One Being, obedient to His command.” The moon, the stars, the sea, and their sisters will call each with her particular tongue. Waving to him, they will say: “Welcome! Don’t you know us? We are all busy in the service of your Owner. Do not feel dismay or fright, nor be distressed by the threat of the calamities with their bared teeth, for the reins of all things are in your Creator’s hand.”

Thus, in the first situation, the person feels a terrible distress in the depths of his conscience. He will be compelled to rid himself of it and to soothe and deaden his senses through diversions, feigning unawareness and busying himself with trivia, so to deceive his conscience and numb his spirit. He will otherwise feel an acute pain in the depths of his conscience, and its effect will be apparent to the degree he is distant from the true path. As for the second situation, there the person feels in the depths of his spirit a great delight and immediate happiness. Whenever his heart awakens and his conscience stirs and his spirit is moved, his happiness will increase and he will receive the good news that the doors of a spiritual paradise are being flung open to him.

# Sūra al-Baqara

(The first of the two Radiant Suras)<sup>1</sup>

**I** F YOU WERE TO ASK: The Qur'an is both miraculous and concise, yet in it some things are apparently frequently repeated, such as the *Bismillāh* (*In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate*), and the verses “*Then which of the favours of your Lord and Sustainer will you deny?*” (55:13, 16, 18 etc.) and “*Ah woe that Day to the rejecters of truth!*” (77:15, 19, 24 etc.) and the story of Moses. Aren't such repetitions tedious and contrary to eloquence?<sup>2</sup>

*You would be told:* Everything that shines does not scorch. Yes, repetitions are sometimes tedious, but not always. Sometimes they are boring, and sometimes appreciated and admired. The food man eats includes both basic sustenance and fruit. The more the former is repeated, the greater the pleasure it affords; it gives strength and the body becomes accustomed to it. But the latter gives rise to boredom when repeated and provides pleasure when replaced with something new.

In just the same way, some words and speech are reality (*ḥaqīqa*) and basic sustenance; they strengthen the mind and feed the spirit. The more they are repeated, the better they seem and the more familiar they become, like sunlight. Then others are like fruits and embellishments; they give pleasure on being varied in respect of sort and appearance (lit. apparel).

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1. In is narrated from Abū Umāma al-Bāhili: “I heard Allah's Messenger (UWBP) say: ‘Read the Qur'an for on the Last Day it will be an intercessor for its adherents. Read the two Radiant Suras (*al-Zahrāwayn*), al-Baqara and Sūra Āl-i 'Imrān...’” al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak* (Beirut, n.d.), i, 553, 554; ii, 287. For other sources see, Abdülkadir Badıllı, *Risale-i Nur'un Kudsî Kaynakları* (Istanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1994), 810.

2. For a discussion on repetition in the Qur'an, see the Tenth Topic of the Eleventh Ray (written 1944). Nursi, *The Rays Collection* [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sözlük Publications, 2002), 262-72.

Having understood this, you should know that as a whole the Qur’an is sustenance for hearts and strength and its repetition causes not boredom, but for the most part delight and pleasure. Similarly, in the Qur’an are parts that are the spirit of that sustenance and strength; the more they are repeated, the more brilliantly they shine, scattering lights of truth and reality. Among these latter are some like the “*Bismillāh (In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)*” that are essential principles, sources of life, and embodied eternal lights. Savour them, if you have any taste! But this is dependent on acceptance of the repetitions. The story of Moses may be taken as an example: in each place (*maqām*) [it is found, it is repeated] for one of the aspects it comprises. It is more useful than the parts of his staff; the Qur’an takes it as silver in its white, shining hand and pours it out as gold so that the sorcerers of rhetoric prostrated before its eloquence.

Similarly, in the “*Bismillāh*” there are different facets, some expressing the seeking of help and blessings; some looking to the subject [of the sura in question], indeed, its aim; others indicating that it is an index of the fundamental points of the Qur’an.

Also contained in the “*Bismillāh*” are different levels [of meaning], those of divine unity (*tawhīd*), and declaring Allah free of human attributes (*tan-zīh*), and praise, and divine glory (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*), and that of working righteousness (*ihsān*), and so on.

The “*Bismillāh*” also infers various ordinances: for instance, it indicates divine unity, prophethood, the resurrection of the dead, and justice; that is, the Qur’an’s well-known four [main] aims. Most suras have [only] one of them as its primary aim, while the rest are secondary. So why shouldn’t one of the *Bismillāh*’s facets or ordinances or levels [of meaning] have a particular relation with the spirit of the sura [in question], and be the topic of that context, indeed, a concise index of all those aspects and levels?

# Verse 1

(The Disjointed Letters)

آلَم

“*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” There are four topics related to these.

## **First Topic**

The Qur’an’s miraculousness and inimitability rise from the horizon of the Disjointed Letters, for it is a light manifested from the blending of the corruscating subtleties of eloquence (or rhetoric – *al-balāgha*). This topic contains many fine points, but whatever their tenuousness a true dawn breaks from their totality.

*Firstly:* “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*,” together with the other Disjointed Letters at the start of some suras, their sisters, consist of half the letters in the alphabet, the basic elements of all words. That is, the Qur’an uses half the twenty-eight letters and disregards half. Ponder over this!

*Secondly:* The half it takes are more commonly used than those it leaves.

*Thirdly:* Of the letters it takes, the Qur’an repeats those easiest on the tongue, like *Alif* and *Lām*.

*Fourthly:* It mentions the Disjointed Letters at the start of twenty-nine suras, which corresponds to the number of letters of the alphabet.<sup>3</sup>

*Fifthly:* It takes half of those letters that have pairs, like the concealed (*mahmūsa*), the emphatic (*majhūra*), the stressed (*shadīda*), the soft (*rakhwa*), and the *musta’liya*, *munḥafiḍa*, and *munḥafiḥa* letters, and the rest of them. Of those that have no pairs (*awtār*), it takes fewer of the ‘heavy’ like the tremolo (*qalqala*), and more of the ‘light,’ like the labiolinguals (*dhallāqa*).

*Sixthly:* Those it uses of these are finer in character.

*Seventhly:* The way the Qur’an has chosen for [selecting] the Disjointed Letters is one out of five hundred and four possibilities, and this is the only possible way of halving the letters [of the alphabet] with their particular

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3. If *Hamza* is counted, there are twenty-nine letters in the Arabic alphabet.

characters. For the divisions [into different groups of letters] are interwoven and one within the other, as well as being dissimilar. Each of these divisions is truly remarkable and singular. So if a person fails to appreciate the light of miraculousness born of the blending of these rays, he has only his own lack of discernment to blame.

### ***Second Topic***

“*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” are each like the rap of a knocker; they rouse the listener, alerting him through their singularity that they are the harbingers of something strange and remarkable. This topic also contains a number of subtleties.

*Firstly:* The disjoining of the letters and their being spelled out by name indicates that what they signify is of the same kind as themselves.

*Secondly:* These letters being disjoined indicates that what they signify is assumedly one and not compound.

*Thirdly:* The spelling out of the letters by disjoining them is an indication that it is alluding to the material of the art, as though providing pen and paper for those wanting to dispute them by writing. It is as if the Qur’an is saying: “Hey you obstinate rivals, you’re the masters of fine speech! You have at your disposal the materials I had when I devised these. You do likewise if you can!”

*Fourthly:* Being devoid of meaning, the disjoining of the letters indicates that [the Qur’an’s] opponents have been left without proof. For they say: “We don’t know the facts, stories, and ordinances that we might dispute you.” So it appears the Qur’an is saying: “I only want you to produce [something similar to] the eloquent composition (*naẓm al-balāgha*) [of the letters], even if it’s made up.”

*Fifthly:* Calling the letters by their names is the custom of scholars and writers. But both the one uttering this speech and those listening to him were unlettered. Considering its character, therefore, the letters being in this unexpected form infers that “this speech is not his but was imparted to him.”

*Sixthly:* Spelling out letters syllable-by-syllable is characteristic of those learning to read and write. It is understood from this that the Qur’an was establishing a new way and was teaching illiterate people.

Those who cannot see the elevated art in the interweaving of these lines – though admittedly some are very fine – are novices to the art of eloquence, so should apply to its adepts!

### *Third Topic*

“*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” indicate the ultimate conciseness, which is the second of the two principles of [the Qur’an’s] miraculousness. This topic comprises a number of fine points.

*First:* “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” indicate, allude to, hint, intimate, and suggest the [following] successive parabolic analogy (*al-qiyās al-tamthīlī al-mutasalsil*): “This is the pre-eternal speech of Allah, which Gabriel brought down to Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon them both).” For sometimes the ordinances laid down in the whole Qur’an are set out in summary in a single long sura; and sometimes a long sura is represented allusively in a short one; and sometimes a short sura is included symbolically in a single verse; and sometimes a verse is indicated in a single sentence; and sometimes a sentence is hinted at in a single word; and sometimes too such a comprehensive word may be discerned in the disjointed letters, like in *Sīn. Lām. Mīm.* Similarly, the whole Qur’an may be discerned in *Sūra al-Baqara*; and *al-Baqara* in *Sūra al-Fātiḥa*; and *al-Fātiḥa* in “*Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*,” and “*Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*” in a chiselled or sculpted “*Bismillāh.*” The same goes for “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” On the strength of this successive parabolic comparison, and as indicated by “*This is the Book,*” manifested from “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” [is the meaning]: “This is Allah’s pre-eternal speech, which Gabriel brought down to Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace).”

*Second:* The Disjointed Letters are divine cyphers communicated by [the Most High] to His Messenger, who holds the key, to which the human mind has not yet attained.

*Third:* “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” show the acute intelligence of the one to whom they were revealed, for he understood what was only allusive, symbolic, and obscure as though it were explicit and clear.

*Fourth:* The disjointing of these letters indicates that the value of the letters lies not in their meanings but in their natural mutual relationships, like the relationships between numbers. The science of the hidden properties of letters (*‘ilm asrār al-ḥurūf*) has discovered these relationships.

*Fifth:* In particular, “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” indicate by their being disjointed the three main points of articulating sound: the throat, the mouth, and the lips. And this in turn infers that the attention will be caught and the veil of familiarity rent, driving one to study the wondrous colours of the embroidery of the letters’ creation.

You who is washed in the colours of the art of eloquence! Assemble the

various pieces of these fine points and gaze on them as a whole, then listen to their reciting to you: “This is Allah’s Word!”

#### ***Fourth Topic***

It is as though when “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” and their sisters appear in this form that they are declaring: “We are leaders; we imitate no one and follow none. Our style is original and our manner, singular.” This topic too contains a number of subtleties.

*First:* It is the custom of orators and eloquent speakers to always adhere to patterns and embroider examples and to follow well-trodden paths. But these letters are virginal, untouched by man or jinn.

*Second:* From beginning to end, the Qur’an is as it was at first. Although out of their longing, its friends have wanted to imitate it, and likewise its enemies out of their desire to challenge it, it has never been imitated nor has anything similar been achieved. If you want proof of this, take a look at the millions of Arabic books! Are any equal to the Qur’an, or even close to it? No! Even an ignorant illiterate would exclaim if he were to compare them to it: “The Qur’an is not of their level!” It is either inferior to all of them, and this is impossible; or it is superior, and this is as it should be. It would fall to his lot to perceive this much of its miraculousness.

*Third:* It is the mark of human art that at first it emerges crude and deficient in many respects. It is dry and lacking in grace. Only later is it perfected and made pleasing. The Qur’an’s style, however, was graceful, fresh, and young when it first appeared, and it still challenges the human mind, which has grown old through the combining of ideas and plagiarizing them. It has triumphed over all of them, proclaiming through its victory that it is the art of the Creator of all powers and destiny.

O you who sniffs at the breeze of eloquence! Doesn’t the bee of your mind gather from the blossoms of these four topics the honey of “I testify that this is the Word of Allah!”?

## Verse 2

ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيْهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ

*This is the Book concerning which is no doubt, guidance sure for those who fear Allah. (Dhālika al-kitāb lā rayba fī-hi hudan li'l-muttaqīn.)*

### Introduction

Consider this: One of the principles of eloquence that beautifies speech making it sparkle is that all the sentences and words respond to each other and evoke each other while looking to the underlying aim. Thus, to the extent of its power each strengthens the aim, which is like the confluence of rivers or a pool fed from all sides, confirming and illustrating the saying:

*Our phrases are diverse but your beauty is one  
And each of us points to that loveliness.*

Consider, for example, the verse “*But if a breath of your Sustainer’s punishment touches them,*”(21:46) it frightens by alluding to a small amount of punishment, like two negatives making a positive. It points out the terrible-ness of the punishment by showing the severity of the least amount.

Don’t you see how the word “*if (wa la’in)*” signifies doubt, and doubt looks to littleness or fewness; and the word “*touches (massa)*” means to touch lightly and expresses a small amount; and the word “*a breath (nafḥa)*” is merely a whiff and is in the singular form, which express little-ness or fewness, as does the *tanwīn* indicating indefiniteness; and the parti-tive “*of (min)*” signifies division or a part; it means a bit and indicates pau-city; and the word “*punishment (adhāb)*” points to a light sort of punishment rather than chastisement (*nakāl*), and suggests a small amount; and by alluding to compassion, the word “*Lord and Sustainer (Rabb)*” indi-cates littleness or fewness?

Now compare the others with this and see how each in its particular way assists the main aim. Make analogies with this verse for its brothers. Especially, “*Alif Lām. Mīm. \* This is the Book concerning which is no doubt, guidance sure for those who fear Allah*” – for its purpose is to praise the Qur’an and prove its perfections. The parts of the verse all point harmoniously to this aim: in one respect, the oath [expressed by] “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.;*” and “*this (dhālika)*”<sup>4</sup> being a demonstrative pronoun and denoting tangible things and distance; the definite article ‘*al*’ in “*the Book (al-kitāb);*” and the proof [indicated by] “*in which there is no doubt (lā rayba fih).*” Each of these phrases assists the main aim, adding its own share, revealing from beneath it the evidences that rest upon it, even if they are slight.

If you wish, consider “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.;*” in so far as it is an oath, it is both corroborative, and it imparts the idea of [the Qur’an’s] greatness. So too, as proof of what it is alluding to, it draws attention to the subtleties underlying [the letters], mentioned in the four Topics above.

Now consider the demonstrative pronoun “*this (dhālika);*” It is used to refer to the essence and attributes [of tangible things], and so both denotes [the Qur’an’s] greatness – because it indicates either what “*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” are alluding to, or what is foretold in the Torah and Gospels – and it points to the evidences underlying it. So how great, how perfect is the thing sworn by [that is, the Qur’an], that is foretold in the Torah and Gospels!

Next scrutinize carefully this demonstrative pronoun, which although properly used for tangible things, here alludes to something mental (*al-amr al-ma’qūl*), and you will see that just as it infers greatness and importance, so it indicates that the Qur’an attracts minds like a magnet, drawing everyone’s gaze upon itself and preoccupying their imaginations. [The ‘mental’ Qur’an] is therefore shown to be at such a level that if one consults one’s imagination even it will appear behind it. Thus, by its very nature [this demonstrative pronoun] infers that [the Qur’an] is veracious and trustworthy and free of weakness and trickery, since these should be concealed.

Then ponder over the distance suggested by the ‘*lika*’ of “*dhālika – this;*” It indicates both the Qur’an’s elevated rank, which points to its perfection, and that it is far above any attempts to imitate it. For it is either inferior to all of these [attempts], and this is impossible as is unanimously agreed, or it is superior to all.

Next study the definite article “*al*” of “*the Book (al-kitāb);*” Since it expresses restriction, it indicates the Qur’an’s sublimity and opens the door

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4. The demonstrative pronoun *dhālika* is usually translated “that.”

to comparison, and hints that it not only gathers together in itself the virtues of all the [revealed] scriptures, but adds to them and is therefore the most complete of them. Then dwell on the expression “*the Book*” and see how it hints that it could not be the fabrication of someone unlettered who knew neither reading nor writing.

**“Concerning which is no doubt (*lā rayba fīh*)”**

There are two aspects to “*concerning which* (lit. *in*) (*fīhi*):” [The pronominal suffix *-hi*] refers either to [this] statement or to “*the Book*.” According to the first, [as asserted in] *Miftāh*,<sup>5</sup> it means “certainly and without doubt,” so is further indirect proof of [the Qur’an’s] perfection. According to the second, as stated in *al-Kashshāf*,<sup>6</sup> it confirms the existence of the Qur’an’s perfections. And both say that from beneath “*concerning which is no doubt (lā rayba fīh)*” whispers the verse, “*And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed step by step to our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto,*”(2:23) pointing to its specific evidence. And because the [negating particle] “*lā*” of “*concerning which is no doubt (lā rayba fīh)*” is absolute, it dispels all possible doubts, and also recites the lines:

*How many correct words are thought to be faulty,  
While their only fault lies in the hearer’s understanding.<sup>7</sup>*

It indicates too that the Qur’an cannot give rise to doubts, for within it are such signs and indications that from all sides they mass together and repulse the assaulting doubts.

And in the adverbiality (or ‘containing’ – *zarfiyya*) of “*concerning which* (lit. *in*) (*fīhi*)” and the choice of “*fī*” in place of other prepositions is a sign that one’s gaze should penetrate to the Qur’an’s interior and that its truths will chase away any unfounded suspicions that may alight on its exterior due to a superficial view.

Friend! Now that you have discerned the value of [this] compound [sentence] through analyzing it, and perceived the difference between the whole and its parts, take a glance at its words and phrases and see how each contributes its share to the joint aim with its own particular evidence, and how the light of eloquence flares up on every side.

Consider this: The reason the phrases “*Alif. Lām. Mīm. \* This is the*

5. *Miftāh al-‘Ulūm* by Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1228), about language, literature, and poetry. It was the most comprehensive work of his time on rhetoric and ‘*ilm al-bayān*’.

6. *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl* by Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144).

7. Al-Mutanabbī, *Diwān*, iv, 246.

*Book ... concerning which is no doubt... guidance sure for those who fear Allah*” are not linked by conjunctions is their intense union and mutual embrace; each seizes the hand of the one preceding it and the coat-tails of the one following it. For in one way each is proof of all of them and in another it is their result.

[The Qur’an’s] miraculousness is inscribed on this verse [as though it were] an embroidery woven of twelve intricately interwoven lines of relations. If you would like to see it in detail, [firstly] study “*Alif. Lām. Mīm,*” for they imply this meaning: “These [letters] are issuing a challenge; is there anyone to answer it?” Then consider “*This is the Book;*” for it states clearly that it surpasses all its fellows and has superseded them, thus inferring that it is exceptional and without peer. Then ponder over “*concerning which is no doubt,*” for it states explicitly that there is no room for doubt, thus proclaiming that [the Qur’an] is illumined with the light of certainty. Then consider “*guidance sure for those who fear Allah,*” for it is informing you that it points out the straight path and is an embodied light of guidance. Thus, in respect of the first meaning each phrase is a proof of its fellows, and in regard to the second meaning all are the result of each of them.

Now, by way of example, we shall mention three of the twelve relations, and you can make analogies with them for the rest.

“*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*” That is, this book challenges all who oppose it; it must therefore be the best of books; it therefore expresses certainty; for the best book is one that is certain; so it must be embodied guidance for mankind.

Then “*This is the Book:*” That is, this book is superior to anything resembling it so it must be miraculous. Or, it is exceptional and distinguished; for there is no doubt concerning it; because it points out the level path to those who fear Allah.

Then, “*Guidance sure for those who fear Allah:*” That is, it guides to the straight path; so it must be certain; so it is exceptional; so it is miraculous.

You can now deduce the rest for yourself.

**“*Guidance sure for those who fear Allah (hudan li’l-muttaqīn)*”**

You should be aware that the beauty of this phrase wells up from four points:

*The First:* The omission of the subject, which indicates that the subject and predicate have united and that the statement [expressed] is accepted. As though in essence the subject is within the predicate, and they are not differentiated between in the mind even.

*The Second:* The substitution of the active participle by the verbal noun,

in which is an allusion to the fact that the light of guidance has been embodied and become the very substance of the Qur'an. Like if the colour red is embodied, it becomes carmine.<sup>8</sup>

*The Third:* The use of the indefinite for “*guidance (hudan)*,” which alludes to the infinite subtlety of the Qur'an's guidance, the essence of which is unfathomable, and to its utmost breadth, which is unencompassable by knowledge. For the indefinite infers either subtlety and concealment, or unencompassable breadth. It is because of this that it is used sometimes to disparage and sometimes to exalt.

*The Fourth:* The conciseness (*ījāz*) of “*for those who fear Allah (li'l-muttaqīn)*,” which is used instead of a longer phrase like “the people who have become pious through the Qur'an,” indicates the result rather than what precedes it (*al-majāz al-awwal*), and points to the fruits of guidance and its effects. This hints at the argument from effect to cause (*al-burhān al-innī*) for the existence of guidance. So the listener in one century has the evidence of preceding centuries, just as he will be evidence for those that succeed him.

• *If you were to ask:* How can eloquence that is beyond human power be born of these few points?

*You would be told:* A great mystery lies in mutual assistance and union. For by virtue of the mystery of reflection, when three beautiful things come together, they become five; and five become ten; and ten become forty. For in each is a sort of reflection and it represents [the beauty] to a degree. Like there appear to be many mirrors when two mirrors are put face to face; or if you shine a lamp at them, the reflection of its rays will increase the light. Similar to this is the combining of a number of points. It is also due to this mystery that you will see that the beautiful and the accomplished all have a natural inclination to join with others similar to them so as to increase their beauty. Stones even, despite their being only stones, incline towards their brothers on leaving the builder's hand for their places in a domed roof, and bow their heads to touch those of their brothers and holding all together, they do not fall. The human being then who fails to perceive this mystery of mutual assistance is more lifeless than a stone, for some stones are such they bend over backwards to co-operate with their brothers!

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8. A topical allusion in so far as this commentary was written immediately before and during the early part of the First World War, for carmine was the colour adopted by and symbolic of the Armenians. It was obtained from cochineal, the pressed dried bodies of insects. See, Nursi, *Ishārāt al-ījāz* [Ihsan Qāsim], 48.

• *If you were to ask:* It is the mark of guidance and eloquence to elucidate, provide clear explanations, and to save minds from confusion. But the Qur’anic commentators have been at variance over verses like this and have suggested different possibilities, and have propounded conflicting aspects of the phrases. So how can the truth be recognized among all these?

*You would be told:* All are right, for the listeners vary greatly. For the Qur’an was not revealed for the people of only one century, but for the people of all the centuries; nor for only one class, but for all the classes of mankind; and each of these has its own share and part in understanding the Qur’an. Between people there are vast differences of understanding, and their tastes vary greatly, and they incline to different sides of the Qur’an, and appreciate different aspects of it, and their pleasures are diverse, and their temperaments are all different. How many things there are that one nation deems beautiful which another does not even notice, and which one enjoys greatly while another does not even recognize their existence. You can draw further analogies in the same way.

It is because of this mystery and instance of wisdom that in most places the Qur’an is not specific and makes its statements general so that everyone can appraise them according to their own taste and appreciation. The Qur’an has ordered its sentences and positioned them in such a way that numerous different possibilities unfold from its various aspects, and [different people with] their diverse understandings may reflect on them and each may receive his share. You can make further analogies. That is to say, all these different aspects are permissible on condition they are not opposed to the sciences of Arabic, are approved by rhetoric (eloquence) (*al-balāgha*), and are acceptable to the science of the principles and aims of the Shari‘a. Thus, it emerges from this point that one of the aspects of the Qur’an’s miraculous inimitability is its ordering and composition and its arrangement in a style that conforms to the understandings of the people of all ages and all classes.

## Verse 3

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

*Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them. (Alladhīna yu'minūna bi'l-ghayb wa yuqīmūna al-ṣalāt wa mimma razaqnāhum yunfiqūn.)*

**“Who believe in the Unseen (Alladhīna yu'minūna bi'l-ghayb)”**

Consider this: The positioning of this verse and the previous one in respect of their essential meanings is this, that the praise of the Qur'an in the previous verse has a bearing on the praise of believers in this one, and the one flows into the other. For the praise of believers is a result of the former; it is a proof from effect to cause (*al-burhān al-innī*); a fruit of the Qur'an's guidance and a witness to it; and by [the praise in this verse] being encouragement it shows that it has a share of that guidance and is an example of it.

As for the positioning of “*who (alladhīna)*” and “*those who fear Allah (al-muttaqīn)*” [and the relationship between them], it [denotes] emptying or clearing (*takhliyya*), and adorning (*taḥliyya*), which is the eternal companion of the former. That is, adornment after purification (*tanzīh*). Do you not see that *taqwā* is the renunciation of evils and that the Qur'an mentions it as having three stages: the giving up of associating partners with Allah (*shirk*), the giving up of sin, and the giving up of all things other than Allah? Adornment is to perform good acts, either inwardly with the heart, or physically, or with property. Now, the sun of interior acts is belief (*īmān*), and the index of physical acts is the *ṣalāt* or ritual prayers, which are “the pillar of religion,”<sup>9</sup> and the pivot of acts related to property is the purification tax (*zakāt*), which is “the bridge of Islam.”<sup>10</sup>

9. *Tirmidhī*, *Īmān*, 8; *Ibn Māja*, *Fitan*, 12; *Musnad*, v, 231; al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, ii, 76.

10. al-Mundhirī, *al-Tarḥīb wa'l-Tarḥīb*, i, 517.

Consider this: Were you to consider [the phrase] “*who believe in the Unseen (alladhīna yu’minūna bi’l-ghayb)*” in respect of its position, you would see that it should be concise (*ijāz*), yet if you compare it to its synonym ‘the believers’ (*al-mu’minūn*), it will strike you as prolix. For the definite article “*al*” has been exchanged for “*alladhīna – who,*” whose function as a relative pronoun is to qualify through the relative clause the noun it governs. [It is the relative clause then – not the relative pronoun – that has importance since it qualifies the subject. The construction here then draws attention] to belief, encouraging it and exalting it. This is a sign too that belief illuminates the one professing it like a lighthouse so that his other attributes wane and fade away. And “[*they*] believe (*yu’minūna*)” has been substituted for ‘believers’ (*mu’minūn*) in order to depict this praiseworthy situation for the imagination. It is also a sign that belief is renewed through its continued existence and is manifested through the succession of evidences, both exterior and interior. Yes, the clearer the evidences are, the firmer is belief.

By “*in the Unseen (bi’l-ghayb)*” is meant that they believe with the heart, that is, sincerely without prevarication, even when alone. And they believe in what is unseen and in the World of the Unseen.

So know that belief is a light produced by affirming in detail all the essentials of religion brought by the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace) and the rest in general.

• *If you were to ask:* Only one out of a hundred ordinary people are able to express the truths of belief clearly?

*You would be told:* The inability to state something clearly does not indicate its non-existence. Mostly, the tongue is incapable of interpreting the subtleties of what the mind conceives of. Similarly, the intellect cannot contemplate the hidden secrets of the conscience, so how should it interpret all of them? Don’t you see that for all his intelligence, a genius and master of rhetoric like al-Sakkāki failed to harvest the fine points produced spontaneously by a nomad like Imru’ al-Qays,<sup>11</sup> or someone similar. In consequence, one can establish whether or not an ordinary person believes by questioning him and seeking an explanation. You can question him both positively and negatively, saying: “O you common man! Is it possible according to your way of thinking that the Maker in the grasp of Whose power are all six aspects of the world, should be present in just one place of

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11. Imru’ al-Qays (?497-545 AD), the most famous of all Arab poets of the *Jāhiliyya*. He was the author of one of the Seven Hanging Odes, in the Ka’ba.

it?” If he replies negatively, then the fact that Allah is beyond the restrictions of space is firmly established in his conscience, and that is sufficient for him. You can think of further examples in the same way.

Know too that as expounded by Sa’d,<sup>12</sup> belief is a light that Allah (May He be exalted) instils instantaneously in the hearts of those of His servants that He wishes – that is, after they have used their will power. Yes, belief is a light for the human conscience, a ray from the Pre-Eternal Sun that suddenly bathes in light the conscience’s inner face. It affords it a feeling of familiarity with the whole universe and establishes relations between it and all things. It imparts such moral strength to a person’s heart that he can overcome all the events and misfortunes that beset him. It affords him such breadth he can endure the past and the future. Yes, as belief is a ray from the Pre-Eternal Sun, so it is a flash of eternal happiness, that is, of the resurrection of the dead. Through the light it emits, the seeds of man’s hopes sprout, and the potentialities lodged in his conscience start to grow and to stretch out towards eternity, and the seeds of his abilities are transformed into a Tree of Tuba.

**“Are steadfast in prayer (*Wa yuqīmūna al-ṣalāt*)**

Consider this: The positioning [of this phrase and its relationship with the previous one] is as clear as daylight. For the *ṣalāt* being specified rather than other physical good works indicates that they are an index of all meritorious acts and a sample of them, and that they reflect them – like the *Fātiḥa* is an index of the Qur’an and man is an index of the world. For in one sense the *ṣalāt* include fasting, the Hajj, *zakāt*, and the other forms of worship; and they include the worship of all creatures, both innate and voluntary; some of the angels bow in worship, others prostrate, and yet others stand, and some stones prostrate in worship, and some trees stand, and some animals bow down.

The verbal form “(lit. they perform) *yuqīmūna*” is used instead of ‘*al-muqīmūn*’ (the active participle) in order to thrust before the mind’s eye of the listener this extensive vital action, this heedfulness of the spirit, in the world of Islam, and to alert his imagination to this admirable and orderly situation in all the regions of humanity, and to arouse in him the desire to do likewise. For if someone observes the effect of a bugle call on soldiers

12. Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, born in Taftazan in Khurasan and died in Samarqand (792/1390). He was an authority in the sciences of Arabic, logic, and *fiqh*. He strove to revive the Islamic sciences after the Mongol invasion. Among his works are *Tahzīb al-Manṭiq*, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, and *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasaḥiyya*.

dispersed and lost among the people, how it arouses them, summoning them to gather together and take up pleasing, orderly positions, he himself will feel inclined to join them. Just the same is the call to prayer of Muhammad (UWBP) among the people in this bleak world. “*And God’s is the highest similitude.*”(16:60)

The use here, the place for conciseness, of the prolix “*are steadfast in prayer (yuqīmūna al-ṣalāt)*” in place of ‘*yuṣallūn,*’ indicates the importance of complying with the meaning of ‘performing’ (*al-iqāma*) the *ṣalāt*, such as performing them correctly, and regularly, and seriously, and preserving oneself [from distractions etc.], and increasing demand for them in the market of the world. Ponder over this, and understand too that the *ṣalāt* are an elevated link, a lofty relationship between the bondsman and the Pre-Eternal Monarch, and an honourable act of service. It is characteristic of this relationship that it captivates the spirit. The ‘pillars’ of the *ṣalāt* comprise numerous mysteries which have been expounded in works like *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*.<sup>13</sup> One of these is that the conscience loves them. They are a summons of the Pre-Eternal Maker to the pavilion of His presence five times a day and night to commune with Him, as a sort of Ascension. This is such that everyone’s heart should yearn for it. The *ṣalāt* perpetuates in the heart the idea of the Maker’s sublimity and makes the mind conscious of it so as to induce obedience to the divine laws of justice and compliance with the dominical order of things. Man is in need of this because he is human and because he is by nature civilized. So alas for those who give up the *ṣalāt*! What a loss the lazy suffer! And O, the ignorance of those who do not know their value! And those who do not deem them worthwhile, they should go elsewhere, the targets of general disgust!

“*And spend out of what We have provided for them (Wa mimmā razqnāhum yunfiqūn)*”

**The positioning [and relationship with the preceding phrase]:** Just as the *ṣalāt* are “the pillar of religion” and uphold religion; so *zakāt* is “the bridge of Islam” and the means by which its people assist one another. There are certain conditions making almsgiving acceptable and not misplaced:

- One should not be wasteful [go to excess], which is reprehensible.
- One should not take from one person and give to another, but should give out of one’s own property.

13. By Muḥyiddīn al-‘Arabī (560/1165-638/1240). See note 8 in preceding chapter.

- One should not give in the hope of gain.
- One should not fear poverty.
- Almsgiving should not be restricted to property; knowledge, ideas, and actions may also be given.
- The recipient of almsgiving should not spend it on frivolities, but on necessities and basic needs.

The Qur'an preferred "*And spend out of what We have provided for them (Wa mimma razqnahum yunfiqun)*" to 'they give alms' (*yataṣaddaqun*) or 'they give the alms-tax' (*yazakkun*) and so on in order to make the following points and infer these conditions:

With "*out of (min)*" it indicates that wastefulness [in the giving of almsgiving] should be avoided;

By putting "*out of what (mimmā)*" first, it infers that it should be given out of the donor's property;

And by "*We have provided (razzaqnā)*," it disallows it being a favour; that is, "it is Allah who is the Giver and you are merely the means."

And by the "*We (-nā)*," it alludes to the meaning of the Hadith: "Never fear scarcity from the Lord of the divine throne."<sup>14</sup>

And because *rizq* [the noun 'sustenance,' derived from the verbal root] here is absolute and not specific, it infers that almsgiving includes the giving of knowledge, ideas, and other things.

And by "*spend (yunfiqun)*," it infers the condition that the recipient should spend the alms on his livelihood and essential needs.

It is stated by a sound Hadith: "*Zakāt is the bridge of Islam.*"<sup>15</sup> That is, *zakāt* is a bridge; the Muslim helps his brother Muslim to pass over it. For it is the means enjoined [by religion] whereby [people] may assist one another; indeed, it is a highway in the ordering of human society, and a link or artery by which the substance of life may flow between its members. Indeed, it is the antidote to the very real poisons impeding human progress. Yes, there is vast wisdom in the obligation of *zakāt* and prohibition of usury and interest, and lofty benefits and extensive mercy. For if you take a historical look at the page of the world and study the evils of human society, you will see that the underlying reasons for all revolutions and corruption, and the source of immorality are only two sayings:

*The First:* "Once I'm full, what is it to me if others die of hunger?"

14. *Al-Jāmi' al-Saghīr*, no: 1508; al-Mundhirī, *al-Tarḡīb wa'l-Tarḥīb*, no: 912. See, Nursi, *Ishārāt al-Ijāz* [Iḥsan Qāṣim], 53.

15. See, note 9 above.

*The Second:* "You work so that I can eat, and you toil so that I can rest."

As for the cruel, rapacious, vile, first saying, it has shaken the world of humanity and brought it to the brink of ruin. It is only *zakāt* that will cut it at the root. While the tyrannical, greedy, perverted second saying has imperiled human progress, taking it tottering to the verge of the conflagration of anarchy. And the only way to eradicate it, the only remedy for it, is the prohibition of usury and interest. So reflect on this!

Consider this: The order of society is dependent on there being no vacuum between the classes of people. The upper classes should not grow distant from the lower classes, nor the rich from the poor, to the extent that the lines of communication are broken between them. But because the obligatory payment of *zakāt* and the prohibition of usury and interest have been neglected, a yawning gap has opened up between the classes, and the upper classes have grown so distant from the lower classes that no links between them remain. It is because of this that instead of respect, obedience, and love ascending from the lower classes to the upper classes, shouts of revolution arise, and shrieks of envy and cries of hatred and revenge. Similarly, instead of kindness, generosity, and favours descending from the upper to the lower classes, the fires of tyranny and oppression, and volleys of insult rain down on them. Alas! While the qualities of the elite should be the cause of modesty and compassion, unfortunately they give rise to pride and arrogance. And while the powerlessness and poverty of the poor necessitate kindness and benevolence, they lead to slavery and degradation. If you want a witness for what I say, take a look at the civilized world; there you will find as many witnesses as you could wish for. The only means of reconciliation between the classes, which will bring them closer together, is the payment of *zakāt*, one of the pillars of Islam, and an elevated, far-reaching rule in the administration of society.

## Verse 4

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ  
يُوقِنُونَ

*And who believe in that which is revealed to you, and that which was revealed before you, and have certain belief in the hereafter. (Wa alladhīna yu'minūna bi-mā unzila ilayka wa mā unzila min qablika wa bi'l-ākhirati hum yūqinūn.)*

Consider this: The Qur'an has let its composition flow. That is to say, in most verses similar to this one, it has not specified any aspect of the phrases and sentences by placing a sign in them. This is for a subtle reason, and this reason is the source of its conciseness (*al-ījāz*), which in turn is the source of its miraculousness. The reason is this: eloquence consists of speaking in conformity with the demands of any situation. The Qur'an addresses people belonging to different classes in different centuries. So taking all these classes and centuries into consideration so that all those different types of people may receive their share, it makes omissions (*ḥadhf*) in many places in order to make general what it says and apportion it out, and speaks in absolute terms so as to make it comprehensive and distribute it. Moreover it leaves the composition free in many places to multiply its facets and to increase the possibilities agreeable to eloquence and acceptable to the sciences of Arabic. Thus all minds receive the Qur'an's effusions to the extent they can appreciate them. Consider this carefully!

### **Now the positioning of this verse in relation to the previous one**

Here it is being specific after being general, to proclaim over the heads of witnesses the distinction of those People of the Book who believe, and to silence those of them who hold back from it, and to take those like 'Abdullah ibn Salam<sup>16</sup> by the hand so as to encourage others to follow his

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16. Abū Yūsuf 'Abdullāh ibn al-Salām al-Ḥārith (d. 43/663). He was a learned Jew who accepted Islam and became one of the Prophet's (UWBP) Companions.

example. Moreover, it states unequivocally that there are two sorts of God-fearing people (*muttaqī*), thus stating openly that the Qur’an’s guidance embraces all peoples, and inferring that Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) was sent as Messenger to all nations without exception. Also, by elucidating the pillars of belief contained in the shell of “*who believe in the Unseen (yu’minūna bi’l-ghayb)*,” it supplies details after its previous succinct statements, for it makes explicit mention of the revealed books and resurrection of the dead, and implicit reference to the prophets and angels.

The Qur’an did not opt for conciseness by saying something like ‘the believers in the Qur’an’ (*al-mu’minūna bi’l-Qur’ān*); rather, in order to study the meaning with subtleties and decorate its appendices with fine points, it preferred “*And who believe in that which is revealed to you (wa alladhīna yu’minūna bi-mā unzila ilayka)*.” For in “*who (alladhīna)*” is a sign that the attribute of belief is what is intended, and that a person’s other attributes are dependent on it and concealed beneath it.

In the use of the imperfect tense for “*(they) believe (yu’minūna)*” instead of ‘the believers’ (*al-mu’minūn*) [the active participle] which infers [something] being fixed and unchanging, is an indication that belief is constantly renewed on the repeated coming of revelation.

Then with the vagueness of “*what (mā)*,” it indicates that abbreviated belief is sufficient, and that belief includes exoteric revelation [like the Qur’an] and esoteric revelation like Hadiths.

Concerning “*revealed (unzila)*,” in regard to its matter (*mādda*) it indicates that belief in the Qur’an is belief in its revelation by Allah the Most High. Likewise, it means belief in Allah is belief in Allah’s existence, and belief in the hereafter is belief in the coming of the hereafter.

The use of the perfect tense although the revelation had not yet been completed, is an indication that its completion was as certain as that which had been revealed. Moreover, “*(they) believe (yu’minūna)*” being in the imperfect tense infers the future, thus compensating for the deficiency inferred by the use of the perfect. Because the Qur’an was revealed in this way [that is, by degrees], you see in its styles that the past very often swallows the future and the imperfect tense dons the attire of the perfect. The eloquence of this is a very subtle:

If a person hears something referred to in the past although it has not yet occurred, it arouses his mind and he is alerted to the fact that he is not alone, but behind him are row upon row at various distances, as though the

centuries and their peoples are sitting in tiers rising up behind him. This makes him aware that the address and call directed towards him is being heard by all of them according to its volume. Yes, it is a divine address from which all the rows of men in all the centuries receive their share. Thus, the past is real for most people most of the time, while for a few a little of the time it is figurative (*majāz*). So to take the majority into consideration serves better the purposes of eloquence.

And in the use of “*to you (ilayka)*” rather than ‘on you’ (*‘alayka*) is a sign that the divine messengership was a duty with which the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace) was charged, that he undertook voluntarily. Also, [on the one hand] it indicates his loftiness since Gabriel served him by presenting [the Qur’an] to him, for ‘on’ (*‘alā*) hints of compulsion and that the means of revelation was higher. While [on the other] the use of the second person “*to you*” rather than [the third person] ‘to Muhammad’ implies that Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) was only an addressee and that the speech is Allah’s Word. Moreover, in meaning, the direct address of the vocative confirms and illustrates the meaning of that which is sent down or revealed (*al-nuzūl*), and this is the Revelation (*al-wahy*), and the Revelation is the Qur’an, which is a divine address [to the Prophet] the character of which is to permeate all these [points]. And this reveals his share of this characteristic. Thus, it becomes clear by reason of its encompassing all these subtle points, that this passage is of the utmost conciseness.

**“*And that which was revealed before you (wa mā unzila min qablika)*”**

Consider this: The purpose of descriptions like these is to arouse eagerness, and this implies [certain new] injunctions: “Believe in such-and-such and make no distinction [between the prophets].” The phrase’s positioning and its ties [with what precedes it] comprise four subtle points:

*Firstly:* The argument from what is adduced to the evidence. It is like this:

“O men! If you believe in the Qur’an, believe also in the previous scriptures, for the Qur’an confirms their veracity and testifies to them.” This is indicated by “*a confirmation of what went before.*”(2:97)

*Secondly:* The argument from the evidence to what is adduced, like this:

“O People of the Book! If you believe in the past prophets and scriptures, you should also believe in the Qur’an and Muhammad (UWBP), for the scriptures gave the good news of his coming. Moreover, confirmation of them, and their revelation and evidences of the messengers’ prophet-

hoods are found in reality and in spirit more perfectly in the Qur’an and more clearly in Muhammad (UWBP). Thus, according to this excellent reasoning, the Qur’an is the Word of Allah and Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) is His Messenger.

*Thirdly:* In this is a sign that the outcome (*al-ma’āl*) of the Qur’an, that is, Islam, which emerged from it in the Era of Bliss, is like a tree whose origin is fastened in the depths of the past. Its spreading roots are fed from the water-sources of that time yielding life and strength. And with its trunk in the skies of the future, its spreading branches are laden with fruit. That is to say, Islam embraces the past and the future.

*Fourthly:* In this is a sign that it is urging the People of the Book to believe [in Islam], for it is making it appear familiar to them, and easy. It is as though [the Qur’an] is saying: ‘O People of the Book! You should not experience any difficulty in entering this [new] way, for you are not casting away your outer shell altogether, but only completing your beliefs and building on the fundamentals you already possess.’ For the Qur’an does not bring any new fundamentals or principal beliefs; it modifies and perfects existent ones; and it combines in itself the virtues of all the previous books and the essentials of all the previous laws. It only establishes new ordinances in secondary matters, which are subject to change due to differences in time and place. For just as with the change of seasons, food and dress and many other things are changed; so too the stages of a person’s life warrant changes in the manner of their education and upbringing. Similarly, as necessitated by wisdom and need, religious ordinances concerning secondary matters change in accordance with the stages of mankind’s development. For very many of these are beneficial at one time yet harmful at another, and very many medicines were efficacious in mankind’s infancy yet ceased being remedies in its youth. This is the reason the Qur’an abrogated some of its secondary pronouncements. That is, it decreed that their time had finished and that the turn had come for other decrees.

[The words] “*before you (min qabluka)*” [also indicate] a number of subtle points:

Consider this: There is no word of revelation that is disdainful of its place, or is not content with it, or thinks that another place would be better. No, there is no word of revelation but it is like an embossed pearl, held firmly in its setting by the bonds of the relationships between it and its brothers. If you wish, study “*before you;*” you will see how the subtleties fly out from every side of the verse and alight on this unique phrase. The

verse of which “*before you*” is a part deals with the question of prophethood and the five aims it comprises. The phrase has absorbed these aims and been coloured by them. Signifying five subtle points, it exudes the five aims, which are reflected from these relationships.

The aims included [in prophethood] are these: Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) is a prophet; he is the most perfect of the prophets; he is the Seal of the Prophets; he was sent to all peoples; his Shari‘a abrogated all preceding ones and contains their virtues.

The manner the first aim is reflected in the phrase: [The words] “*before you (min qabluka)*” are used only when ways are united and the road is one, as though the phrase is suggesting that by comparison all the proofs of the previous prophets and of the veracity of their scriptures form a decisive proof of the prophethood of Muhammad (UWBP) and the revelation of his Book. For all the causes and reasons confirming their prophethoods, prove his prophethood more explicitly and more powerfully. It is as though all their miracles form a single miracle proving his veracity.

The way in which the second aim, the perfection of Muhammad’s (UWBP) prophethood, is reflected in the phrase “*before you:*” In view of the facts that it is the custom for the king to appear before the people at the end of a ceremony, and in accordance with the law of human progress a later teacher is better than an earlier one, and generally those who come later are more proficient than those who preceded them, Muhammad (Upon whom be peace) was the Sovereign of the Prophets, and the best and most perfect of them, just as the Qur’an is more comprehensive and universal than their scriptures.

The way the phrase “*before you*” absorbs the third aim, which is Muhammad’s being the Seal of the Prophets: In accordance with the rule, “if one is multiplied it goes to infinity, stopping nowhere; but if a multiplicity of things are united, they acquire stability and come to a halt,” and as is inferred by the opposite idea, “*before you*” hints that “there will be no prophets after you,” and that Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) is the Seal of the Prophets.

The way the phrase “*before you*” is coloured by the fourth aim, the universality of his mission: It expresses this meaning: “You are their successor and they are all your predecessors.” Hence, according to the rule, “the successor shoulders the duties of his predecessor and takes his seat,” all of them were your predecessors and you are their deputy and the Messenger to all peoples. Yes indeed, it could only be thus! For the innate disposition

of things demands it and wisdom requires it. Before the Era of Bliss all the nations of the world of humanity were extremely distant from one another and hostile to each other, both physically and emotionally, and by instinct and upbringing. A single sort of education was insufficient for them and all could not be drawn to a single cause. Then, when humanity was awakened in the Era of Bliss and subsequently, and people felt a desire to come together due to the exchange of ideas and swapping of characters, and the intermingling of peoples, and some of them investigating the conditions of others, and time was churned up by the many means of communication and transportation; – then the globe of the earth became like a single country, or a province, or a town, and the people of the world came together; and then a single mission, a single prophethood was sufficient for all of them.

The way the phrase intimates the fifth aim: Since the “*from (min)*” of “*before you (min qablīka)*” infers a beginning, it infers ‘to’ (*ilā*),” which indicates the end. That is, “prophethood came to an end with your coming, for your Shari‘a is sufficient.” This infers that his Shari‘a abrogated all previous ones, signalling their end, and through its sufficiency, included them all.

The evidence that from the point of view of eloquence this phrase has absorbed these subtle points is that the five aims resemble a river flowing beneath these verses; one of them gushes out completely in one verse, then another flows forth in another, and another is manifested entirely in a torrent in yet another. Even the least trickle on the surface indicates that the veins of this phrase touch it. Moreover, the above meanings sprout forth in many different verses.

**“And have certain belief in the hereafter (*wa bi’l-ākhirati hum yūqinūn*)”**

Consider this: This phrase refers to the fourth of the four well-known aims of the Qur’an: the resurrection of the dead. I have deduced ten proofs of it from the Qur’an’s composition and have set them out in another book.<sup>17</sup> It will be useful to summarize them here. They are as follows:

The resurrection of the dead is a reality, for there is perfect, intentional order in the universe. There is total wisdom in creation. There is nothing futile in the world. There is no waste in creation (*al-fiṭra*). This testimony is vouched for by the inductive reasoning of all the sciences, each of which is a faithful witness to the order in its field of study. Also, there being

17. Nursi, *Muhâkemat* [first published 1911] (Istanbul: Sözlür Yayınevi, 1977), 151-3. As the New Said, he later included the same proofs in the Twenty-Ninth Word, *The Words* (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 2008), 538-45.

repeated resurrections in most things, such as the days and the years and so on [testifies to the resurrection of the dead]. Man's innate disposition also points to it. It is indicated too by his infinite hopes and desires. The All-Wise Maker's mercy also alludes to the resurrection, while the truthful tongue of Allah's Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace) states it explicitly. And the Inimitable Qur'an testifies to it with such verses as "*Seeing that He has created you in successive stages,*"(71:14) and "*Nor is your Sustainer ever unjust to His servants.*"(41:46) These ten genuine proofs are keys to eternal happiness and to the doors of Paradise.

***An Explanation of the First Proof:*** If the universe did not result in everlasting happiness, the order in it, which its Maker has laid down with the greatest skill and precision, leaving minds in amazement, would be a flimsy, deceptive form, and all non-material matters and connections, and relationships and links in the order would go for nothing. The order is order only because it leads to eternal happiness. That is, the fine points and non-material aspects of the order only sprout in the next world. Otherwise, all those non-material aspects would be extinguished, all the bonds be broken, all the relationships severed, and the order would cease to be. But the power inherent in the order declares in resounding voice that it would not let it be broken and dissolved.

***Second Proof:*** The faultless wisdom [in the universe], which is the exemplification of pre-eternal providence (*al-'ināyat al-azaliyya*) and consists of following uses and instances of wisdom in all the realms (lit. species – *naw'*) of beings, indeed in every part of each – as is testified to by the sciences, gives the glad tidings of eternal happiness. We would otherwise have to deny these purposes and benefits the certainty of which compels us to acknowledge them. For then the benefits would not be benefits, and the wisdom would not be wisdom, and the uses would not be useful. And this is pure sophistry.

***The Third Proof, which expounds the Second:*** Science testifies also that the Maker chooses the shortest path in everything, and the closest side, and the lightest and most beautiful form. This indicates the absence of futility. And this suggests that the Maker is truly serious. And this could only be with the coming of eternal happiness. Otherwise existence would descend to the level of absolute non-existence and everything would be transformed into pure futility. Glory be unto to You! You did not create this in vain!

***The Fourth Proof, which elucidates the Third:*** The sciences

show that there is no waste in creation. If your mind is incapable of perceiving the instances of wisdom in the macrocosm, that is, the world, scrutinize the microcosm, which is man, for the science of anatomy has described and proved them. In the human body are approximately six hundred bones each of which has a particular function. And there are six thousand veins and arteries for the circulation of the blood, each with its own use. And there are twenty-four thousand pores and ducts in the cells. And in each cell function the five powers of attraction, repulsion, holding (*mumsika*), forming (*muşawwira*), and reproduction, which all have their own purposes.

If the microcosm is thus, would the macrocosm be defective in comparison? If there is this absence of waste in the body, which has no importance compared with its essence (*lubb*), is it conceivable that the spirit (*jawhar al-rūḥ*) would be neglected, or that spiritual matters (*al-ma'nawiyāt*) and hopes and ideas, which are the works of the spirit, would be wasted? If it were not for eternal happiness, all spiritual matters would shrivel up and be wasted. For God's sake, is it reasonably possible that you should have a jewel worth the world and look after its shell and case, not even letting it become dusty, then take it and smash it to smithereens and destroy all trace of it? Absolutely not! You only look after the case for what it contains. Furthermore, if a person's sound constitution and healthy members and faculties give you to understand that he will continue to live and develop, do not the constant reality permeating the spirit of the universe, and the total force indicating the continued existence of its order, and the perfection causing the evolution (*takammul*) of its overall system all show you that eternal happiness will arrive through the door of bodily resurrection, because it is only resurrection that saves the order from disturbance and is the means of its evolution, and for the unfolding of that perpetual force?

***Fifth Proof, and Surmise, which indicates intention:*** The existence of repeated resurrections in most of the realms of beings points to the supreme resurrection. If you like, this can be illustrated with an example: take a look at your weekly clock. It contains various cogs and flywheels that turn and work the hands. One of them counts the seconds; it is a forerunner, giving news of the motion of the minute hand. This paves the way for and announces the motion of the hour hand, and it results in and proclaims the motion of the hand that counts the days of the week. The preceding one completing its circuit indicates that its sister following it will complete its circuit. Similarly, Allah the Most High, be He exalted, has a vast

clock the machinery of which are the heavenly spheres; its hands count the days, and the years, and the life of mankind, and term of the world. They are the equivalent of the seconds, minutes, hours, and days of your clock. The morning comes after every night, and the summer comes after every spring – resulting from the motion of that clock – which is a concealed sign and subtle hint that the morning of the spring of the resurrection will come, breaking forth from the vast clock of the universe.

• *If you were to ask:* Things are not resurrected identically in the repeated resurrections in the universe, so how does this show that they will be restored to life identically at the supreme resurrection?

*You would be told:* A human individual is like a species of other creatures. For the light of thought affords such breadth and expansion to man's hopes and his spirit that they encompass the past, present, and future. If he were to swallow the past and the future together with the present, it would not satisfy his hopes. For the light of thought renders his nature lofty, his value general, his view universal, his perfection unlimited, his pleasures continuous, and his sufferings constant. As for the members of other species, their natures are particular, their value individual, their views limited, their perfections restricted, their pleasures instantaneous, and their suffering fleeting. So why should the existence of a sort of resurrection in the [other] species not point to a general resurrection of the human individual?

***The Sixth Proof, which is allusive:*** This is the unlimited nature of man's potentialities. Man's unbounded conceptions and thoughts are born of his infinite hopes. These arise from his unrestricted desires, which in turn arise from his unlimited abilities. These are concealed in his boundless potentialities, planted in the substance of his spirit, which Allah the Most High has ennobled. All of these point testifying to eternal happiness beyond the bodily resurrection of the dead, fixing their gaze on it from afar. Reflect on this!

***The Seventh Proof, conveying the good news*** that the mercy of the Most Merciful and Compassionate One tells of the coming of the supreme mercy, by which I mean eternal felicity. For it is through eternal felicity that mercy becomes mercy and bounty becomes bounty, and the universe is delivered from the lamentations and general mourning arising from eternal separation, which transforms bounty into an affliction. If the spirit of bounty, that is, eternal felicity, were not to come, all bounties would be transformed into misfortunes, and it would necessitate obstinate denial of the mercy that is self-evidently testified to by the whole universe.

O Habib and Shafiq,<sup>18</sup> both lovers! Consider the finest works of divine mercy: affection, compassion, and love. Then consult your consciences, but after supposing them to be subject to eternal separation and unending parting; how they appeal for help! How your imaginations cry out, and your spirits are tormented at the transformation of affection and kindness, the most beautiful and exquisite sorts of mercy and bounty, into a terrible calamity and affliction. Is it at all possible that such necessary mercy would assist eternal separation in assaulting affection and kindness? No! That mercy is such that it would set eternal separation to attack unending parting, and beset unending parting with eternal separation, and annihilate both of them!

**The Eighth Proof, which is explicit:** This is the veracious, verified tongue of Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace). His word flung open the doors of eternal felicity. The consensus of all the prophets from Adam to their Seal (UWBP) concerning this truth, forms a decisive proof of it. There must be such a truth, since they were in agreement concerning it.

**Ninth Proof:** This is the miraculous Qur'an's announcement of eternal felicity. The seven aspects of its miraculousness have been confirmed for thirteen centuries furnishing proof of what it claims. For it discloses bodily resurrection with its message and is the key to it.<sup>19</sup>

**The Tenth Proof:** This consists of thousands of proofs supplied by numerous verses. For example, the verse, “*Seeing that He has created you in successive stages*”(71:14) indicates a parabolic analogy (*qiyās tamthīlī*); and “*Nor is your Sustainer ever unjust to His servants*”(41:46) points to a proof of justice. Indeed, in most of its verses the Qur'an has opened up windows looking onto the resurrection of the dead.

The parabolic analogy (*al-qiyās al-tamthīlī*) in the first verse above is as follows: consider the human body, how it passes from stage to stage, from sperm to a blood-clot, and from that to an embryo, and from that to flesh and bone, and from that to a new creation. Each of these stages has such particular laws, such determined order, such regular development that it reveals transparently an intention, will, and choice. Next study its continued existence, for the body renews its clothes every year, and this occurs

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18. The names of two of Nursi's students, which mean affectionate and compassionate, respectively. The former acted as the author's scribe.

19. An allusion to the commentary *al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī and *Miftāḥ* by al-Sakkākī. See, notes 5 and 6 above.

through dissolution and reassembling. That is to say, the cells are broken down and repaired with a subtle substance prepared by their Maker in accordance with a particular law, and distributed in appropriate amounts to all the organs.

Now study the stages of the subtle matter that bears the members' sustenance, how it is spread to all the parts of the body in a way that astonishes the mind, and how it is apportioned according to a specific law of division appropriately to the needs of the members. This is after it has been distilled by passing in accordance with a fixed order and specific rules and extraordinary process through the body's four filters, and being cooked in its four kitchens, and undergoing four wondrous transformations; and the sustenance having been obtained according to a regular law, and particular system, and specific rule from substances dispersed through the world of the elements.

All the laws and systems in these stages show transparently a driving force, an intention, and wisdom. How could it not be thus? If you study an atom from the caravan of the subtle matter [known as sustenance], for example one concealed in the element of the air which finally becomes part of the pupil of Habib's eye, you will see that its path has been determined in the air, as though charged and commanded to proceed to the place appointed for it. And if you consider it with a scientific eye, you will be certain that it is not in motion through blind chance and aimless coincidence, for whatever level it enters upon it conforms to its particular order, and whatever stage it rises to it knows its specific laws, and to what level it travels to it is driven with a wondrous, orderly motion. It passes through all these stages till it reaches its destination. And it never deviates even an iota from its intended goal.

*In Short:* Whoever ponders over the first creation will cease to have any doubts concerning the second. Indeed, the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace) said: "How strange the person who sees the first creation yet denies the second!"

For the soldiers of a regiment to gather together at the sound of the bugle after having dispersed to rest, emerging from every nook and cranny, and to form ranks under their flag, is far easier than calling them up the first time and taking them under discipline and arms. Similarly, it is easier for particles that are closely acquainted having been intermingled in a single body to regather at sound of Israfil's trumpet, and for them all to come from every side in response to their Creator's command; this is easier and

reasonably more possible than their original creation and composition. For in relation to divine power, the greatest thing is equal to the smallest.

It seems that at the resurrection, the original parts of the body will be restored to it, as well as those that were discarded. This is alluded to by the vast bodies of the resurrected,<sup>20</sup> and the fact that it is disapproved of (*makrūh*) to cut the hair or nails when canonically unclean, and that it is Sunna to bury them.<sup>21</sup> But according to investigations, [a few cells from] the coccyx (*‘ajb al-dhanab*) will be sufficient as a seed and substance for the body’s re-formation.<sup>22</sup>

Now for the proof indicated by the verse, “*Nor is your Sustainer ever unjust to His servants:*”(41:46) we very often see tyrannical, sinful, and cruel men living in the greatest luxury, passing their lives in affluence and ease. Then we see that poor, oppressed, righteous men of good character live lives of great hardship, degraded and oppressed. Then death comes and makes them equal and this appears to be the ultimate tyranny. Whereas divine justice and wisdom, which are testified to by all the universe, are exempt from such tyranny. There must therefore be a final gathering at which the former will receive his punishment and the latter his reward, so that divine justice may be fully manifested. You can compare other verses of the Qur’an with these two.

**The positioning of the parts of the phrase: “and have certain belief in the hereafter (*wa bi’l-ākhirati hum yūqinūn*)”**

The main points [that this phrase consists of]: The “*and (wāw)*,” the precedence of “*in the hereafter (bi’l-ākhirati)*,” the use of the definite article for “*the hereafter*,” the term “*hereafter*,” the use of the personal pronoun “*hum (they)*,” and the use of “*have certain belief in (yūqinūn)*” rather than ‘they believe’ (*yu’minūn*).

The [conjunction] “*and (wāw)*,” After the general statements of the previous phrases, [the purpose of] this is to denote the specificity [of this one] with its explicit mention of this pillar of belief, for [this pillar] is one of the two pivots on which the revealed scriptures turn.

The precedence of “*in the hereafter (bi’l-ākhirati)*” denotes restriction,

20. A Hadith narrated by Abū Hurayra says: “The kafir’s tooth will be [as huge as] Mount Uhud, and his skin will be of the thickness of three days’ journeying.” *Muslim*, iv, 2189. See, Nursi, *Ishārāt al-I’jāz* [Iḥsan Qāṣim], 66, for this and following two Hadiths.

21. al-Suyūṭī, *Kanz al-Ummāl*, vi, 656; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Faṭḥ al-Kabīr*, ii, 375; and others.

22. A Hadith narrated by Abū Hurayra says: “All the sons of Adam will be consumed by the earth except for [a few cells from] the coccyx. They were created out of that [in the first place] and will be recreated out of it.” *Muslim*, Fitān, 28; *Ibn Māja*, Zuhd, 32; and others.

and this suggests that because [some of] the People of the Book say: “*The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days*,”(2:80) and [others of them] deny bodily pleasures, the hereafter will be metaphorical for them and only in name; what they will experience will not be the true hereafter.

The use of the definite article “*al*” is to express its known nature. That is, it indicates that [the hereafter] is well known by reason of its constant mention by the revealed scriptures. Its being well known is also a hint that it is true, and a sign that in consequence of the proofs based on the nature of things mentioned above it is a fact almost visible to the mind. Its being well known is therefore a sign that it is a reality. And the use of the term “*the hereafter (al-ākhirah)*,” that is, making it an adjective qualifying creation (*al-nā’ita li’l-nasha’*), is to direct attention towards the first creation, so that the mind will grasp the possibility of the second.

The personal pronoun “*they (hum)*” infers restriction, and this suggests that the belief of those People of the Book who do not believe in Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) is not certain belief. Indeed, it is only a supposition they suppose is certain.

“*Have certain belief in (yūqinūn)*” is used instead of ‘they believe’ (*yu’minūn*), although belief is certain affirmation, in order to intentionally point the finger at the objective so to dispel any doubts. For the resurrection of the dead is a thronging mass of doubts [and complete certainty (*yaqīn*) concerning it is more important than affirmation (*taṣḍīq*) of it]. Also this definite statement blocks up the path of such excuses of the People of the Book as “We’re believers anyway, so let those who don’t believe, believe.”

## Verse 5

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

*They are on [true] guidance from their Lord, and it is these who will prosper. (Ūlā'ika 'alā hudan min Rabbihim wa ūlā'ika humu'l-muflihūn.)*

Consider this: The surmised places (*al-mazānn*) in which the subtleties sparkle [in this verse] are the following: the positions of the words in relation to those that precede them; the perceptibility of “*They (Ūlā'ika)*” and the distance it expresses; the elevatedness denoted by “*on ('alā)*”; the use of the indefinite in “*guidance (hudan)*”; the preposition “*from (min)*”; the raising and sustaining inferred by “*their Lord and Sustainer (Rabbihim)*.”

### **The positioning**

This verse is tied to what precedes it with a number of threads of relationships. One of these is picking up the threads, that is, it is the answer to three implied questions:

*The first* is a question seeking an example, as though having listened to the Qur'an and heard that it is marked by giving guidance to people who as a result acquire fine qualities, the listener wants to see them actually clothed in these qualities seated on the throne of guidance. So it replies by depicting them for him, saying: “*They are on [true] guidance from their Lord and Sustainer.*”

*The second* is a question about the reason for guidance, as though the questioner is asking: “*What are they like that they have deserved guidance and are distinguished by it?*” And it replies: “*They possess all these qualities in combined form. If you study them carefully, you will see that they are worthy of the light of guidance.*”

• *If you were to ask:* Doesn't the more detailed mention of the qualities in previous verses explain the reason for guidance more clearly than the concise “*ūlā'ika (they)*”?

*You would be told:* Conciseness (*ijmāl*) is usually clearer than detailed

explanation, especially if the answer sought arises from a combination of things. For [here] the limited nature of the listener's mind, and the extended nature of the discussion, and the intervention of forgetfulness, and the reason for guidance emerging from the combination of all the elements of the discussion [hinder] understanding of it. So because "*they (ūlā'ika)*" combines these things, its conciseness explains the reason more clearly.

*The third* is a question about the results and fruits of guidance, and its being a bounty and pleasure, as though the listener asks: "What is its pleasure and [how is it a] bounty?" And it replies saying that it is [only] in guidance that happiness is to be found in this world and the next; that is, the result of guidance is itself and its fruits are the same as itself. For of itself it is the greatest bounty, and rapture of the conscience; it is the paradise of the spirit, just as misguidance is its hell. Later it will produce the fruits of happiness and salvation in the hereafter.

When it comes to the perceptibility (*al-maḥsūsiyya*) of "*they (ūlā'ika)*," it is a sign that the frequent mention of the qualities leads to their being embodied in the listener's brain, made present in his mind, and perceptible to his imagination. So from their [qualities] being known by [mere] mention they become (lit. a door opens onto) known actually (lit. externally), and from this he understands the believers' distinction and gazes on their shining radiance among mankind. It is as though nothing else will appear to whoever raises his head and opens his eyes to look.

The distance expressed by "*they (ūlā'ika)*," although on the whole they are near, indicates the loftiness of their rank, for when seen from afar only the tall in stature are visible. Nevertheless, if distance of time and space is real, it is the best judge of the imperatives of eloquence. For the Era of Bliss [may be thought of as] a tongue reciting this verse as it was revealed, and all subsequent centuries tongues reciting it also, making it young and fresh as though newly revealed, not [something that] was revealed long ago that has been related. For the front rows, referred to by "*they (ūlā'ika)*," appear from afar. So their being visible despite the distance proclaims their great stature and lofty rank.

Now for [the preposition] "*on (alā)*." Consider this: The mystery of the relationships [or associations] between things makes most of them like mirrors reflecting each other. This one reflects that, and that one this. Just as a fragment of glass can show you a vast desert; so sometimes a single word may provoke endless imaginings, and one sentence may conjure up a strange tale before your eyes, and one phrase may take your mind on a

jaunt through the World of Similitudes. Similarly, the word *bāraza*, to meet in combat, reveals to you a battlefield, and the word “fruit” in the verse pushes open for you the door of Paradise. You can carry on in the same way! Just the same is the word “*on* (*‘alā*):” it opens a window for the mind, [revealing] the following comparison: the Qur’an’s guidance is a divine mount which it gives to believers to travel on. When mounted on it, they are on the Straight Path, journeying to the throne of perfections.

The use of the indefinite for “*guidance* (*hudan*)” indicates that it is different to “*guidance to those who fear Allah* (*hudan li’l-muttaqīn*).”(2:2) For generally speaking, the repetition of the indefinite shows that the second is not the same as the first. Here, the previous one is a *maṣḍar* or verbal noun, while this one is ‘the product’ of the verbal noun (*ḥāṣil bi’l-maṣḍar*). That is, it is a constant ‘perceptible’ attribute or quality (*ṣifa maḥsūsa qāra*) and the fruit of the first.

The word “*from* (*min*)” indicates that [guidance] is both created by Allah and granted to them by Him.

The word “*Sustainer and Lord* (*Rabb*)” indicates that to give guidance is the mark of dominicality (*rubūbiyya*), so just as He provides them with sustenance, so He sustains them with guidance.

**“*And it is these who will prosper* (*wa ūlā’ika humu’l-muflihūn*)”**

Know that the places the subtle points should be sought are these: The conjunction “*and* (*wāw*);” the repetition of “*they* (*ūlā’ika*);” the detached pronoun “*they* (*hum*);” the definite article “*the* (*al*);” “*those who will prosper* (*muflihūn*)” being absolute, and the form of their prosperity or good fortune not being specified.

The conjunction is used owing to the relationship between the two clauses. For just as the first “*they* (*ūlā’ika*)” signifies happiness in this world (*al-sa’ādat al-‘ājila*), which is a fruit of guidance; so the second points to the happiness of the hereafter (*al-sa’ādat al-ākhirati*). Yes, although both of them are the fruit [or summary] of what precedes them, the best [view] is that the roots of the first “*they* (*ūlā’ika*)” are fastened on the first “*who* (*alladhīna*),”(2:3) and it seems to refer to unlettered believers who [are not People of the Book and] receive their strength from the pillars of Islam [that is, they perform the *ṣalāt* and pay *zakāt*]; this looks to what precedes “*and have certain belief in the hereafter* (*wa bi’l-ākhirati hum yūqinūn*).” The second “*they* (*ūlā’ika*)” glances secretly, alluding to the second “*who* (*alladhīna*),”(2:4) which it seems, refers to believing People of the Book. Its point of reference is the pillars of belief and certainty about the

hereafter. Now reflect on this!

As for the repetition of “*they (ūlā’ika)*,” it indicates that in respect of the ultimate cause of guidance and the reason for their being praised and privileged, these two fruits [of guidance and salvation (prosperity)] are independent of and different to each other. Nevertheless, the best [interpretation] is that the second “*they (ūlā’ika)*” points to the first in addition to [the predicate of which it is the subject] as though it is saying: “This one is learned and that one has been honoured.”

To come to the detached pronoun “*they (hum)*,” Besides corroborating the restriction that hints at the People of the Book who do not believe in the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace), it contains a subtle point which is this: the “*they (hum)*” being placed between the subject and predicate changes the subject into one with numerous predicates. One is mentioned and the rest are referred to the imagination. For the “*they (hum)*” alerts the imagination to the fact that the predicates are not restricted and urges it to search for suitable ones. Just as you could plant Zayd before the listener and reel off many of his attributes, saying “Zayd is learned, Zayd is clever, he is this, he is that;” so too by saying: “*they (ūlā’ika)*” then putting the [pronoun] “*they (hum)*,” the Qur’an excites the imagination so that it comes up with things consonant with their attributes. For example, “They are on guidance,” “they shall prosper,” “they shall escape Hell-fire,” “they shall win Paradise,” “they shall succeed in attaining to the vision of Allah’s beauty (May He be exalted),” and so on.

The definite article “*the (al)*” portrays reality, as though saying: “If you want to see the truth about those who shall prosper, look in the mirror of ‘*they (ūlā’ika)*’ and it will depict it for you.” Or [its purpose] is to specify them, as though saying: “If you have heard who it is that shall prosper and attain to happiness and you want to learn what they’re like, look at ‘*they (ūlā’ika)*,’ for that is [how they are].” Or [its purpose is] to clarify what is being stated and make it evident, like *wāliduhu al-‘abd* (his father is [a] slave); that is, the fact that his father is a slave is known and obvious. [For although the predicate should have been indefinite, it was made definite.]

“*Who shall prosper (muflihūn)*” is absolute to make it general. For the Qur’an addresses all classes of people with their different aspirations: some of them want to be saved from Hell-fire; others aspire only to Paradise; and others seek only divine pleasure; yet others yearn for the vision of divine beauty; and so forth. The Qur’an has put it in absolute form to make the table of its favours general so that everyone may pick what they fancy.

## Verse 6

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

*As to those who reject faith, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe (Inna alladhīna kafarū sawā'un 'alayhim a' andhartahum am lam tundhirhum lā yu'minūn)*

### **This verse's positioning [and relationship with what precedes it]**

Consider this: In the world of His pre-eternal attributes, the Unique Being has two manifestations, those pertaining to His glory (*jalālī*) and those pertaining to His beauty (*jamālī*). Through their manifestation in the world of the attributes of actions, they appear as grace and wrath, and goodness and majesty. Then inclining to the world of actions, adornment and embellishment (*tahliya*, *tazyīn*) arise, and demonstrate that the Creator is exempt from the attributes of creatures (*takhliya*, *tanzīh*). Then, being imprinted on the world of the hereafter, which is one of the worlds of works (*'ālam al-āthār*), grace is manifested as Paradise and light, and wrath is manifested as Hell and fire. And being reflected in the world of remembrance, recollection is divided into praise (*al-ḥamd*) and glorification (*al-tasbīḥ*). And being represented in the world of speech, they diversify into command and prohibition. And being depicted in the world of guidance, they divide into encouragement and restraint, and reassurance and warning. And through their manifestation in the conscience, hope and fear are born. And so on. Moreover, it is the mark of guidance to preserve the balance between hope and fear, in order that hope may induce striving and work, and fear may restrain from transgression, and a person will not despair of divine mercy and opt out in blameworthy fashion, or feel sure he will not be punished so unconcernedly go astray. It is because of this successive wisdom that the Qur'an does not encourage without restraining, nor praise the righteous without censuring sinners.

- *If you were to ask: Why is there no conjunction here, between this and*

the previous verse, as there is in the verse, “As for the righteous, they will be in bliss \* And the wicked, they will be in the Fire.”(82:13-14)?

*You would be told:* A conjunction is apt in so far as the relationship [between the two parts of speech it is joining] is apt, and the aptness of the relationship depends on [both parts being congruent and] following the same aim. But because different aims are being followed here [in this verse and the previous one], the conjunction was not deemed fitting. For the praise of the believers leads to and is preliminary to praise of the Qur’an, and it is its result and is driven to it. While the censure of the unbelievers is in order to restrain and frighten, and is not the prelude to praise of the Qur’an.

**Now consider the subtleties in the positioning of the parts of this verse**

Firstly familiarize yourself with [the intensive particle] “*inna*” and [the relative pronoun] “*those who (alladhīna)*,” for they are the most itinerant and roaming of whatever you will encounter in the Qur’an in the way stations of revelation. For some reason or other, the Qur’an mentions them frequently, for besides the fine points they express particular to the places they are used, they comprise two general subtleties from the jewels of eloquence:

It is characteristic of “*inna*” to pierce the surface and delve into the truth, and fasten the purport of its sentence to it, as though it is itself the root and sinks into the truth. For example, “Indeed, it is thus:” that is, what is being stated is not imaginary, or contrived, or subjective, or newly invented; it is a constant truth. [The grammarians] say that [the purpose of] “*inna*” is to establish or confirm facts (*li’l-taḥqīq*) and therefore denotes this fact and characteristic. The particular point here is that “*inna*” repels doubt and denial, although these were completely lacking in the Prophet (UWBP), who was being addressed; it alludes therefore to his overwhelming desire that [the deniers] should come to believe.

Now for “*those who (alladhīna)*,” know that it is characteristic of [the relative pronoun] “*alladhī*” to indicate something new and strange that the mind perceives before the eyes, which is not emphatic but born of a combination of things. For this reason you will see that among the particles and pronouns of demonstration “*alladhī*,” the relative pronoun, is the easiest on the tongue and the one most used in denoting the change and renewal of subjects. For when that which was to establish truth and reality, that is the Qur’an, appeared, some things (*anwā’* pl. of *naw’*) were cancelled and vanished, and others were formed and new truths were born.

Consider the Era of Ignorance, how social relations (*anwā'*) were based on national ties, and social mores (lit. truths – *ḥaqā'iq*) were based on tribalism. Then when the Qur'an came, it severed those ties and destroyed those mores, and established other relations (*anwā'*) in their place: the bonds of religion. Now reflect on this! When the Qur'an rose shining over humankind, hearts bloomed and became fruitful through its light, and a luminous truth was produced, which was the class (*naw'*) of believers. Then because of their iniquity, some souls putrified in the face of that light and a venomous truth was born, the particular characteristic of the class of unbelievers. Between the “*who (alladhīna)*” in this verse and that [in verse 3] there is also reciprocity, [because they both point to a truth which is the reverse of the other].

Know that like the definite article, the relative pronoun is used to express five meanings, the best known of which is its denoting something known (*al-'ahd*). The “*who (alladhīna)*” here alludes to notable unbelievers like Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab, and Umayya ibn Khalaf, who died in a state of unbelief. In this respect therefore, the verse gives news about the unseen realm [it is a prophecy of the future]. Born of these flashes, and others like them, is a sort of miraculousness, there being four sorts of miraculousness or inimitability pertaining to the Qur'an's meanings (*al-'i'jāz al-ma'nawī*).

The word “[*Those who reject faith (kafarū)*]:” Unbelief is darkness, consisting of the denial of something brought by the Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace), after having had certain knowledge of it.

• *If you were to ask:* The Qur'an is one of the essentials of religion, yet there has been dispute over its meanings?

*You would be told:* In every passage of the Qur'an there are three propositions:

*The First:* This is the Word of Allah the Most High.

*The Second:* Its intended meaning is the truth.

It is unbelief to deny these two.

*The Third:* Its intended meaning is this.

If this last proposition is incontestable or expounded, it is compulsory to believe in it once one is informed about it and to deny it is unbelief. If it is clear or is a verse that has another possible meaning, it is not unbelief to deny it since it is open to interpretation. Interpretation however should not be based on personal whims. Unanimously reported Hadiths are the same as Qur'anic verses in this regard. However, where there is denial of the first proposition in connection with Hadiths, these should be considered care-

fully. [That is, the Hadith's authenticity and the unanimity concerning it should be considered carefully.]

• *If you were to ask:* Unbelief is ignorance yet in the Qur'an it says: "*The People of the Book know this as they know their own sons.*"(2:146) How can these two statements be reconciled?

*You would be told:* There are two sorts of unbelief. The first is due to ignorance; a person denies because he does not know. The second is obstinate rejection; a person knows but does not accept; he is certain but does not believe; he affirms but his conscience does not submit. Think carefully about this!

• *If you were to ask:* Does Satan know Allah in his heart?

*You would be told:* No, because due to his innate disposition his heart is continuously preoccupied with leading people astray, and his mind continuously thinks of unbelief and inculcating it in others. He never ceases doing this. The idea of unbelief never quits his head so that knowledge of Allah might become established in it.

• *If you were to ask:* Unbelief is an attribute of the heart, so how can wearing the 'zunnar'<sup>23</sup> and the hat, which has been compared to it, be unbelief?

*You would be told:* The Shari'a acknowledges the outward signs of hidden matters. It even recognizes apparent causes that have no reason (*'illa*) as the reason. So since some girdles hinder bowing in prayer and some hats prevent full prostration, it deems the wearing of them a reason for unbelief. For they both infer the renouncing of worship and imitation of unbelievers, betokening appreciation of their outlook and nationality. Thus, so long as the hidden matter is not decisively disproved, judgement is made according to its outward signs.

• *If you were to ask:* If they have no warning, why should people be held accountable?

*You would be told:* To rebut their arguments and excuses. [For they could say: We weren't told that we would be held to account, and did not know about it. And this could save them from punishment.]<sup>24</sup>

• *If you were to ask:* Since their obstinate rejection is foretold, it means they are prevented from believing. Isn't it therefore impossible to hold them responsible?

*You would be told:* Neither the prediction, nor divine knowledge or will

23. *al-Zunnār* – a rope girdle worn by Eastern Christians, Jews, and Magi.

24. Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmecid], 78.

are connected to their unbelief independently of the cause. They are connected to it only through their wills (*ikhtiyār*). There is detailed discussion of this below. It is because of this that it is said: “An obligation [imposed by] will is not inconsistent with [or opposed to] will.”

• *If you were to ask:* Isn’t it reasonably possible for them to believe in the verse that states they will not believe? So isn’t this a contradiction in terms?

*You would be told:* They are not being ordered to believe in every detail of the Qur’an, that it should be impossible. Also, the verb “(who) reject faith (lit. disbelieved) (*kafarū*)” being in the perfect tense infers that they chose unbelief after the truth had become clear, so the warning was futile. [As the word *sawā’un* – it is the same – indicates.]<sup>25</sup>

Now for “**the same** (*sawā’un*);” it is a figure of speech meaning: whether it is futile or has the desired result, it makes no difference whether or not you warn them. That is, there’s no reason for you either to warn them or to not warn them.

“*To* (lit. on) *them* (*‘alayhim*):” in this is a sign that they shall remain on the earth but not raise their heads and heed their leaders. It also implies: “But it is not the same for you, [O Muhammad!, whether you warn them or not], for it is meritorious for you to convey the message; indeed, ‘*The Messenger’s duty is but to proclaim [the Message].*’”(5:99)

“**Whether you warn them or do not warn them** (*a’ andhartahum am lam tundhirhum*):” the “*whether* (*a’ – hamza*)” and “*or* (*am*)” here are like letters signifying “*the same* (*sawā’un*),” and corroborate “*the same*” in the first [phrase of the verse]. Or [their purpose] is to direct attention to the two meanings of it mentioned above.

• *If you were to ask:* Why is this ‘sameness’ expressed in interrogative form (*ṣūra al-istifhām*)? [That is, the “*a’*” of “*a’ andhartahum*.”]

*You would be told:* If you want to alert the person you are addressing subtly yet convincingly to the fact that what he is doing is futile, you have to question him so as to draw his attention to it. [Then] he can switch mentally from the act to its result and feel certain. There is also a connection between the interrogative form and the sameness, because the question comprises it. For as far as the questioner knows, it is the same whether or not the thing about which he is asking exists. Moreover, very often the answer also implies this sameness.

25. Nursi, *İşâratü’l-İ’caz* [Abdülmeccid], 79.

• *If you were to ask:* Why is the warning expressed by “you warn (lit. warned) them (*andhartahum*)” in the perfect tense?

*You would be told:* So that it might proclaim: “You’ve tried it before, O Muhammad! So you know what’ll happen!”

• *If you were to ask:* Why does it say “or whether you do not warn them (*am lam tundhirhum*)” although it is clearly pointless not to warn them?

*You would be told:* Warning a person may increase his obstinacy, but remaining silent may induce him to think fairly.

• *If you were to ask:* Why, although the Prophet (UWBP) is both a bringer of glad tidings and a warner, does this verse only warn and intimidate?

*You would be told:* Because intimidation is fitting for unbelief; and because repelling harm is preferable to attracting benefits and more effective; and because the intimidation here causes the imagination to tremble and makes it realize that after the words “they will not believe (*lā yu’minūn*),” it will be faced with “whether or not you give them glad tidings [it is the same for them].”

Know that all speech has a literal meaning and a hidden purpose. This too has subtle hovering meanings, and a purpose that unfolds, which is to alleviate the Prophet’s difficulties and relieve his stress, and to console him and advise him to follow the earlier prophets. For most of them were addressed similarly. Noah, even, said after receiving such an address: “... *Leave not of the unbelievers a single one on the earth!*” (71:26) Also, because the Qur’an’s verses resemble mutually reflecting mirrors, and the stories of the prophets are like a halo around the moon, they look to the Prophet’s (Upon whom be blessings and peace) situation. It is as though this passage is saying: “This is a natural divine law that has to be obeyed.”

Having made this analysis, know that with all their parts this verse and the next one up to “*great is the penalty they incur (wa la-hum ‘adhābun ‘azīm)*” are so delivered that they infer the abomination of unbelief and scorn of it, and cause aversion to it and implicitly deter from it, and humiliate the unbelievers and mark them out, and scare others away from it and threaten them. With their words these verses proclaim that unbelief is a terrible calamity, the loss of vast bounties, the onset of severe suffering, and the cessation of elevated pleasures. They state explicitly that unbelief is the most repulsive of things, and the most harmful. As follows:

The replacement of ‘they do not believe’ (*lam yu’minū*) with “*they disbelieve or reject faith (kafarū)*” indicates that due to their lack of belief they

have fallen into the darkness of disbelief, which is a calamity that corrupts the very substance of man's spirit, and implies that it is a source of suffering. And the replacement of 'they do not give up unbelief' (*lā yatrūkūna al-kufr*) with "they will not believe (*lā yu'minūn*)" indicates that due to this loss they have lost their belief, the source of all happiness.

With the phrase "Allah has set a seal on their hearts (*Khatama Allāhu 'alā qulūbihim*)" it indicates that having come to disbelieve, their hearts and consciences, which receive life, joy, happiness, and attain to perfection only through the manifestation of the divine truths through the light of belief, become like ruined buildings desolate and swarming with vermin and noxious things. So their doors are locked and sealed up, and they are shunned. They are abandoned and left to the scorpions and monsters.

With the phrase "and on their hearing (*wa 'alā sam'ihim*)" it indicates that due to their unbelief they have lost the immense bounty of hearing, for when the light of belief constantly [shines] behind and informs his ear, it is affected by the cries of all the world and understands the invocations of its beings. It hears the universe's vociferations and understands its glorifications. Indeed, when the ear hears the dominical speech in the sighing of the blowing wind, the peals of the rolling thunder-clouds, the refrains of the billowing sea, the clamour of the throbbing stones, the pattering of the falling rain, and the songs of the twittering birds, and understands their lofty glorifications, the universe becomes a vast orchestra for him. It arouses in his heart an elevated sorrow and excites passion in his spirit. He feels sad on recalling his friends and companions, but it is a pleasurable sadness at their absence. It is not that he has no friends, so is distraught. But when the ear is blocked up by disbelief, it becomes deaf to these delightful sounds and it hears nothing from the universe except cries of mourning and the lamentations of death. This arouses in the heart the pathetic sorrow of the orphan; that is, the lack of friends; and the desolation of alienation; that is, being without owner or guardian. It is for this reason that the Shari'a deems lawful such sounds as excite an elevated love and the sorrow of love, and it declares unlawful any that inflame the carnal appetites and produce the sorrow of the orphan. Any the Shari'a does not specify for you, judge for yourself according to the effect they have on your spirit and conscience.

The phrase "and on their eyes is a veil (*wa 'alā abṣārihim ghishāwatun*)" alludes to the loss of a huge bounty in consequence of their unbelief. For when the eye is illuminated with the light of belief dwelling behind its pupil, the light assists and impels it, and the whole universe becomes a

garden for it bedecked with flowers and houris. The eye's pupil becomes a bee, flying hither and thither gathering from the blooms the juices of reflection, thought, familiarity, friendliness, love, and felicitation. It takes up its load, which in the conscience is transformed into the honey of perfections.

But if, God forbid!, the eye becomes dimmed and lustreless through disbelief, the world becomes a prison in its view, its truths are hidden from it, and the universe becomes a wasteland, causing such pain to the heart that it overwhelms the conscience completely.

Moreover, with the phrase "*great is the penalty they incur (wa la-hum 'adhābun 'aẓīm)*" it indicates a fruit of the Zaqqum-tree of unbelief in the next world, which is the torment of Hell and the terrible punishment of divine wrath.

While "*they will not believe (lā yu'minūn)*" corroborates "*the same (sawā'un)*," explicating the manner of the sameness.

## Verse 7

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ  
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

*Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing. And on their eyes is a veil; and great is the penalty they incur. (Khatama Allah 'alā qulūbihim wa 'alā sam'ihim, wa 'alā abṣārihim ghashāwa wa la-hum 'adhābun 'aẓīm.)*

Consider this: At this point we have to stop to listen to what the scholars of *kalām* have to say, for a fierce war has been waged around this verse, between the Mu'tazila, the Jabriyya, and the Sunnis. Wars like this have caught the attention of observers. It is appropriate therefore to mention the main arguments so they may be benefited from. [It will be seen then that] the Sunni School is the Straight Path, and the others either go to excess or are deficient.

*The First:* It has been established that “there is no effective agent in the universe other than Allah the Most High.” Hence, there is no delegation of power, [as the Mu'tazila asserted, that man creates his own actions].<sup>26</sup>

*The Second:* “Allah is All-Wise,” so reward and punishment are not futile or without wisdom. Hence, there is no compulsion. Just as divine unity (*tawḥīd*) strikes the Mu'tazila on the chest, so Allah being free of anthropomorphic elements (*tanzīh*) deals the Jabriyya a slap in the mouth.

*The Third:* Everything has two aspects: the outer (*mulkiyya*) aspect, which is sometimes good and sometimes bad. Different forms intrude on it in succession, like the back of a mirror. The inner aspect (*malakūtiyya*) looks to the Creator. It is transparent in every respect, like the front of a mirror. Thus, the creation of bad is not bad, because its creation in respect of the inner face is good. The creation of bad is to complete the good, so is indirectly good. So pay no attention to the specious arguments of the Mu'tazila!

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26. Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmeccid], 83.

*The Fourth:* The *al-ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣḍar* is the outcome of the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*), like death is the outcome (*al-ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣḍar*) of murder (*qatl* – verbal noun) and pain is the outcome (*al-ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣḍar*) of a blow (*ḍarb* – verbal noun). The outcome of the verbal noun is something fixed, created, and lifeless, and attributes cannot be derived from it. [That is, the active particle cannot be derived from something lifeless (*jāmid*), as is well known in grammar (*ilm al-ṣarf*.)] The verbal noun (*al-maṣḍar*), however, is acquired (*maksūb*), relative (*nisbī*), and hypothetical (*i'tibārī*) and attributes can be derived from it. Thus, the Creator of murder (*qatl*) cannot be the murderer (*qātil*). So leave the Mu'tazila "to plunge in vain discourse and trifling." (See, 6:91)

*The Fifth:* Apparent actions are generally the result of a succession of acts that end in a person's 'inclination' (*mayalān*), called will (*al-juz' al-ikhtiyārī*). It is around this point that the arguments have revolved.

*The Sixth:* It is the Most High's practice that His universal will looks to the particular will of His servant, [That is, it is manifested in accordance with the servant's will] so there is no compulsion.

*The Seventh:* Knowledge is dependent on the thing known; the thing known is not dependent on knowledge, otherwise it would be a circular argument. So a person cannot make excuses concerning, [or disclaim responsibility for], his actions by ascribing their magnitude and measure to divine determining (*qadar*) [by claiming they are determined].

*The Eighth:* The creation of the *ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣḍar* is dependent on the 'acquisition' of the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) through the functioning of the divine laws in the universe (*'ādāt Allāh ta'āla*) in accordance with the conditions He has laid down for them. And the nucleus and life force in the acquisition of the verbal noun is inclination (*mayalān*), and when this is solved, the nub of the question is solved.

*The Ninth:* Preference [something being preferable] without a cause or attribute to cause it is impossible, but choice without a cause or attribute to cause it is not impossible. Thus, no aim (*gharaḍ*) or cause (*'illa*) is necessary in Allah's actions; the only agent of choice (*muraḥḥijih*) is His will.

*The Tenth:* An existent matter must necessarily have an effective agent (*mu'aththir*) [to bring it into existence], otherwise preference without a cause or attribute to cause it would be necessary, and this is impossible as shown above. However, a theoretical matter (*i'tibārī*) [like human will and inclination] can be specified (*takhaṣṣuṣ*) without a specifier (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*);

this is not necessarily impossible. [That is, since man’s inclinations do not have external existence, they do not require a cause.]

*The Eleventh:* A being has to be necessary for it to come in to existence; that is, a thing cannot come into existence if its existence is not necessary; its existence becomes necessary only on the conjunction of two wills, universal will and particular will; it then has existence instantaneously. But theoretical things can be preferable (*tarajjuh*) and specified without reaching the degree of necessity, so this does not necessitate a contingent being coming into existence without an effective agent (*mu’aththir*).

*The Twelfth:* The knowledge that a thing exists does not necessitate knowing its nature; and the absence of such knowledge does not necessitate its non-existence. So the inability to define the true nature of will does not contradict its certain existence.

If you have comprehended these principles, listen now to what shall be said: we Sunnis say: O Mu’tazila! The bondsman [of Allah] is not creator of the *ḥāṣil bi’l-maṣdar*; that is, the results of his actions. He is only the *masdar* or source of his actions. For “there is no effective agent in existence other than Allah.” Divine unity (*tawḥīd*) necessitates this. Now we say to the Jabriyya: man is not under compulsion for he has (particular) will (*juz’ ikhtiyārī*), for Allah is All-Wise. Moreover, Allah’s being exempt from all defect necessitates it.

• *If you were to ask:* Whenever man’s will is dissected, the only thing to appear is predestination (*al-jabr*)?

*You would be told:*

*Firstly:* The conscience and innate disposition both testify to something elusive that distinguishes between a voluntary matter and a compulsory one, and the existence of which is certain. But we are not at fault if we cannot define it.

*Secondly:* We say that if inclination (*mayalān*) is something existent, as the Ash’ari’s claim, then the disposal of it is a theoretical matter and pertains to man. [That is, switching the inclination from one act to another.]<sup>27</sup> But if inclination is a theoretical matter, as the Maturidis say, its existence (*thubūt*) and being specified (*takhaṣṣuṣ*) do not require a necessitating cause (*al-‘illa al-tamma*), so an inclination does not necessarily have to be acted upon. [That is, very often no action occurs on the occurrence of an inclination. Thus, there is no compulsion.] Think about this carefully!

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27. Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ’caz* [Abdülmecid], 85. See also, *İşârâtü’l-İ’caz* [Sağlam], 100.

*In Short:* The *ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣḍar* is dependent, in accordance with the laws of divine practice in the universe, on the *maṣḍar* or source, the basis of which is inclination (*mayalān*). And neither inclination itself, nor the disposal of it, has [external] existence so that being applied this way or that it should be a contingent being and need an effective agent, or that there should have been preference without something to cause it. Also, neither inclination nor the disposal of it is non-existent that it should not be amenable to being a condition for the creation of the *ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣḍar*, or a cause of reward or punishment.

• *If you were to ask:* Don't pre-eternal knowledge and pre-eternal will pluck out free will and remove it?

*You would be told:* Knowledge of a voluntary action does not negate the will. [Because the effective agent is power, not knowledge, which is dependent on what is known.]<sup>28</sup>

Also, pre-eternal knowledge is all-encompassing like the sky, it is not the beginning of a chain or the starting-point of past time so that effects should be erroneously ascribed to it in disregard of their causes.

Also, knowledge is dependent on the thing known – that is, on how the thing is. Knowledge also encompasses it – so the measure and criteria of the thing known are not based on the principles of divine determining (*qadar*).

Also, divine will does not look to the cause once and separately to the effect once, rendering the will and the cause ineffective. Indeed, it looks at once to cause and effect. In consequence, if for example one person kills another with a rifle and we posit the absence of any cause, would the person have died that instant or not? The Jabriyya say: he would have died even if he had not been killed. For they assert that divine will deals with cause and effect separately, and that there is a disjunction between them. And the Mu'tazila say: he would not have died. For according to them, it is permissible that the effect (lit. what is intended) may 'lag behind' divine will. As for the Sunnis, they say: We discontinue [the argument and] are silent. For to assume the absence of any cause necessitates assuming that divine will and knowledge are unconnected with the effect, whereas will and knowledge look to both together. This false assumption necessitates an impossibility. Think about this carefully!

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28. Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmeccid], 85.

## A Second Introduction

Consider this: the Naturalists say that causes have an actual effect, the Zoroastrians say that evil has another creator, and the Mu‘tazila assert that living beings create their [own] voluntary actions. The three are based on a false, deluded idea, are pure error, exceed the mark, and are false analogies that have duped [those people] and led them astray. For proceeding from these assertions they have declared Allah free of anthropomorphic elements (*tanzih*), or so they supposed, and have fallen into the trap of associating partners with Him (*shirk*). If you want to learn the details, listen to the following matters, which also dispel their delusions.

*The First:* Man’s hearing, speech, observation, and thought are all particular; he can attend to things only one at a time in succession. Similarly, his aspiration is particular; he can busy himself with things only in turn.

*The Second:* Man’s worth is proportionate to what he is. And what he is has value to the extent of his aspiration. And his aspirations are valuable relatively to the importance of the aims to which he devotes himself.

*The Third:* Man loses himself in whatever he turns his attention to and gets caught up in it. It is due to this that you see that in their daily lives, people do not ascribe lowly things and insignificant matters to great and lofty persons, but to causes and intermediaries. They suppose that it would be unfitting for their dignity for them to be preoccupied with petty matters and that they would not condescend to such things, or expend their efforts on things of no consequence. Such trivia would be unequal to their vast ambitions.

*The Fourth:* It is characteristic of man that when he reflects on something in order to weigh it up, he first of all seeks criteria for it and its relations and principles, in his own self; then in his fellow humans; and if he cannot find them there, in other contingent beings around him. When he ponders over the Necessarily Existent, even, Who in no way resembles contingent beings, his surmising faculty (*al-quwwa al-wāhima*) forces him to take the above-mentioned evil delusion as his principle, and use that deceptive analogy as a telescope. However, the Maker (May His glory be exalted) cannot be observed from this point, for His power cannot be restricted.

*The Fifth:* “And Allah’s is the highest similitude,”(16:60) His power, knowledge, and will (May His glory be exalted) are like the light of the sun; they embrace everything and encompass all matters. They cannot be restricted or be compared with anything. Just as they look to (*ta‘alluq*) the

vastest things, like the divine throne, so they look to the smallest, like an atom. And just as they create the sun and moon, so they create the eyes of the flea and gnat. And just as they lay down the elevated order of the universe, so they place a fine order in the guts of microscopic organisms. And just as they bind together the celestial bodies and stars, suspended [in space] by that law of His known as gravity, so they order minute particles through a similar law, as infinitesimal samples of them. It is through the intervention of impotence that different degrees occur in power. So all things are equal in the face of the power of the One for whom impotence is impossible. For impotence is the opposite of essential power.<sup>29</sup>

*The Sixth:* Divine power looks first (*ta'alluq*) to the inner face (*mal-akūtiyya*) of things, and this in all things is transparent and beautiful, as discussed. Yes, just as the Most High made the face of the sun burnished and shining and the moon incandescent, so He made the inner face of the night and clouds luminous and beautiful.

*The Seventh:* The human mind does not have the breadth and scope to measure divine grandeur (May He be exalted), weigh up [the Most High's] perfections, or to judge His attributes. This is not possible except in one respect<sup>30</sup> – they may be gauged only from the sum total of His artefacts, and from what is manifested of all His works, and from what may be epitomized from all His acts. Yes, an atom can only be a mirror, not the measure.

If you have understood these matters, know that the Necessary Being (Be He exalted) cannot be compared with contingent beings, for they are as different from one another as are the ground and the Pleiades. Surely you can see that it was because of this false comparison, that with the Naturalists, the Mu'tazila, and Zoroastrians their powers of delusive imagination overpowered their reasons, and they ascribed an actual effect to causes, and the creation of acts to living creatures, and the creation of evil to one other than Allah (May He be exalted!). With their delusions and imaginings they asked how with His grandeur, sublimity, and freedom from defect (*tanaẓ-zuh*) Allah (May He be exalted!) would condescend to [create] these base matters and ugly things. To hell with them! How could they shackle the intellect with such a feeble delusion? But alas! As a whispering doubt, it afflicts believers also. So be careful to avoid it!

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29. For the New Said's proofs of divine power, see the Twentieth Letter, Nursi, *Letters 1928-1932* (Istanbul: Sözlük Publications, 2010), 287-95.

30. That is, the human mind can comprehend the divine attributes only to the extent it can attain knowledge of them through observation of the divine works.

### Now to analyze the words of this verse and their positioning

The fact that “*has set a seal (khatama)*” is tied to “*they will not believe (lā yu’minūna)*” and follows [immediately] after it is just like making the punishment the consequence of the act, as though it is saying, “Since they have corrupted their wills and not come to believe, they have been punished by having their hearts sealed and blocked up.”

The word(s) “*has set a seal (khatama)*” also indicate a compound metaphor (*isti’āra murakkaba*), which alludes to parabolic comparisons as a [literary] device (*uslūb tamthīlī*), which [in turn] signifies an allegory (*ḍarb mathal*) depicting their misguidance, for what it means is the truth being prevented from penetrating to the heart. The term ‘seal or sealing’ (*al-khatm*) portrays the heart as a house built by Allah (May He be exalted!) to be a treasury full of jewels. But due to the misuse of the will, it has become corrupted and has putrefied, and what it contains has turned poisonous so it has been locked up and sealed, to make it shunned.

The word “*Allāh:*” Know that the use of [the proper noun instead of the first person pronoun] signifies a turning (*iltifāt*) from the first to the third persons. This comprises a subtle point pertaining to the intended (*bi’n-niyya*) relationship of the word “*Allāh*” with “*they will not believe (lā yu’minūna)*”; I mean that the implied “in Allah” indicates the following subtle meaning: when the light of the knowledge of Allah came to them, they did not open the door of their hearts to it, so He turned away from them angrily and locked the door on them.

The use of “*on (alā)*” with the transitive verb “*khatama*” suggests that the verb includes the meaning of branding, as though it is saying: Allah has set a seal on their hearts, branding and marking them so the angels see them. “*On (alā)*” also suggests that it is the heart’s lofty door that is blocked up, not its lowly door that looks onto this world.

The word “*their hearts (qulūbihim)*” precedes hearing and sight because it is the seat of belief; and because the first evidences of the Maker are manifested from the heart’s consultation with itself, and from the conscience referring to the innate disposition. For when a person consults himself, he feels an acute sense of powerlessness that drives him to seek out a point of support, and he perceives his clamouring need to fulfil his hopes and is compelled to find a source of assistance. But there is no support to be found and no help except in belief.

What is meant by the heart is the dominical subtle faculty – not the piece of flesh shaped like a pine-cone – the emotions of which are manifested in

the conscience and the thoughts of which are reflected in the mind. The term heart indicates that the dominical subtle faculty is to man's spiritual dimensions what the cone-shaped piece of flesh is to the body. For just as the physical heart is a life-machine that pumps the water of life to all the parts of the body, and if it is obstructed or ceases from activity, [life departs and] the body stiffens; so the subtle inner faculty dispenses the light of true life to all the parts of the corpus composed of man's spiritual aspects, and his [mental] states, and hopes. And if, God forbid, the light of belief fades away, his being, with which he contends with the universe, becomes like a motionless spectre, dark in its entirety.

**“And on their hearing (wa ‘alā sam’ihim):”** The repetition of “on (‘alā)” indicates that the evidences of each [faculty] are independent, for the heart [points to Allah] with the evidences of the intellect and conscience, and the hearing [points to Him] with evidences from the Qur’an and Hadith (*naqlī*) and from the outside world. Its repetition also hints that the sealing up of the hearing is not of the same kind as the sealing up of the heart.

Moreover, the singular case of “hearing” despite having a plural on either side of it [that is, the heart and the eyes] is an instance of conciseness, and also contains several signs: it hints that as a verbal noun, [the act of] hearing (*sam’*) [is performed with the ear, which] has no cover [like an eyelid]; and that the one making hear (*musmi’*) is singular; and that what is heard (*masmū’*) by each person is singular; and that a person hears one thing at a time. And it hints at the partnership of all who hear, as though their ears are united becoming one; and at the union of the community and its personification, which makes one imagine that its faculty of hearing is singular; and that one person hearing something suffices the community. It was on account of these points that eloquence required “hearing” to be in the singular. However, the things pertaining to the heart and eyes are different, and their ways are diverse, and their evidences differ, and they receive instruction from different things, and the things that prompt them are various. For these reasons the singular intervenes between two plurals. The heart is followed by hearing because hearing forms the heart's character [that is, mostly information reaches the heart through the channel of the ear], and it is closer to it. Also, the hearing resembles the heart in that it receives information from the six directions, [from all sides, while the eyes only look to the front].

**“And on their eyes is a veil (wa ‘alā abṣārihim ghishāwa):”** Know that the change of style, that is, the choice of a nominal sentence, indicates that

in distinction to the gardens of the hearing and heart, which are continuously renewed, the gardens of the eyes, from which they gather up evidences, are fixed and constant.

By ascribing the sealing up of the heart to Allah (May He be exalted!) and not the veiling of the eyes, it suggests that the sealing up is punishment for what they have earned, while the veiling is of their own doing.

It is also a sign that initially in respect of the heart and hearing there is choice, while in respect of the sight there is compulsion; that is, there is choice only to the extent of shutting one’s eyes.

The term “*veil (ghishāwa)*” indicates that the eyes look in only one direction. And the use of the indefinite is to show this; that is, the cause of blindness is not known that it might be avoided.

The precedence of “*and on their eyes (wa ‘alā abṣārihim)*” is to direct attention to their eyes, for the eyes mirror the secrets of the heart.

“**Great is the penalty they incur** (*wa la-hum ‘adhābun ‘azīm*):” Know that just as the verse alludes with this phrase to the bitter fruits in this world of the accursed tree of unbelief; so it indicates the bitter fruit of that side of it that extends to the hereafter, which is the Zaqqum-tree of Hell.

Also, the style here requires a phrase like ‘theirs will be a terrible chastisement’ (*wa ‘alayhim ‘iqābun shadīd*). For in substituting words fitting for bounties, that is, “*la-hum*” for *‘alayhim*, and “*‘adhāb*” for *‘iqāb*, and “*‘azīm*” for *shadīd* is a sign that it is a sort of insinuating, condemnatory mockery as though [the Qur’an] is saying: “Their benefit, their delight, their supreme bounty will be nothing but torment.” This resembles the saying: “Greetings between them will be a painful blow,” and the verse “*announce to them (lit. the glad tidings of – fa-bashshirhim) a grievous penalty.*” (3:21) For the “*la-*” of “*la-hum – (lit.) to them*” denotes the consequences of the action and its benefits, as though it is reading out to them [mockingly]: “Receive the wages for what you have done!”

In the word “*penalty (‘adhāb)*” [the root of which also bears meanings of sweet, pleasant, etc.] is an obscure allusion reminding them that they sought pleasure and delight in this world through sinful acts, as though announcing to them: “Now taste the bitter [fruits] of your sweet life!”

And in the word “*great (‘azīm)*” is a hidden sign reminding them of the state of [the people of] Paradise who receive stupendous bounties, as though it is whispering to them: “See the vast bounties you have forfeited and how you have fallen into grievous suffering. “*Great (‘azīm)*” also strengthens the *tanwīn* (indefiniteness) of “*penalty (‘adhāb).*”

• *If you were to ask:* The sin of unbelief persists a short time but its punishment is eternal and unending; how is this conformable with divine justice? And if one does accept this, how is it consistent with pre-eternal wisdom? And if one accepts this even, how does dominical compassion permit it?

*You would be told:* If one accepts that the penalty is infinite, it is established that unbelief perpetrated in finite time is in six respects a crime of infinite proportions:

*Firstly:* The person who dies an unbeliever will remain as such even if he lives to all eternity, for he has corrupted the very substance of his spirit. And his corrupted heart has the propensity to commit infinite crimes.

*Secondly:* Even if unbelief occurs in finite time, it is an infinite crime and gives the lie to infinity, I mean, it denies the whole universe, which testifies to divine unity.

*Thirdly:* Unbelief is ingratitude for infinite bounties.

*Fourthly:* Unbelief is a crime against infinity; that is, the divine essence and attributes.

*Fifthly:* As [indicated by] the Hadith: “The heavens and earth contain me not, yet I am contained in the heart of the believer,”<sup>31</sup> the human conscience is in regard to its outer face limited and finite, but by virtue of its reality the roots of its inner face spread and extend to eternity. In this respect therefore it is infinite. Unbelief however sullies it and it dwindles away.

*Sixthly:* Although opposites stubbornly resist each other, they are similar in many instances. Thus, on the one hand belief yields the fruits of the delights of Paradise, and on the other unbelief produces everlasting suffering and pain.

It may be concluded therefore if one puts these six aspects together that infinite punishment fits the infinite crime and is pure justice.

• *If you were to ask:* So it is conformable with justice, but what about wisdom, which is exempt from creating evils that result in punishment?

*You would be told:* As you have heard before, a greater good should not be abandoned due to the interspersion of lesser evil, for that would be a greater evil. This is because divine wisdom necessitates the existence of relative truths, which are far more numerous than actual truths; and their appearance is possible only through the existence of evil; and evil can be

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31. Although reputed to be a Hadith Qudsi, this has no known ascription to the Prophet (UWBP). See, al-‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khafā’*, ii, 195.

held within its limits and prevented from its aggression only through intimidation; and intimidation only truly affects the conscience if it [can be] verified and actualized by the existence of external torment; for like the intellect and imagination, the conscience is truly affected by intimidation only if it perceives from various indications the eternal, external reality of torment. It is pure wisdom therefore after filling people with fear at Hell-fire in this world, for it to exist in the next.

• *If you were to ask:* So it is consistent with divine wisdom also, but how does compassion permit it?

*You would be told:* The unbelievers can be thought of only in terms of non-existence or existence in torment. If you think it over in your conscience [you will understand that] existence, even if in Hell, is a mercy and better than non-existence. For if you analyze it carefully [you will see that] non-existence is pure evil; indeed, non-existence is the source of all misfortunes and sins, whereas existence is pure good, even if in Hell. Furthermore, it is in the nature of man's spirit, if it knows that the torment eliminates its crimes and sins, to be content with it, to alleviate the burden of shame. It will then acknowledge that the punishment is fair and that it deserves it. Out of its love of justice, it receives pleasure from it even. There are many honourable people in this world who long for the execution of justice so as to be saved from the shame of their crimes.

[The unbelievers] go to Hell and abide there forever as their perpetual abode, but after some time paying the penalty for their actions they grow accustomed to it in a way, even if they do not deserve this, and adapt to it. Also, their punishments are reduced and mitigated in many ways in recompense for their good deeds in this world, as is indicated in some Hadiths. These are instances of mercy for them, although they are not worthy of them.

## Verse 8

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَيَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

*Of the people there are some who say: we believe in Allah and in the Last Day; but they do not really believe. (Wa min al-nās man yaqūlu āmannā bi'llāhi wa bi'l-yawm al-ākhir wa mā hum bi-mu'minīn.)*

### **The verse's positioning in regard to what precedes it**

Just as two parts of a sentence are joined by a conjunction because they both contribute to what is being stated, and two clauses or sentences are joined by a conjunction since they serve the same aim; so two stories are joined since they are both consistent with the same goal. The conjunction of the story of the dissemblers and that of the unbelievers is of this latter sort; that is, the summary of the following twelve verses is joined by a conjunction with the substance (*ma'āl*) of the previous two verses. For since the Revelation (*al-tanzīl*) opens with praise [of itself]: “*This is the Book*,” it entails praise of the believers as the fruits of that book (lit. praise); and this in turn requires disparagement of their opposites, since “things are known by their opposites.” Then, to fulfil the purpose of guidance, it is fitting to follow this with the dissemblers, so that all types of people should be included.

• *If you were to ask:* Why does it deal concisely with the disbelievers and pure unbelief in two verses, and then deal at length with dissembling in twelve?

*You would be told:* For several subtle reasons:

*Firstly:* If unknown, an enemy is more harmful; and if he is elusive, he is more pernicious; and if he is mendacious, he causes more corruption; and if he is on the inside, he is more injurious. For an internal enemy saps one's strength and crumbles one's forces, contrarily to external enemies, for they strengthen resolve and solidarity. Alas! The harm dissembling has caused

Islam is truly immense. It is the cause of the present confusion. For this reason the Qur'an frequently condemns it.

*Secondly:* The dissembler mixes with the believers and becomes familiar with them to an extent, and grows accustomed to belief a little. He starts to feel repelled at his condition because his actions are reviled and condemned. Little by little the confession of divine unity trickles from his tongue to his heart.

*Thirdly:* The dissembler surpasses the unbeliever in such crimes as mockery, trickery, fraudulence, cunning, lying, and hypocrisy.

*Fourthly:* The dissembler is usually one of the People of the Book, and a diabolically clever scheming swindler. To be prolix about dissembling therefore is perfect eloquence.

Now to analyze the verse's words:

Consider this: In one respect "***And of the people*** (*Wa min al-nās*)" is the prefixed predicate of "*who (man)*."

• *If you were to ask:* Isn't it obvious that the dissembler is one of the people?

*You would be told:* When a statement is obvious, what is intended is one of its necessary consequences, and here it is to cause astonishment. It is as though it is saying: It is extraordinary that the contemptible dissembler is a human being, for man is noble; it is not characteristic of him to stoop to such baseness.

• *If you were to ask:* Why is the predicate put first?

*You would be told:* Precedence is more apt for producing astonishment, and for concentrating attention on the subject, for that is where the aim [of the sentence] is found. Otherwise one might expectantly pass [from the subject] to the predicate [and partially overlook the subject and aim].

Several subtle points may be distilled from the expression "*the people* (*al-nās*):"

*Firstly:* The Qur'an did not specify [the dissemblers] and expose them, indeed, it concealed them under the term "*the people*." This indicates that shielding them and not lifting the veil from their repugnant faces was more consistent with the Prophet's policies (Upon whom be blessings and peace). For if it had exposed them, the believers would have wavered, for no one is safe from the tricks of the soul, and doubts would have led to fear, and fear to hypocrisy, and hypocrisy to dissembling. Also, if attention had been drawn to their ugliness it might have been said that the Prophet (UWBP) was hesitant and did not trust his followers. And sometimes, if cor-

ruption remains concealed it subsides by degrees and the one perpetrating it endeavours to hide it. But if the veil is raised, in consequence of the saying: “If you’re shameless you can do as you like!”<sup>32</sup> he would exclaim, “It doesn’t matter what happens!” and unconcernedly spread depravity.

*Secondly:* The term “*the people (al-nās)*” indicates that quite apart from other attributes opposed to dissembling, the most general of attributes, I mean humanity, is contrary to it. For man is noble and such degradation is not characteristic of him.

*Thirdly:* It also infers that dissembling is not particular to any group or class, but is found in mankind generally, whatever the people.

*Fourthly:* The word hints that dissembling offends the honour of every-one human and inevitably arouses their anger against the person, and drives them to restrict [his activities] to prevent the poison spreading. Similarly, it wounds the honour of the group, and the disgrace of its member excites [its members’] rage against him.

**“Who say: we believe (man yaqūlu āmannā)”**

• *If you were to ask:* Why although they both refer to the same person, is “say (yaqūlu)” in the singular case, and “we believe (āmannā)” in the plural?

*You would be told:* This indicates an exquisitely subtle point, which is that the first person plural is singular [to say: “we” is to speak as one], and “say (yaqūlu)” is singular because one person is speaking. But “we believe (āmannā)” is plural because he is not alone in his belief.

Then is the quotation of their assertions: this form of literal quotation indicates the rebuttal in two respects of what is quoted, in the same way that it indicates its forcefulness in two respects. For “say (yaqūlu)” hints by its form that they do not speak out of conviction or [in consequence of their] actions, but utter with their mouths what is not in their hearts. Also, its being in the imperfect tense suggests that the reason for their continuing to defend themselves and make this claim is hypocrisy and not prompted by the conscience. While their assertion “we believe (āmannā)” being in the perfect tense suggests: “All of us People of the Book, we have long since believed so why shouldn’t we believe now?” And the pronominal suf-

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32. This is based on a Hadith related from Abū Mas‘ūd ‘Uqba ibn ‘Amr al-Ansārī and cited by al-Bukhārī: “One thing people have understood from the words of earlier prophethood is: ‘You can do you what you like so long as you feel no shame.’” al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, 215; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durar al-Muntathira*, 35. See, Nursi, *Ishārāt al-I‘jāz* [Iḥsan Qāsim], 89; Badīlī, *Kudsī Kaynakları*, 812.

fix “-nā – we” hints that they say: “We are a community and have *esprit de corps*; we aren’t like an individual who may lie or be deceived.”

“***In Allah and in the Last Day*** (*bi’llāhi wa bi’l-yawm al-ākhir*)”

Consider this: The Revelation either takes exactly what others have said, or taking its substance, puts in another form, or summarizes it. According to the first of these, by mentioning the first and last of the pillars of belief [the dissemblers] are demonstrating their firmness [of belief]. For in their view, these pillars are the most acceptable. And by repeating [the preposition] “*in (bā)*” despite the proximity [of the two words], they are alluding to the other pillars. Then according to the second [possibility], if it is the Most High’s word, by mentioning only these two poles of belief, it is indicating that what they claim to believe in most powerfully even is not belief. For their belief in them is not as it should be. And the repetition of the preposition “*in (bā)*” indicates difference. For belief in Allah is belief in His existence and unity, and belief in the Last Day is belief in its reality and that it will come, as was discussed above. [That is, belief in both is multifaceted and not only in one respect.]

“***But they do not really believe*** (*wa mā hum bi-mu’minīn*)”

• *If you were to ask:* Why does the verse not say ‘and they do (lit. did) not believe (*wa mā āmanū*), which would be similar [in tense and form] to “we believe (*āmannā*)”?

*You would be told:* Lest it should be supposed that there is any inconsistency, if only in form. And so that the negation should not refer to “we believe (*āmannā*),” which [despite being a verb in the perfect tense] is an exclamatory clause (*jumla inshā’iyya*). Thus, its explicitness disallows its denial. Rather, the negation and denial refer to the sentence implicit in “we believe (*āmannā*),” which is ‘for we are believers’ (*fa-naḥnu mu’minūn*). Furthermore, because this negative sentence is a nominal one, it infers that their unbelief is continuous.

• *If you were to ask:* Why doesn’t it indicate its non-continuance, since the negating particle *mā* comes at the beginning of the clause?

*You would be told:* Negation is what is signified by the dense [visible] letter (*al-ḥarf al-kathīf*), whereas continuance is signified by the light structure (*al-hey’at al-khafīfa*) [of the nominal clause]. So the negation is closer to what is being expressed.

• *If you were to ask:* What is the subtlety in [the preposition] “*bā*” of “(*bi-mu’minīn*)” being used in the predicate of the negating particle “*mā*”?

*You would be told:* It indicates their lack of ability to believe even if they [appear to] believe outwardly. It is the difference between “*mā Zayd sakhīyan* (Zayd is not generous),” and “*mā Zayd bi-sakhīyin:*” the first refers to his capricious character, its meaning is Zayd is not actually being generous although he has the ability and is a generous person. While the second means, Zayd does not have the capacity to be magnanimous and is not a generous person, although he does good works.

## Verses 9-10

يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا  
يَشْعُرُونَ \* فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ  
أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ

*Fain would they deceive Allah and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves, and realize [it] not! \* In their hearts is a disease; and Allah has increased their disease; and theirs is a grievous penalty, because they are false [to themselves]. (Yukhādi'ūna Allāha wa alladhīna āmanū wa mā yakhda'ūna illā anfusahum wa mā yash'urūn; \* Fī qulūbihim maraḍun fa-zādahum Allāhu maraḍan wa la-hum 'adhābun alīmun bi-mā kānū yakdhibūn.)*

### **The positioning [of this verse and its relationship with the preceding one]**

Consider first what the phrases indicate: Censure of dissembling; then condemnation of it; then denunciation of dissemblers as repugnant; then the threatening of them; then intimidation of them; then amazement at them; then an exposition of their aims as expressed above; then an explanation of what made them say what they did; then a description of the first of the four misdeeds arising from their dissembling, which are deception, corruption, their calling the believers feeble-minded, and their deriding them. Then a portrayal of their crimes and artifices by means of a parabolic metaphor (*isti'āra tamthīliyya*). It is like this: it depicts their conduct in the face of Allah (the Most High)'s injunctions and towards the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace) and the believers – their displaying belief for worldly ends despite inwardly disbelieving. It depicts how Allah, the Prophet and the believers act towards them, gradually enacting the precepts of the believers against them, although in Allah's sight they are the most abominable disbelievers. Just like two people tricking each other, or a

hunter and his prey: the prey senses the hunter on emerging from its hole so scurries back into it.

**The positioning [and relationships] of the words and phrases** from “*Fain would they deceive* (*yukhādi’ūna*),” which looks to their first crime, to “*because they are false [to themselves]* (*bi-mā kānū yakdhibūn*).” Consider the consecutive consequences inferred by these seven phrases, as follows:

*Firstly:* They are shown to be stupid for attempting something impossible like deceiving Allah.

*Secondly:* They are deemed foolish for harming themselves while seeking their own benefits.

*Thirdly:* They are accused of ignorance for failing to distinguish between benefit and harm.

*Fourthly:* They are scorned for their malignant characters, and their sick sources of health, and moribund springs of life.

*Fifthly:* They are despised for increasing their sickness while seeking a cure.

*Sixthly:* They are threatened with pure suffering and nothing but further pain.

*Seventhly:* They are paraded before the people [as the perpetrators of] the ugliest of vices; that is, lying.

The sequence of these seven phrases, and how each bears on the next may be illustrated as follows:

If you want to hold someone back from doing something and advise him against it, you say to him firstly: “Hey you! You’re an intelligent person, you can see that this is impossible! And you’re fond of yourself, so you can understand how harmful it is! And you’re sensible too, so why can’t you tell the difference between what’s harmful and what’s beneficial? Maybe you have no will, but at least admit that your character is corrupted. It is sick and distorts the truth and makes you think that what’s sweet is bitter. You’re searching for a cure, but it only increases your sickness and is no remedy. What you’re afflicted with resembles insomnia; you try to sleep, but it only upsets you and banishes your sleepiness. Or you resemble someone whose heart is assailed by worries and this excessive anxiety only compounds his ailment. Then you seek pleasure but it yields severe pain and leads to more terrible suffering, and that contains no pleasure at all. If you don’t come to your senses immediately and give up all this, nothing remains but to brand you on the snout with an ugly mark! Then everyone will know you and your corruption won’t spread among them!

In just the same way, in order to restrain the dissemblers, Allah the Most High says: “**Fain would they deceive Allah** (*yukhādi‘ūna Allah*),” rather than ‘Fain would they deceive the Prophet,’ [also] pointing out their stupidity. That is, how could they deceive the Prophet (Upon whom be peace) seeing that he is a Messenger from Allah the Most High? So their trickery reverts to Allah Himself, and it is impossible to trick Allah the Most High. To attempt the impossible is stupidity and such stupidity is only to be wondered at.

This is followed by “**but they only deceive themselves** (*wa mā yakhdā‘ūna illā anfusahum*),” to point out their foolishness. That is, “There is no benefit in what you are doing, only harm; and its harm will turn back on you, as though you were deceiving yourselves.”

Following this is “**and they realize it not** (*wa mā yash‘urūn*),” to demonstrate their ignorance. That is, “You ignorant people! You’re further astray than beasts or solid stones, for you can’t see the difference between benefit and harm!”

This is succeeded by “**In their hearts is a disease** (*fī qulūbihim maraḍun*)” to show how contemptible they are, for their natures are corrupted. That is, if you don’t have wills, at least you should know the sickness for what it is, and that you are depraved. Indeed, dissembling and envy are sicknesses of the spirit, the mark of which is to distort the truth and change it so that you suppose sweetness to be bitter and bitterness to be sweet, and black to be white and white to be black; so don’t follow such a path!

Then it adds: “**so Allah has increased their disease** (*fa-zādahum Allāhu maraḍan*)” to show their debasement. That is, you want a remedy to be cured of your anger and envy, but they are ailments that will only increase your sickness. You are like a person who breaks one of his hands, and seeking revenge on someone strikes him with it, causing it multiple fractures.

Next it says “**and theirs is a grievous penalty** (*wa la-hum ‘adhābun alīmun*),” in order to threaten them. That is, if you are seeking pleasure through this dissembling of yours, it will give you nothing but ghastly suffering now, and result in more terrible suffering in the hereafter. It is not like other sins, which afford a sort of immediate paltry pleasure.

Finally, it completes the section with “**because they are false [to themselves]** (*bi-mā kānū yakdhibūn*),” to brand them with the most repulsive stamp. That is, if you don’t come to your senses, and you haven’t come to

your senses, the only solution will be for you to be paraded before the people for lying so that they do not put their trust in you and your sickness does not spread.

**Now the positioning of the parts of the phrases relatively to each other**

**The first phrase:** that is, “*Fain would they deceive Allah and those who believe (Yukhādī‘ūna Allāh wa alladhīna āmanū):*” The use of the term deception to describe their act, and of the imperfect tense, and especially the third form of the verb, and particularly using the name of Allah in place of the Prophet, and “*who believe (alladhīna āmanū)*” in place of ‘the believers’ (*al-mu‘minūn*), all point explicitly to the impossibility of their aim to deceive. It thrusts this impossibility before the eyes, making people abominate it and shudder at it, for the parabolic metaphor (*al-isti‘āra al-tamthīliyya*) contained in the word ‘deception’ (*al-khudā*) arouses revulsion. The heart too recoils at the descriptiveness of the imperfect tense and the continuance it infers.

As in the verse, “*The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto,*(42:40) the reciprocity expressed by the use of the third form of the verb suggests that their deception will be fruitless. For in the third form of the verb, the act of the doer is a cause of the act of the one acted upon, and here the latter is a cause of the doer’s deception being fruitless and without effect; indeed, it shows their deception to be feeble and without substance, like turning the tables on someone. For example, you mock someone supposing him to be unaware of it, but inwardly he knows and is secretly mocking you.

The name “*Allāh*” states explicitly the impossibility of what they intend, for to deceive the Prophet (Upon whom be peace) entails deceiving Allah the Most High, and the reasoning faculty cannot accept such deception.

In the choice of “*and those who believe (wa alladhīna āmanū)*” rather than ‘the believers,’ that is, in the choice of the relative clause and the attribute of belief, is a sign that the dissemblers try to ingratiate themselves with the believers through the attribute of belief, exciting that vein of the believers in order to win their love so that they can insinuate themselves among them. It suggests too that since the minds of the community of believers are illuminated with belief, the dissemblers’ deceptions are not hidden from them, which leads to those deceptions being fruitless.

**The second phrase:** that is, “*but they deceive only themselves (wa mā yakhda‘ūna illā anfusahum):*” In the restriction expressed by “*only*” is a sign of their total foolishness, since their act rebounds on them. Like a per-

son who throws a stone at a wall and it bounces back and cracks his skull. For they let fly arrows at the believers but hit themselves, as though it were only themselves they had deceived.

And the replacement of ‘they harm’ (*yaḍarrūna*) by “*they deceive (yakhda’ūna)*” implies their utter foolishness, for among reasonable people one may be found who intentionally harms himself, but none that deliberately deceives himself, unless he is a complete donkey.

And in the word “*themselves (anfusahum)*” is a concealed sign that since their dissembling and artifice are to gratify their instinctual souls and for selfish reasons, they result in the reverse of what is being sought.

• *If you were to ask:* The restriction [to the dissemblers] here implies that their deceptions cause no harm to Islam and the Muslims, but Islam has been harmed by nothing to the extent it has been harmed by the various sorts of dissembling and their offshoots, which have spread like poison among the peoples of the Islamic world?

*You would be told:* The aggressive harm you see and that contagious poison have spread like an infectious disease from their prurient characters, corrupted natures, and putrid consciences; it is not the result of the deceptions and tricks they have perpetrated through their wills. For they want to deceive Allah and the Prophet and the community of believers, but Allah has knowledge of all things and the Prophet is the recipient of revelation, and it is not possible for the deception to be hidden from the community of believers for any length of time, and they are not deceived. So it is established that it is only themselves that they deceive.

**The third phrase:** “*and realize it not (wa mā yash’urūn);*” that is, they do not perceive or are not sensible of: This succinct phrase ascribes ignorance to them, for it gives to understand that if they are intelligent beings, this is not characteristic of intelligence, and if they are animals and act on the impulses of the instinctual soul, they should sense and be aware of this palpable harm. Hence it is established that they have come to resemble inanimate beings, devoid of will.

**The fourth phrase:** “*In their hearts is a disease (fī qulūbihim maraḍun);*” this phrase being positioned here states that since they do not act as required by the reasoning of the intellect and awareness of the senses, it is clear that they are suffering from a sickness of the spirit. For at least they should know it is a sickness and avoid its attendant problems and not judge according to them. For such sickness alters the truth, distorts beauty, and shows what is bitter to be sweet, as has been described.

The preposition “*In (fī)*” hints that their envy and hatred are sicknesses afflicting the inward dimensions of their hearts, the heart being a subtle dominical faculty, as discussed.

And in the term ‘heart’ (*qalb*) is an indication that just as a disease of the physical heart disturbs the functioning of all the body, so when what the heart signifies is sick with deception and dissembling, all the functions of the spirit are deflected from the straight path, for the heart in this sense is the source of life and its machine.

And “*In their hearts (fī qulūbihim)*” preceding “*is a disease (maraḍun)*” bears the meaning of restriction in two respects: by way of allusion it indicates that belief is a light which gives health and right direction to all man’s actions and works. Secondly, it infers that their corruption is fundamental so it is of no avail to repair minor matters.

The word “*disease (maraḍun)*” allusively confutes their excuses and rams them down their throats. For man’s innate disposition inclines naturally to the truth; corruption and destruction are sicknesses and accidental (*‘āriḍ*).

And in the use of the indefinite is a sign that the disease is so deep-seated that it is not possible to either see it or cure it.

**The fifth phrase:** that is, “*and Allah has increased their disease (fa-zādahum Allāhu maraḍan)*.” When they do not recognize the disease or avoid it, but chase after it applauding it, Allah increases it, for “whoever seeks will find.”

In the “*fa-*” [of *fa-zādahum Allāhu*], which expresses purpose, – although the existence of the sickness is not a reason for its increase – is a sign that since they do not identify the disease, nor seek a means of curing it, indeed, take steps to aggravate it like someone who strikes a superior enemy with a broken hand, it seems they are seeking its increase. So Allah increases it by transforming their hopes into oppressive despair, due to the triumph of the believers, and transforms their enmity into burning hatred in their hearts, because the believers prevail. So there arise from the diseases of hatred and despair, the sickness of fear and ailment of weakness and illness of degradation, all of which overwhelm their hearts.

Allah the Most High did not say ‘Allah increased their disease’ (*fa-zāda Allāhu maraḍahum*), but “*Allah has increased them in disease*” and made the pronominal suffix the object and “*disease*” specificatory (*tamyīz*) in order to indicate that the inner sickness of the heart has spread to the outside, contaminating all they do. It is as if this malignant disease has cov-

ered all their bodies, which have become the disease itself. The suppurating blisters of the illness become an additional body for them. Like the saying “*ishta’ala al-baytu nāran*,” which infers that fire has enveloped the whole house and it is all ablaze; as opposed to “*ishta’ala nāru’l-bayt*,” which states that a part of it has caught fire.

**The sixth phrase:** that is, “*and theirs is a grievous penalty (wa la-hum ‘adhābun alīm)*.” The *lām* (of “*la-hum – theirs*”), which denotes benefit, indicates that if they are to receive benefit, it would definitely be [in the form of] grievous suffering in this world or painful torment in the next. Now it is impossible that these should be benefits, so it is impossible they should receive them. While the word “*torment, penalty (‘adhāb)*” being qualified by “*painful, grievous (alīm)*,” meaning ‘in pain, suffering’ (*muta’alim*), which usually refers to people, hints that the torment has overwhelmed their bodies and enveloped their persons and suffused their inner beings, so that they have become torment and the torment has become identical with them, like red-hot coals turn into burning embers when consumed by fire. If one beholds the torment with one’s imagination and hears the agonized wailing and moaning on every side arising from the perpetually renewed life of torture, it seems as though it is the torment itself that is wailing and groaning. What a terrible warning for those who think!

**The seventh phrase:** that is, “*because they are false [to themselves] (bi-mā kānū yakdhibūn)*.” By attributing the above-mentioned penalty for their crimes to lying alone, it is indicating the atrociousness of lying, and its ugliness and loathsomeness. This indication testifies truthfully to the severe effects of the poison of lying, for lying is the basis of unbelief; indeed, unbelief is a falsehood and the worst sort of lying, and it is the chief sign of dissembling. Lying is to slander divine power and it is the opposite of dominical wisdom. Lying destroys high morals. It transforms great enterprises into putrifying corpses. Its poison has spread through the Islamic world. It has overturned the affairs of mankind, and held back the world of humanity from attaining its perfections, and prevented its advance and progress. It has cast down the likes of Musaylima the Liar to the lowest of the low. It is a heavy burden on man’s back hindering him from achieving his aims. It is the progenitor of hypocrisy and artificiality. These are the reasons it has been specified by that which was revealed from above the Sublime Throne, and why it is execrated and made the object of threats. So you people, and especially you Muslims! This verse calls on you to note it carefully.

- *If you were to ask:* Isn't lying excusable if for some good purpose?

*You would be told:* – If to lie is imperative and its advantages are certain. But what they call good reason is [generally] a false excuse. For it is stipulated by the science of the principles of the Shari'a that because a matter that is not determinable or quantifiable is open to exploitation, it cannot be made the basis of rulings. For example, since the hardship involved in performing the *ṣalāt* while on a journey is undeterminable, it is not the reason for their being shortened; the reason is the journey. And if we accept that the harm of a thing outweighs its benefits, a ruling is given to abrogate it and its benefit lies in its non-existence. The anarchy and disorder in the world testify to the overwhelming harm of the pretext of benefit. But hinting and allusions are not lying. The way is twofold: either silence, for truthfulness does not demand that one says everything that is true; or honesty, for truthfulness is the basis of Islam and a characteristic of belief; indeed, belief is truthfulness and its main sort. [Truthfulness] is the bond of all perfections; and the life of high morals; and the root binding things to reality; and the manifestation of truth on the tongue. It is the pivot of man's development and the order of the Islamic world; and it is what conveys man with the speed of lightning down the road of progress to the *ka'ba* of perfections; and it raises the poorest and dullest person higher than a sultan; and it made the Companions of the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace) superior to all others; and it raised up our Master Muhammad al-Hāshimī (Upon whom be blessings and peace) to the loftiest peak of humanity.

## Verses 11-12

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ  
\* أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ

*When it is said to them: ‘Do not spread corruption on the earth,’ they answer: ‘We are but improving things!’ \* Oh, verily, it is they, they who are who are spreading corruption, but they perceive it not. (Wa idhā qīla la-hum lā tufsidū fi’l-ard qālū innamā naḥnu muṣliḥūn. \* A’ lā innahum hum al-mufsidūna wa lākin lā yash’urūn.)*

### **Consider the positioning of these verses in regard to the preceding ones**

Allah the Most High mentions the first of the crimes arising from their dissembling: their wronging themselves and transgressing His rights (*ḥuqūq Allāh*), together with the successive consequences mentioned above, and then He follows this with the second of their crimes: their trampling the rights of His servants and their spreading corruption, and its results.

[The phrase] “*When it is said (idhā qīla)*” is linked by virtue of the story to “*say (yaqūlu)*” in “*Of the people there are some who say: (Wa min al-nās man yaqūlu),*”(2:8) and by reason of its meaning to “*Fain would they deceive (Yukhādī’ūna),*”(2:9) so too, by virtue of itself it is linked to “*they are false to themselves (yakhḍibūn).*”(2:10)

The change from a categorical to a conditional clause is an indication and concealed sign of the clause implicit between them. It is as though it is saying: “Theirs is a grievous penalty for what they give the lie to; for when they lie they cause dissension, and when they cause dissension they cause corruption; and if they are admonished they do not accept it, and if they are told: don’t spread corruption... and so on.”

### **The positioning of the verses’ phrases, both explicit and implicit**

It is exactly the same as the order and linkages in the example that I shall now give you:

If you see someone who has taken a road leading to perdition, you first of all warn him, saying: “This way will be the ruin of you; don’t take it!” If he does not avoid it using his own intelligence, you will renew your efforts to restrain him by forbidding and upbraiding him, and you will reinforce this and instil it in his brain either by scaring him with the threat of universal condemnation, or by softening his heart by inculcating fellow feeling, as will be explained to you below.

If the person is obstinate, persistent, recalcitrant, and mounted on compounded ignorance, he will not be silent but will defend himself. For it is characteristic of corrupters to look on their corruption as good and useful. For by nature, man does not perpetrate iniquitous acts thinking they are iniquitous. He will offer evidence that his way is right, claiming that this is well known and that you have no right to admonish him and that he has no need for your advice. Rather, you need to learn about his way. For the only smooth path is his and you should not attack the better way.

And if that obdurate person is two-faced, he will also have a forked tongue. On the one hand, he will try to divert the person admonishing him and silence him, and on the other he will defend his way saying: “Outwardly I put things to rights as you wish, and inwardly as I believe.” Then to corroborate what he claims, he says: “Putting things to rights is something I’ve always done; it isn’t that I now do good works having previously spread corruption.”

And if that obdurate, Nimrod-like person persists in spreading his way and declaring the admonisher a liar and making insinuations against the people of truth to this extent, it is clear that the medicine has no effect on him. Only one remedy remains and that is to put him into quarantine. This treatment consists of warning people and informing them that he is a corrupter, not a doer of good, for he does not use his head or employ his intelligence that he might grasp this matter, which is so obvious and palpable.

If you have understood the links enumerated in the above example [that is, the progression of the argument], you will have grasped the links between the phrases, both stated and alluded to, in this verse from “*And when it is said to them (Wa idhā qīla la-hum)*” to the end. For their order is so natural and succinct (*ījāz*) that the miraculousness glows from beneath it [like live coals].

### The order and positioning of the parts of the phrases

Consider this: the definiteness expressed by “*when (idhā)*” in “**When it is said to them: ‘Do not spread corruption on the earth’** (*Wa idhā qīla la-hum lā tufsidū fi’l-ard*)” denotes the necessary obligation of ‘forbidding what is unlawful.’

The passive form of “*it is said (qīla)*” indicates that such prohibition is incumbent on all (*farḍ kifāya ‘alā al-umūm*).

In the “*la-*” of “*la-hum – to them*” is a sign that the prohibition must be in the form of advice, not coercion; and through persuasion rather than by force.

“*Do not spread corruption (lā tufsidū)*” is a summary in the form of a conditional syllogism; that is, “do not do that, for it will lead to anarchy. Relations [requiring] obedience will be severed, justice and its system will be thrown into disorder, the bonds of unity will be broken, and this will lead to corruption. So don’t do it lest you cause corruption.”

The phrase “*on the earth (fi’l-ard)*” corroborates and perpetuates the prohibition, for [its effect] is temporary. The admonition therefore has to fix it permanently in the brain of the one addressed by appointing his conscience to always restrain him from beneath. This is either by exciting his vein of fellow feeling, or by arousing his desire to flee from public disgust. “*On the earth (fi’l-ard)*” arouses these two veins, for the phrase addresses [the dissemblers] saying: “This depravity of yours spreads through mankind. Why do you feel such hatred and anger at all the people, some of whom are innocent, or poor, or unknown by you? Why don’t you feel sorry for them and pity them? We can see you have no sympathy for your fellow men, but at least you should realize that this action of yours attracts their loathing.”

• *If you were to ask:* Which of [the dissemblers’] objectives looks to the people at large? How can their depravity spread to everyone?

*You would be told:* Just as everything appears dark and ugly to a person who looks through a dark lens, so everything appears hateful and odious to the person whose sight is veiled by dissembling and whose heart is corrupted by unbelief. His heart is full of malice towards all men, indeed, all beings, and he stubbornly opposes them. Furthermore, if one tooth of a fly-wheel in the workings of a clock is damaged, the clock is affected either wholly or partially. Similarly, mankind’s order is affected by one person’s dissembling, for it is set in order through justice, Islam, and obedience. Alas! [The dissemblers’] continuously scattered poisons have accumulated and resulted in the present ignominy.

**“They answer: ‘We are but improving things!’ (Qālū innamā naḥnu muṣliḥūn)”**

In the substitution of “*they answer* (lit. say) (*qālū*)” for ‘they do not accept advice’ (*lā yaqbulūna al-naṣīḥa*), which would have been appropriate in the context, is an indication that they are making presumptuous claims and calling others to their way.

“*Innamā*,” [the restrictive particle, meaning only or but], possesses two characteristics:

*The First:* The phrase in which it is included has necessarily to signify something known, either in reality or allegedly. Thus, it infers depreciation of the one offering advice, as well as their [the dissemblers’] persisting in their compounded ignorance.

*The Second:* The restriction of “but” indicates that in their view their improving things is unadulterated by corruption. And this is an insinuation against the believers [who say the opposite].

The use of the active participle in “(lit.) *improvers [of things] (muṣliḥūn)*” rather than the verbal form ‘we are making improvements, setting in order, etc.’ indicates that [they allege that] this attribute of theirs is constant and continual and that what they are doing is total betterment. But they are dissimulating in saying this also, for what they profess inwardly is the opposite of what they profess outwardly: inwardly they claim their corruption to be improving things, and outwardly they hypocritically claim that what they do is for the betterment of the believers and in their interests.

**“Oh, verily, it is they, they who are who are spreading corruption, but they perceive it not. (A’ lā innahum hum al-muṣṣidūna wa lākin lā yash’urūn)”**

Consider this: The previous verse inferred a number of things about the dissemblers: for example, their spreading their ideas, and claiming that they consistently put things to rights and that this is a constant attribute of theirs, and is confined to them; and that their bettering things is untouched by corruption; that this is clear and well known; and their casting aspersions on the believers and imputing ignorance to those who offer them advice. Here, the Qur’an replies to them with the present sentence, which comprises elements proving their corruption and that they have become one with it; that corruption is restricted to them, and that this is an established fact, and warning the people against them, and showing them to be ignorant by disallowing them any senses, as though they were inanimate. If you wish, consider the following:

The [intensifying interjection] “*Oh, verily! (a’-lā)*” is for alerting or warning: See how with its warning it declares false all their propaganda, which is alluded to by the word(s) “*they say (qālū)*.”

The [corroborative particle] “*innā,*” which is for verification: See how it refutes their well-known claims, indicated by “*innamā.*” It is as though the “*innā*” is saying that in reality their inner state is one of corruption, so their outwardly being righteous will not profit them.

The restrictive meaning of the personal pronoun “*they (hum)*” counters the insinuations implicit in “*naḥnu*” and “*innamā:*” “*We are but improving things.*”

The definite article in “(lit.) the spreaders of corruption (*al-mufsidīn*),” which signifies that you see in them the quintessence of those who cause corruption and that they are in essence depravity – see how this contradicts the restriction expressed by “*innamā.*”

And “*but they perceive it not (wa lākin lā yash’urūn)*,” how it contradicts their declaring false the one admonishing them and their claim that they are not in need of advice, since their assertions [about what they are] are known.

## Verse 13

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا كَمَا آمَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا آمَنَ  
السُّفَهَاءُ إِلَّا أَنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

*And when they are told, 'Believe as other people believe,' they answer, 'Shall we believe as the weak-minded believe?' Oh, verily, it is they, they who are weak-minded, but they know it not! (Wa idhā qīla la-hum āminū ka-mā āmana al-nās qālū a' nu'minu ka-mā āmana al-sufahā' a' lā innahum hum al-sufahā' wa lākin lā ya'lamūn)*

### **The positioning of this verse and its relationship with the previous one**

Consider this: In so far as these two verses (2:11, 2:13) consist of advice and guidance; the enjoining of what is lawful, adornment (*al-taḥlīyya*), and encouragement [in the present verse] are linked to the prohibiting of what is unlawful, purification (*al-takhlīyya*), and intimidation in the previous one. And in so far as they both describe [the dissemblers'] crimes, their decrying the believers and pride [in the present verse] are linked to their mischief-making (*ifsād*) in the previous one. Just as their mischief-making is tied to their depravity (*fasād*), every sort of which is a branch of the Zaqqum-tree of dissembling.

### **The relationships between the verse's phrases**

Consider this: With the sentence “*And when they are told, 'Believe as other people believe'* (*Wa idhā qīla la-hum āminū ka-mā āmana al-nās*),” [the verse] first suggests with its parts the obligation of calling to sincere belief in emulation of the mass of the people, who are genuine [believers], for indeed the conscience perpetually urges them to do this. It then quotes [the dissemblers' retort]: “*they answer, 'Shall we believe as the weak-minded believe?'* (*qālū a' nu'minu ka-mā āmana al-sufahā'*),” indicating their [pique,] obduracy and pride, and their insistence on their rightness. Yes, all liars look on the false as true and think their ignorance is knowl-

edge. For [the dissemblers’] hearts have been corrupted by dissembling, and pride and the tendency to corrupt spring from depravity, and because of this they have grown obdurate. Due to their corruption, they secretly confabulate and plan to lead others astray. And in their pride, they consider fervent religiosity and perfect belief, the cause of independence and contentment, to be ignominy, foolishness, and indigence.

Moreover, because of their duplicity, they dissemble when saying this, also. For outwardly they say: “How should we be like the weak-minded, for we aren’t mad? We are as superior as you could wish.” While inwardly they say: “How could we be like the believers, for most of them are paupers? In our eyes they are the dim-witted rabble of different nations.”

You can now supply the fine points to the two parts of this conditional sentence.

The Qur’an then hurls back at them the stone they flung at the believers, ramming it down their throats: “*Oh, verily, it is they, they who are weak-minded (a’ lā innahum hum al-sufahā’)*.” For whoever is obstinate to this degree and ignorant without realizing it, deserves to be paraded among the people and proclaimed the feeble-minded one, for this is an established fact, and their calling the believers weak-minded is due to their own feeble-mindedness.

Then by saying: “*but they know it not (wa lākin lā ya’lamūn)*,” it is pointing out that their ignorance is compounded because they are unaware of it. It is therefore useless to offer them advice; they should be shunned entirely. For it is only those who realize that they are ignorant that may benefit from advice.

#### **The positioning of [and relationships between] the phrases’ parts**

“*And when they are told, ‘Believe as other people believe;’ (Wa idhā qīla la-hum āminū ka-mā āmana al-nās)*”

In this phrase, the certainty expressed by the word “*when (idhā)*” indicates the necessity of offering guidance [to the people] by ‘enjoining what is lawful.’

“*[Being] told (Qīla)*.” The passive mood infers that offering advice is an obligation [that may be performed by a number of people in the name of the community (‘*alā sabīl al-kifāya*)], as has been mentioned.

The use of the verb “*believe (āminu)*” rather than ‘be sincere in your belief’ (*akhliṣū fī imānikum*) indicates that insincere belief is not belief.

The phrase “*as [others] believe (ka-mā āmana)*” is an allusion to the fine

examples of admirable men, suggesting that sincerity may be attained by following them.

The word “*the people (al-nās)*” contains two points, which induce the conscience to always enjoin the good. For “*as other people believe (ka-mā āmana an-nās)*” intimates: “Follow the mass of the people, for to oppose them is an error that the heart is not so bold as to commit.”

Secondly, it infers that those who do not believe should not be counted as true men; only believers are true human beings, as though the others are human only in form. For the believers have advanced in perfections and true humanity is particular to them, and the rest have fallen from the level of humanity.

The phrase: “*they say: shall we believe as the weak-minded believe? (qālū a’ nu’minu ka-mā āmana al-sufahā’)*” has this meaning: “We don’t accept advice. How could we be like those lowly wretches? How can we people of standing be put on a par with them? We look on them as dim-wits?”

Thus, the word “*they say (qālū)*” hints at their self-justification, their spreading their views, their disdain for advice, and their arrogance and presumption.

The rhetorical question “*shall we believe (a’ nu’minu)*” indicates their obstinately sticking to their ignorant views. As though, using the interrogative form, they are saying to the one advising them: “Consult your conscience! Can you in all fairness accept that we reject [religion]?”

Moreover, “*they say (qālū)*” contains three consecutive aspects; that is: first of all they address themselves, then their fellows, then the one offering them guidance, for it is usual when offered advice for a person first of all consult himself, then his fellows, then to refer back to you with the results of his reasoning. Hence, when they are told what was said, they examine their corrupted hearts and rotten consciences and are shown the way of denial. What they say is an interpretation of what is in their hearts. Then with a view to making mischief they refer to their brothers, and are again shown the way of denial, and they begin holding secret confabulations. Then by way of making excuses and to mislead they turn back to the one giving them advice and say provocatively: “The difference between us is so great we can’t be compared with them. They are poor and have to be strong in religion and Sufism; they simply have to be like that. But we are people of high rank and standing.” In their arrogance they call on the one offering them advice to be fair, and as a ruse and stratagem say deceitfully: “Don’t

suppose us to be feeble-minded; you shouldn’t imagine we’re people like that! No, we act as sincere believers act.” However, inwardly they say: “We aren’t like those impoverished, worthless believers,” which is an oblique hint at their depravity and spreading of corruption and their arrogance and duplicity.

“*As the weak-minded believe (ka-mā āmana al-sufahā’)*,” that is, “You suppose the believers to be the people of perfection, but in our view they are contemptible mendicants. They’re forced to turn to religion. They’re worthless for all their numbers. They’re the riff-raff of other nations.”

Their claiming that there can be no comparison between them indicates that Islam is the refuge of the downtrodden, the recourse of the poor, the defender of truth, and the preserver of right, the preventer of arrogance, and the restrainer of pride; it is the only measure of perfection and distinction.

The dissemblers’ claim to be different also points to the cause of dissembling, which for the most part is self-interest, pride, and arrogance, as is explained by the verse, “*We see [in] you nothing but a man like ourselves; nor do we see that any follow you but the most abject among us, in judgement immature.*”(11:27)

It is also a concealed sign that Islam cannot be made an instrument of domination and oppression in the hands of the worldly and high-ranking; it is rather a means of upholding right at the disposal of the poor and needy, contrarily to other religions. History testifies to this.

“*Oh, verily, it is they, they who are weak-minded (a’ lā innahum hum al-sufahā’)*”

Consider this: The sole reason for the Qur’an’s vigorous assaults on dissembling and its condemnation of it is that its various kinds have been the cause of most of the calamities visited on the Islamic world.

The interjection “*a’ lā – Oh, verily*” is to attract attention and publicize their folly and call on public opinion to testify to it. The real meaning of “*a’ lā*” is “Don’t you know that they’re weak-minded? That is, you ought to know!”

The corroborative particle “*inna*” acts as a mirror to the truth and is a means to it, as though it were saying: “Refer to the truth and understand that their outward sophistries are baseless.”

The pronoun “*they (hum)*” infers restriction [to themselves] and [its purpose] is to reject their self-justification and repulse their imputation of feeble-mindedness to the believers, indicated by “*as the weak-minded believe (ka-mā āmana al-sufahā’)*.” That is, the weak-minded are those people who

give up [working for] the hereafter at the behest of their pride and self-interest and fleeting pleasures, unlike those who earn eternal life by giving up their ephemeral desires.

The definite article “al” of “*al-sufahā* – [the] *weak-minded*” indicates that it is a known fact that they are weak-minded. It also denotes completeness; that is, theirs is complete weak-mindedness.

**“But they know it not”** (*wa lākin lā ya‘lamūn*)”

This contains three indications:

*The First:* Knowledge and consideration (*naẓar*) are necessary to distinguish between truth and falsehood and differentiate between the way of the believers and that of the dissemblers, unlike [the dissemblers’] corruption and dissension, which can be perceived by those of least intelligence. For this reason, [as this verse is concluded with the phrase, “but they know it not”], the previous verse has appended to it the phrase, “but they perceive it not.”

*The Second:* “They do not know,” like similar phrases at the ends of verses such as “they do not use their reasons (*lā ya‘qilūn*),” “they do not reflect (*lā yatafakkarūn*),” and “they do not recall (*lā yatadhakkarūn*)” show that Islam is founded on reason, wisdom, and knowledge. It is characterized by being acceptable by all sound minds, unlike other religions, which are based on blind imitation and bigotry. This indication presages well [for Islam], as is discussed elsewhere.<sup>33</sup>

*The Third:* One should avoid [the dissemblers] and not concern oneself with them, for there is nothing to be gained from offering them advice; they are not aware of their ignorance that they might try to dispel it and be quit of it.

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33. This refers to *al-Khuṭba al-Shāmiyya* (Turk. *Hutbe-i Şamiye*) (1911). For English translation, see, *The Damascus Sermon* (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 2001), 27-43.

## Verses 14-15

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا  
مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِؤْنَ \* اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدَّهُمْ فِي  
طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

*When they meet those who believe, they say: “We believe;” but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: “We are really with you; we [were] only jesting. \* Allah will throw back their mockery on them, and give them rope in their trespasses; so they will wander like blind ones [to and fro]. (Wa idhā laqū alladhīna āmanū qālū āmannā wa idhā khalaw ilā shayāṭīnihim qālū innā ma‘kum innamā naḥnu mustahzi’ūn. \* Allāhu yastahziyu’ bi-him wa yamuddhum fī ṭughānihim ya’mahūn.)*

### **The relationship of these verses’ meaning with that of the previous one**

This consists of the linking [by means of the conjunction “and”] of the dissemblers’ fourth crime; that is, their mockery and scorn, with their previous crimes; that is, their accusing the believers of weak-mindedness, their spreading corruption, and their depravity.

### **The positioning of the phrases constituting these verses [and the relationships between them]**

Belief, as a prop and support in the face of suffering and a source of assistance for realizing one’s hopes, possesses three essential properties:

*The First:* Self-respect, which arises from having such a support, and the mark of which is not to lower oneself by being abject and servile.

*The Second:* Compassion, the mark of which is not to abase others or be contemptuous of them.

*The Third:* Respect for the truth and knowledge of its worth. For the person who possesses something of high value possesses the truth; he owns a unique jewel and will not be scornful of the truth. For he is also dignified.

Similarly, the opposite of belief, that is, dissembling, has three characteristics, the reverse of those of belief: obsequiousness, the desire to corrupt, and arrogance leading to contempt of others.

If you have recognized these, then know that dissembling causes a person to be obsequious, which results in his abasement; in this he is hypocritical, which means he is sycophantic, which is lying. This is indicated by “**When they meet those who believe, they say: ‘We believe’** (*Wa idhā laqū alladhīna āmanū qālū āmannā*).”

Moreover, dissembling corrupts the heart, and this makes the spirit feel orphanlike; that is, its being without owner, protector, or lord; and this gives rise to fear, which makes such people resort to hiding themselves away. This is indicated by “**but when they are alone** (*wa idhā khalaw*).”

Also, dissembling causes a person to sever relations with his relatives, and this extinguishes his compassion, and its extinction leads the person to mischief-making, which leads to dissension, and this to treachery, and this to weakness, which compels him to seek a supporter and helper. And this is indicated by the phrase “**with their evil ones** (*ilā shayāṭīnihim*).”

Then, because dissembling is wavering ignorance, it causes [the dissemblers] to vacillate, which leads to their instability, and then to their having no outlook, and then to their not being trusted, and this compels them to continually renew their agreements. This sequence of events is indicated by “**they say: we are really with you** (*qālū innā ma’kum*).”

Then, feeling the need to make excuses, out of their fickleness they attach no importance to the truth. Because of their own worthlessness, they depreciate its high value. Due to their own abasement, they disdain elevated things. And in their weakness, they are carried away by pride. The Qur’an alludes to this with the words: “**we were only jesting** (*innamā naḥnu mustahzi’ūn*).”

While expecting from this line of reasoning that the believers will reply to [the dissemblers], the listener sees that Allah the Most High replies to them in their stead. This indicates Allah’s honouring the believers and implies that their mocking the believers is nothing compared with Allah the Most High’s punishment of them. It indicates too their stupidity and that they deserve to be rejected and turned away, for how can the person who has Allah as his protector be mocked? So the Most High says: “**Allah will throw back their mockery on them** (*Allāh yastahziyu’ bi-him*).” That is, He will punish them severely for their mockery by causing them to be continuously derided and scorned in this world and the next.

And the phrase “*and give them rope in their trespasses; so they will wander like blind ones [to and fro] (wa yamudduhum fī ṭughānihim ya‘mahūn)*” specifies what form [Allah’s] mocking [will take], the punishment for their mockery.

**The positioning of the parts of the phrases [and the relationships between them]**

Consider this: The phrase “*When they meet those who believe, they say: ‘We believe.’ (Wa idhā laqū alladhīna āmanū qālū āmannā)*” denotes their sycophancy.

The certainty expressed by “*when (idhā)*” infers definiteness, deliberateness, and intention. That is, they deliberately intended to meet the believers.

The verb “*they meet (laqū)*” indicates that they intended to encounter the believers on thoroughfares in the midst of the people.

The use of the phrase “*those who believe (alladhīna āmanū)*” in place of ‘the believers’ (*al-mu‘minīn*) indicates that [the dissemblers] have direct contact with them and that they are in touch with each other, and that the reason for their relations is belief, and that belief is the most outstanding of the believers’ attributes.

The word “*they say (qālū)*” hints that they say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, and that what they say demonstrates their artificiality, hypocrisy, and sycophancy, and that they say it to rebuff accusations and avidly attract [to themselves] the believers’ advantages and so that they might pry into their secrets.

The word “*we believe (āmannā)*” not being in the intensive [or corroborative – *bilā ta‘kīd*] form although the sense requires it, and its being a verbal clause, indicate that there is no passion or incentive in their hearts driving them to be steadfast in what they say. The non-use of the intensive also indicates their strenuous rebuttals of the accusations against them, as though they are saying: “Your denying [our belief] is uncalled for, in fact it’s futile, for we’re not the sort of people who can be accused.” It is also a sign that such vehemence will not give currency to what they say. It also hints that the veil covering their lies and dissembling is so flimsy, if force were applied to it, it would be torn apart. Also, in its being a verbal clause is a sign that they cannot claim to be constant and persistent [in their belief]; their aim in dissimulating while claiming that they have recently come to believe is to share in the believers’ benefits and to discover their secrets.

**“But when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: ‘We are really with you’ (Wa idhā khalaw ilā shayātīnihim qālū innā ma’kum)”**

The comprehensive “wāw – and” in “but (lit. and) when (wa idhā)” denotes that these words are so placed to make it clear that the dissemblers adhere to no particular way, and to describe their vacillation, [as set forth] in detail in the two conditional clauses [this phrase and the last one].

The definiteness expressed by “when (idhā)” indicates that driven by their depravity and spreading of corruption, they deem it their bounden duty to have recourse [to their evil ones].

The verb “they are alone (khalaw)” infers that because of their perfidy they are scared, and because of their fear they conceal themselves.

The use of “ilā (lit. to)” instead of ma’ (with), which is [properly] used with the verb khalaw, indicates that because of their weakness and impotence they [have to] seek refuge [with others], and because of their corruption and intrigues, they hand over the believers’ secrets to the unbelievers.

The term “evil ones (al-shayātīn)” indicates that their chiefs are like satans, hidden and making diabolical suggestions, and that they cause harm like satans, and that they are on a satanic path, and can conceive of nothing but evil.

The phrase “they say: we are really with you (qālū innā ma’kum)” is to express their meeting their obligations and renewing their agreements, and their constancy in their way. For here, it is confirmative although no denial is made, while in the previous phrase it is not confirmative although there is denial, which is evidence for the lack of compelling eagerness in the speaker’s heart in the previous phrase, and its being found in this one. Moreover, the fact that this phrase is a nominal clause and the previous one is a verbal clause, indicates that the purpose here is to demonstrate their constancy in dissembling and their inconstancy in belief.

**“We were only jesting (Innamā nahnu mustahzi’ūn)”**

This phrase is not joined to the preceding one with a conjunction, for conjunctions are not used to join sentences that are either so similar as to be one with each other or are totally unconnected, but only [with sentences that] are between the two. This phrase in one respect is a substitute (*badal*) for the previous one, and in another respect corroborates it; the two are therefore closely interlinked. Then in another way it is the answer to an implicit question and so is totally unconnected. For usually, replies are declarative (*ikhbāriyya*) sentences or clauses, and questions express wishes, requests, or conditions (*inshā’iyya*).

With regard to this clause corroborating the previous one, and its being a substitute for it, which is closer to it, it signifies contempt for the truth and the people of truth, so exalts falsehood and its followers; this is the meaning of: “*We are really with you.*”

And with regard to its being the answer to an implied question, it is as though their satans are saying to them: “If you are with us and on our way, why are you in agreement with the believers? Either you subscribe to their beliefs, or you have no belief.” Apologetically they reply: “*We were only jesting,*” thus stating explicitly that they are not in any way Muslims. By using the restrictive “*only (innamā)*,” they also infer that they are not hesitant or without beliefs or convictions, and by using the active participle “*mocking, jesting (mustahzi’ūn)*,” they hint that to mock is one of their permanent characteristics. Thus, they are not serious in this action of theirs [their belief].

**“Allah will throw back their mockery on them (Allāh yastahziyu’ bi-him)”**

This clause is not joined to those preceding it; indeed, it is disjoined and separate from them. For if it had been attached by a conjunction to “*we [were] only jesting (innamā nahnu mustahzi’ūn)*,” it would also have had to corroborate “*we are really with you (innā ma’kum)*.” And if it had been attached to “*they say (qālū)*,” it would also have had to have been confined to when they were alone, whereas Allah mocks them continually. And if it had been attached to “*when they are alone (idhā khalaw)*,” it would have had to be the complement of their vacillation. And if it had been attached to “*when they meet (idhā laqū)*,” both clauses would have had to have been intending the same thing, whereas the first describes what they have done and the second, their punishment. Thus, since all the possibilities demanding a conjunction are invalid, it would not be correct for this clause to be attached to those preceding it. So it can only be unconnected to the previous phrase (*musta’nifa*), and in reply to an implied question. This hints and implies that their wickedness and loathsomeness have reached such a degree that they induce the spirits of all those aware of them to ask: “How will people who behave like that be punished?”

The clause’s beginning with the word “*Allāh*,” although the listener expects to see the believers facing up to them, indicates that He is honouring the believers and being beneficent to them, for He confronts the dissemblers in their stead. It is also a hint restraining the dissemblers, for those supported by the One All-Knowing of the Unseen cannot be mocked. Also, the fact that this clause is detached and unconcerned with their

mockery indicates that their mockery is nothing compared with its punishment. Moreover, the use of the term “mocking” to describe Allah the Most High’s chastisement of them, which is unfitting for His exaltedness, is to give the idea of the similarity between the holders of a conversation, and to indicate that the chastisement is the punishment for their mockery and its inevitable result, although its purpose is to humiliate and scorn them. Furthermore, it hints that their mockery of the believers does not profit them, indeed, it harms them, as though Allah the Most High is mocking them [for it]. Like someone who thinks he is making fun of you, but you look on him as crazy and want him to talk to you even if he abuses you, for his making fun of you is part of your making a fool of him.

Here, the derisory “*mocks (yastahziyu)*” is a verb in the imperfect tense, although in the previous verse “*mustahzi’un*” it is an active participle, which indicates that Allah the Most High’s chastisement and His debasing them are continually renewed so that they suffer the pain and are affected by it. For the effects of something continuous and regular diminish, or disappear altogether. This is the reason it is said that variation is necessary to make things felt.

**“And give them rope in their trespasses so they will wander like blind ones [to and fro] (*wa yamudduhum fī tughyānihim ya’mahūn*)”**

That is, they make use of the means of misguidance and seek it, so Allah the Most High gives it to them. Thus, the word “(lit.) *grant them a respite, give them rope (yamuddu)*” implies rebuttal of the Mu’tazilites, [who asserted man creates his own actions], and since it includes the meaning of ‘seeking help’ (*istimdād*) it infers rejection of the Jabriyya; that is, misusing their wills the dissemblers chose this path and sought help to follow it, so Allah the Most High helped them, and loosened their halters.

The addition of the pronominal suffix “*their (-hum)*” to “*trespasses* (lit. rebellion) (*tughyān*),” that is, they chose it voluntarily, signifies that they were not coerced so that they might be excused, while “*tughyān*” [which has the meaning of overflowing and exceeding all bounds] indicates that their harm has inundated everything good like a flood, destroying the foundations of perfection, and that nothing remains but black scum.

“*So they will wander like blind ones [to and fro] (ya’mahūn):*” that is, they are bewildered and hesitant. This indicates that they have no beliefs and no fixed goal.

## Verse 16

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَتْ تِجَارَتُهُمْ  
وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ

*These are the people who have purchased error at the price of guidance, but their trade is profitless, and they are not rightly-guided. (Ūlā'ika alladhīna ishtaraw al-ḍalālata bi'l-hudā fa-mā rabiḥat tijāratuhum wa mā kānū muhtadīn)*

### **The verse's positioning with regard to what precedes it**

Consider this: This verse is a summary of the preceding detailed descriptions, illustrating them in elevated and effective fashion. Commerce is chosen as the parable's [subject] because the first people it was addressing had experienced the pleasures and hardships of trade on their journeys of winter and summer.

***The verse's pertinence is this:*** Human beings were not sent to this world to make it their homeland, but to trade using the capital of their innate faculties and powers; to cultivate them and then dispose freely of their produce.

### **The positioning of the verse's phrases**

This is a fluent, natural arrangement, reflecting the ordering of the parable. It is like this: there was a cheated failed merchant. He had been given rich capital but he had used it only to buy poison and things harmful to himself. He worked his capital, but it brought him no profit and was of no avail to him; indeed, it plunged him into ever greater loss. Finally he lost all of it, and then strayed from the path until there was no return.

### **The positioning of the parts of the phrases**

The demonstrative pronoun "***These (Ūlā'ika)***" brings near what is tangible and distant. This suggests that on hearing the crimes enumerated in the above verses, the listener feels in his heart a gradually increasing anger and disgust, so wants to see the dissemblers in order to vent his anger and confront them with his loathing and contempt. The palpability hints that their

being qualified by these extraordinary attributes embodies them in the [listener's] mind, making them [almost] tangible to [his] imagination. It also indicates the reason for the statement, since sin leads to further sin. [For certainly a reason is necessary if one exchanges misguidance for guidance, and this is their above-mentioned crimes and attributes. Thus, the Qur'an alludes to them with "*These (Ūlā'ika)*," that is, those qualified by those attributes, so that the listener will know the reason for the condemnation of them in this verse.]<sup>34</sup>

As for the distance signified by "*These (Ūlā'ika)*," it indicates their great distance from the right path; they have reached the point of no return; they departed of their own accord, but they cannot return.

The relative pronoun "*who (alladhīna)*" indicates that this sort of commerce is strange and injurious. Only recently had it appeared and become a principle and course of action adopted by people. For as mentioned above, the relative pronoun indicates new facts that are just being established.

The verb "*have purchased (ishtaraw)*" alludes to the rejection of their excuse [when they say] "it is in our natures to do this." It is as though the Qur'an is saying to them: "No! Allah has given you your lifespan as capital, and deposited in your spirits the potentiality to mature and be perfected, and planted in your consciences the seeds of truth, which constitute innate guidance, so that you might buy happiness. But rather than buying it, indeed renouncing it, you procured immediate pleasures and worldly benefits, and misusing your wills you chose the way of misguidance rather than the path of guidance, and you spoiled that innate guidance and lost your capital.

The phrase "*error [at the price of] guidance (al-dalālata bi'l-hudā)*" hints that they incur loss upon loss, for just as they lose by acquiring misguidance, so they lose through giving up the supreme bounty of guidance.

"*But their trade is profitless (fa-mā rabiḥat tijāratuhum)*:" The use of the negative – for not only have they incurred a loss but have lost all their capital – suggests that it would have been intelligent not to attempt unprofitable trade, and particularly trade that causes loss and even the loss of one's capital.

Also, by ascribing the verb to their commerce – although rightly it should have been ascribed to themselves; that is 'but they gained no profit in their trade' (*fa-mā rabiḥū fī tijāratihim*) – is a sign that in no respect, in

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34. Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmeccid], 121-2.

none of its particulars or conditions or means, does their commerce yield any benefit, unlike in some businesses where no profit is made on the products but some benefits may accrue in other particulars or their services. The dissemblers’ trade is pure evil and undiluted harm. Ascribing the verb to the trade here resembles the saying: “*Nāma layluhu* (his night slept)” instead of “*nāma fi’l-layl* (he slept in the night).” The former means that besides himself sleeping, the night was hushed and silent as though sleeping, and nothing disturbed him.

“**And they are not rightly-guided** (*wa mā kānū muhtadīn*):” That is, just as they have lost their capital, so have they lost their way. [This is linked and associated with the parabolic] “*ishtaraw* (*have purchased*),” as was the preceding phrase. It also hints obliquely at “*guidance for those who fear Allah* (*hudan li’l-muttaqīn*)” at the start of the sura. As though it is saying: “The Qur’an offered them guidance, but they did not accept it.”

## Verses 17-20

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ  
 بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ \* صُمُّ بَكْمٌ عُمِيٌّ فَهُمْ  
 لَا يَرْجِعُونَ \* أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ  
 يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ مِنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ  
 مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ \* يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَارَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ  
 لَهُمْ مَشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ  
 بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Their parable is that of people who kindle a fire: but as soon as it has illumined all around them, Allah takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, wherein they cannot see: \* Deaf, dumb, blind – and they cannot turn back. \* Or [the parable] of a violent cloudburst in the sky, with utter darkness, thunder and lightning: they put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death; but Allah encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth. \* The lightning well-nigh takes away their sight; whenever it gives them light, they advance therein, and whenever darkness falls around them, they stand still. And if Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and sight: for verily Allah is powerful over all things. (Mathaluhum ka-mathal alladhī istawqada nāran fa-lamma aḍāʿat mā ḥawlahu dhahaba Allāh bi-nūrihim wa tarakahum fī zulumātīn lā yubširūn \* Ṣummun bukmun ‘umyūn fa-hum lā yarjī’ūn. \* Aw ka-ṣayyibīn min al-samā’ fī-hi zulumātun wa ra’dun wa barqun yaj’alūna aṣābi’ahum fī ādhānihim min al-ṣawā’iq ḥadhara al-mawt, wa

*Allāhu muḥīṭun li'l-kāfirīn. \* Yakādu al-barqu yakḥtafu  
abṣārahum kullamā aḏā'a la-hum mashaw fī-hi wa idhā  
aḏlama 'alayhim qāmū wa-law shā'a Allāhu la-dhahaba bi-  
sam'ihim wa abṣārihim, innā Allāhu 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr.)*

Consider this: The Qur'an's miraculous inimitability is founded on the eloquence of its composition (*naẓm*), and the eloquence of its composition is of two sorts: the first is like decoration and the second like a garment.

**The First Sort** resembles strung pearls, finely worked decoration, and embroidery studded with gems. It is derived from following the grammatical and verbal meanings of a speech, like molten gold running among lumps of silver. The exposition of the subtle points that are the fruits of this sort of eloquence has been undertaken by *fann* [*'ilm*] *al-ma'ānī*.

**The Second Sort** is like a costly gown or robe of honour, cut out according to the stature of the meanings, sewn from different pieces with regular stitches, and clothed altogether on the meaning, or on the story, or the aim. This sort's craftsman and master is *fann* [*'ilm*] *al-bayān*.

One of the most important questions of this [latter] sort is that of parabolic comparisons (*tamthīl*).<sup>35</sup> The Qur'an contains as many as a thousand, for such comparisons contain a subtle mystery and are elevated wisdom. Yes, through them delusion is overcome by reason, imagination is compelled to submit to thought, the hidden is made present, the abstract made tangible, and the meaning made palpable, the disparate are brought together, the various are blended, the diverse united, the sundered connected, and the defenceless armed. If you want to hear a detailed discussion, then listen along with me to what the author of *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* chants in *Asrār al-Balāgha*,<sup>36</sup> when he says:

### On the Appropriate and Effective Use of Parabolic Comparisons

The intelligent (*'uqalā'*) agree that when comparisons come after the meanings, or when the meanings emerge on being summarized by comparisons, and are transposed from their original forms to that of the compari-

35. *Tamthīl* may be translated as comparison, or parabolic comparison, or analogical representation.

36. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078). He was pre-eminent in the fields of Arabic language and rhetoric. For this passage, see, M. Rashīd Riḏā (ed.), *Asrār al-Balāgha* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1367/1947), 92-6.

sons, the comparison clothes them in splendour, makes them glorious, raises their value, kindles their fire, augments their power by rousing souls, summons hearts towards them, stirs up breasts with fervent longing and love, and subjugates dispositions through ardent passion and zeal.

For if [what is intended] is praise, [the allegorical comparison makes it] more splendid and magnificent; and more sublime and august; it excites the emotions more, familiarizing the meanings more swiftly, causing more joy; [it is] more effective on the praised, a more powerful intercessor for the praiser; more judicious will be his gifts and presentations, easier on the tongue and pleasanter to mention; more efficacious at causing the heart to cleave to the meaning, and worthier.

And if [what is intended] is censure, the [comparison's] touch is more biting, its branding more caustic, its impact severer, its sharpness keener.

And if it is argument and disputation, the [comparison's] proofs are more illuminating, its power is more cogent, its exposition more dazzling.

And if [what is intended] is pride and vainglory, its aspiration is farther reaching, its honour more serious, its tongue more vehement.

And if [what is intended] is apology or excuse, [the comparison] is closer to hearts and better at cajoling them, dispelling hatreds more gently, extinguishing anger more effectively, more captivating in its spells, leading to a better return

And if [what is intended] is admonishment, [the comparison] is better healing for the breast, more conducive to thought, more eloquent in cautioning and restraining, better at disclosing the aim, revealing the purpose, absolving the ailing, healing rancour.

If you investigate the kinds and varieties of speech and study its categories and branches, you will see that this is indeed the case.

(Here end al-Jurjānī's words)

The following verses contain evidences of the Qur'an's miraculousness (*dalā'il al-i'jāz*) and the mysteries of its eloquence (*asrār al-balāgha*). We are mentioning them because of their relevance to the matters discussed in the forthcoming introduction:

An example of a parabolic comparison given by the Qur'an in the station (*maqām*) of praise is that concerning the attributes of the [Prophet's] Companions: "*And their similitude in the Gospel is like a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and it stands on its stem, [filling] the sowers with wonder and delight.* (48:29)

In the station of censure are the verses, "*His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone, he [still]*

*lolls out his tongue.”(7:176) “The similitude of those who were charged with the [obligations of the] the Mosaic Law, but who subsequently failed in those [obligations], is that of a donkey which carries huge tomes [but understands them not].”(62:5) “We have put yokes round their necks right up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up [and they cannot see].” (36:8) And so on.*

And in the station of argument and deduction: *“Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire.”(2:17) “Or [another similitude] is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky; in it are zones of darkness...(to the end of the verse).”(2:18) “Or the parable of those who reject faith is that of the beast which hears the shepherd’s cry, and hears in it nothing but the sound of a voice and a call.”(2:171) “The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is that of the spider, who builds [to itself] a house.”(29:41) “He sends down water from the skies, and the channels flow, each according to its measure; but the torrent bears away the foam that mounts up to the surface. Even so, from [ore] which they smelt in the fire, to make ornaments or utensils therewith, there is a scum likewise.”(13:17) “Allah puts forth a parable, a man belonging to many partners at variance with each other, and a man belonging entirely to one master: are those two equal in comparison?”(39:29) And so on.*

An example of pride and dignity, even if not so-called, that illustrates divine sublimity and perfection: *“No just estimate have they made of Allah, such as is due to Him; on the Day of Judgement the whole of the earth will be but His handful, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High is He above the partners they attribute to Him!” (39:67) And so on.*

The only examples of parabolic comparisons in the station of apology and excuse are such futile excuses as are mentioned to express disapproval: *“They say: Our hearts are under veils, [concealed] from that to which you invite us, and in our ears is a deafness, and between us and you is a screen.”(41:5) And so on. As it says in the poem:*

*Suppose not that my dance among you is joyful,  
For the slaughtered fowl dances out of pain.*

Examples in the Qur’an of admonishment about the luxuries of this life are these: *“Here is a similitude; how rain and the growth which it brings forth delight [the hearts of] the tillers; soon it withers; you will see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away.”(57:20) “Do you see not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the*

earth? Then He causes it to grow, therewith, produce of various colours.” (39:21) “We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof; but man undertook it, he was indeed unjust and foolish!” (33:72) “Had We sent down this Qur’an on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of Allah. Such are the similitudes We propound to men that they may reflect.” (59:21) “Then what is amiss with them that they turn away from all admonition \* As though they were terrified asses \* Fleeing from a lion?” (74:49-51) “The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it grows seven ears, and each ears has a hundred grains.” (2:261) “... is the parable of a garden, high and fertile; heavy rain falls on it...” (2:265)

An example of showing how hypocrisy and harmful acts nullify good works: “Does any of you wish that he should have a garden with date palms and vines and streams flowing underneath, and all kinds of fruit, while he is stricken with old age, and his children are not strong [enough to look after themselves] – that it should be caught in a whirlwind, and with fire therein, and be burnt up?” (2:266) “The parable of those who reject their Lord is that their works are as ashes on which the wind blows furiously on a tempestuous day: no power have they over aught that they have earned; that is the straying far, far [from the goal].” (14:18)

Some examples from the categories of speech; [examples of] the station of description (*maqām al-waṣf*): “Moreover, He comprehended in His design the sky, and it had been [as] smoke; he said to it and to the earth: Come you together, willingly or unwillingly. They said: We do come [together] in willing obedience.” (41:11) “Then the word went forth: O earth! swallow up your water, and O sky! withhold [your rain]! And the water abated, and the matter was ended. The ark rested on Mount Judi, and the word went forth: Away with those who do wrong!” (11:44) “See you not how Allah sets forth a parable?– A goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches [reach] to the heavens – \* It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord.” (14:24-5) “And the parable of an evil word is that of any evil tree: it is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth; it has no stability.” (14:26)

A verse:

*And the night flowing, the stars showering onto the Milky Way  
Like a garden, its flaring blossoms extinguished in the river.*<sup>37</sup>

37. By Ibn al-Nabih al-Miṣrī (d. 619 H.) in praise of the Ayyubids.

Consider this: all these parabolic verses (*al-āyāt al-tamthīliyya*) are of different levels, degrees, forms, and styles. Each contains subtle truths. If you take a silver flagon, decorate it with molten gold and stud it with gems, then electrify it making it shine and sparkle, you will behold in it many levels of beauty and varieties of adornment. Similarly, in all these verses, allusions and indications extend [by means of] the comparisons from their main aims to the [above-mentioned] stations, as though the underlying aim rolls along all these levels gathering tints and a share from each, making the words comprehensive summaries [of the Qur'an], or epitomes even.

### An Introduction [on Eloquence (or Rhetoric)]

Consider this: One who speaks expresses a meaning, then offering evidence convinces the intellect. Then too, employing comparisons, he excites feelings in the conscience, so arousing either desire or distaste in the heart and preparing it to accept [his words]. Thus, eloquent speech is speech which the intellect and conscience profit from together; it both enters the intellect, and trickles into the conscience. The parabolic comparison provides for these two aspects, for it comprises a sort of analogy (*qiyās*), and through it the law included in the comparison is reflected in the mirror of the thing represented. As though the speech is a proposition supported by evidence. For example, you might say about a ruler who suffers hardship for the sake of his subjects: “The lofty mountain endures the burden of ice and snow, while the valleys below grow green and flourish.”

Similes (*al-tashbīh*) form the basis of comparisons (*al-tamthīl*), and the function of similes is to arouse feelings of disgust or longing or sympathy or aversion or wonder or awe. Thus, the purpose of the comparison is to exalt or to denigrate or to arouse longing or aversion, or to defame or embroider or show kindness, and so on. The conscience is aroused by the form of the comparison and feelings of desire or aversion are provoked.

The need for comparisons arises from the profundity and subtlety of meanings, comparisons make these apparent; or [it arises] from the aim [what is intended by the speech] being disparate and scattered, then the comparison binds it together. The allegorical verses of the Qur'an (*al-mutashābihāt*) are of the former kind, for according to the authoritative scholars (*ahl al-taḥqīq*) they are a sort of elevated comparison and a means of expressing sheer truths and abstract ideas. One reason for this is that for

the most part ordinary people can be taught truths only in imaginary form – they can comprehend abstract ideas only by means of comparisons, and this necessitates the use of such allegorical expressions (*mutashābihāt*) as “*Then He established Himself on the Throne.*”(7:54) In this way, taking their understanding into consideration, such ideas are made familiar to them.

Over the course of time I have deduced from the essentials of eloquence (rhetoric) twelve matters preliminary to expounding the Qur’an’s miraculous inimitability. Each is the thread of (*khayṭ*) [means to] many truths.<sup>38</sup> Set out above are the verses containing comparisons and parables; now it is appropriate to summarize those [twelve] matters. So saying, “Success is only from Allah the Most High,” we begin:

### ***The First Matter***

The source of the embroideries of eloquence is none other than the arrangement of the meanings; it is not the ordering of the words, which was the domain of the grandiloquent word-worshippers (Ar. *al-lafziyyūn*; T. *lafizperest*). Their passion for words developed into a chronic illness so that finally ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī refuted them in his *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāgha*, devoting more than a hundred pages to disputing them.

The arrangement of the meanings consists of the grammatical meanings being placed systematically among the words; that is, the literal (*ḥarfī*) meanings being dissolved among the words to obtain the novel embroideries. If you look into it closely, you will see that the natural channel for ideas and emotions is the ordering of the meanings.

The arrangement of the meanings is constructed through the rules of logic, for it is only by means of logic that thought progresses towards truths. And thought reaches truths when it penetrates the subtleties of the natures of things and their relations. And the relations between the essences of things are the bonds of [the universe’s] perfect order. And the perfect order is the shell of sheer beauty, which is the source of all beauty. And sheer beauty is the garden of the elegant and refined sayings that are the flowers of eloquence. This flower-filled garden is where the nightingales wander who are known as the men of eloquence and lovers of creation. And the sweet, soft songs of those nightingales arise from the harmonious spiritual echoes wafting from the pipes of the meanings’ arrangement.

*In Short:* The universe is of the utmost eloquence; its Maker composed it flawlessly, eloquently. All the forms and species it contains, because of the

38. This refers to the twelve ‘Topics’ comprising the second part (İkinci Makale) of Nursi’s work, *Muhâkemat*, 77-102.

order included in them, are miracles of power. Thus, when speech emulates the real, material world, and its arrangement is in conformity with the latter's order, it possesses purity of style (*al-jazāla*) in its entirety. But if it turns to the ordering of the words, it descends into artificiality and hypocrisy, and as though degenerates into dry earth or a delusive mirage.

The underlying reason the word-worshippers deviated from true eloquence was that when the non-Arabs became Arabicized on being drawn by the attractions of Arab rule, the art of words came to have paramount importance for them. With their intermingling with the Arabs, the speech of the Mudari, which forms the basis of the Qur'an's eloquence, became corrupted; that mirror of the Qur'an's styles became tarnished – although it sprang from the emotions and temperament of the Mudar people. So a large number of later scholars were carried away by love of the words.

NOTE: Embellishing words enhances them only if it is necessitated by the meanings. And decorating the forms of the meanings only elevates them if the meanings permit it. And burnishing the literary devices employed augments the purity of style only if permitted by what is intended. And the subtlety of the comparisons becomes eloquence only when suitable to the aim and approved by what is intended. And the power and roaming of the imagination is eloquence only when it does not mar the truth, nor preponderate over it, and the imagination exemplifies the truth, springing from it. If you wish for some comprehensive examples of these conditions, you should consult the above-mentioned parabolic verses.

### ***The Second Matter***

If rhetorical magic (*al-siḥr al-bayānī*) is manifested in speech accidents become substance, meanings are embodied, inanimate beings acquire spirits, and plants are endowed with intelligence. Conversation then starts up between them that leads sometimes to dispute, and sometimes to banter. Lifeless beings start to dance before the imagination. If you want an example, consider these lines:

*Perfidiousness whispered to me from behind his deferment,  
And hope and despair fell to disputing in my breast.*<sup>39</sup>

Or take note of the love between the earth and the rain in the lines:

*The earth complained to the rain of its tardy coming,  
Then drank deep of its waters, sipped from its lips.*<sup>40</sup>

37. By Ibn al-Mu'tazz; *Dīwān Ibn al-Mu'tazz*, ii, 125, in, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* (1428/2007), 120.

38. See, al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, i, 263.

This depicts the crackling and sprouting of the parched earth on the arrival of the belated rains. There must therefore be a grain of truth in every imagining, like in these examples, and in the lamp of every rhetorical figure (*majāz*) the flame of truth. Otherwise the imaginary eloquence is mere fable, good only for exciting wonder.

### ***The Third Matter***

Know that the beauty and perfection of speech, and the rhetorical garment with which it is clothed, lie in its manner of expression (*uslūb*). And its manner of expression consists of the form of the truths and the model of meanings obtained from the pieces of the parabolic metaphors (*al-isti'ārāt al-tamthīliyya*). As though those pieces were an imaginary cinema, like the word 'fruit' points to its orchard, and the word 'combat' to the battlefield.

Moreover, parabolic comparisons (*al-tamthīlāt*) are founded on the mystery of the relations between things, and their reflection in the order of the universe, and some things recalling others. For example, for the sons of the date-palm [the Arabs], the sight of the crescent moon in the constellation of the Pleiades calls to mind a bunch of grapes [a cluster of dates] hanging from a curved whitened stalk. As the Revelation says: "... till it returns like an old date-stalk, withered and curved."(36:39)

The usefulness of comparisons (*uslūb al-tamthīl*), as shown in the verses given previously, is that by means of them the speaker brings to light [raises to the surface] deep roots and unites scattered meanings. When he hands one side to his listener, it is possible for the listener to draw the remainder towards himself; since they have been brought together, he can transfer to them mentally. Since he sees some, though they may be in the dark, he can progress step by step towards all of them.

For instance, a jeweller defines eloquent speech as "an idea that bores [a pearl like a drill]." While a taverner would say that it is "what is cooked in the cauldrons of knowledge." And a camel driver would say of eloquent speech: it is "what you take by the halter and cause to recline in the hollow of the meaning." Observing the art in these definitions, someone hearing them would comprehend all they intended.

The wisdom in the formation of the literary device (*uslūb*) [of comparisons] is that voluntarily the speaker hails and arouses the meanings reposing in the nooks and crannies of his heart, stark and bare. They emerge and enter the imagination, and don the garments of whatever form they find, that are found there by reason of the speaker's art or occupation or familiar-

ity or need. Or at least they tie a kerchief of his art around their heads, or are tinted with its hues. The exordia you find in the prefaces of books form the best examples of this matter.

However, the style of speech may also be in accordance with the imagination of the one addressed, like the styles of [the literary devices used in] the Qur'an. Don't forget this! Moreover, the degrees of the styles are various. Some are softer than the breeze; when it blows, it is signified by the speech as a whole. And some are more covert than the subterfuges of war; they can be divined only by masters of the art of warfare. Like al-Zamakhsharī divined from the verse “*Who can give life to [dry] bones and decomposed ones [at that]?*” (36:78), “Are there any contenders for the fight?” If you like, study the verses mentioned previously; you will find in them things verifying the subtlest aspects of these matters. And if you wish, visit Imam al-Būṣayrī, and see how he writes his prescription in the style of a physician with his words:

*Shed tears from eyes filled  
With forbidden things; stick to a diet of repentance.*<sup>41</sup>

The physician's style is alluded to with the word diet. And listen to Sulayman's Hoopoe; how it refers to its engineering<sup>42</sup> with the words: “*That they should not worship Allah, Who brings to light what is hidden in the heavens and the earth...*” (27:25)

#### ***The Fourth Matter***

Know that speech possesses power and strength only if it confirms the lines:

*Our expressions are diverse but your beauty is one,  
And all [of us] point to that beauty;*

[it should confirm them] with all its words, order, and phrases responding to each other; and each taking the hand of the other and supporting it, and apart from its particular fruits each assisting to its own extent the general purport. This shared aim resembles a pool fed from all sides by rivulets. The mutual response gives rise to mutual assistance, which gives rise to order, from which harmony proceeds, from which fairness is born, and essential beauty. This secret of eloquence sparkles on every part of the

41. Sharaf al-Dīn al-Būṣayrī (d. between 694-6/1294-7). For these lines, see, A. R. Anjum (Tr.), *Busairi's Poem of the Mantle* (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1403/1983), 44.

42. According to *al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: 431/2010, iii, 1123), this signifies water-divining.

Qur'an, especially on "*This is the Book concerning which is no doubt, guidance sure for those who fear Allah,*"(2:2) and others like it, as you saw in "*But if a breath of your Sustainer's punishment touches them.*"(21:46)

### ***The Fifth Matter***

Know that the richness of [any part of] speech and its scope lie in its serving the main aim, and its manner and overall form and allusive meanings all indicating and pointing to the main aim together with its subsidiary and secondary meanings. Then levels of meaning appear one after the other, and stations appear one behind the next. If you want an example of this, study "*When it is said to them: 'Do not spread corruption on the earth...'*" (to the end of the verse, 2:11), and "*When they meet those who believe...'*" (to the end of the verse, 2:14), as expounded above.

### ***The Sixth Matter***

Know that the meanings garnered from the chart of speech are taken and inscribed by the camera of the wording according to their various sorts and degrees. Some are like air; they can be felt but not seen. Others are like steam; they can be seen but not held. Yet others are like water; they can be held but not grasped. Others are like molten metal; they can be contained but not determined as to shape. And others are like strung pearls or beaten gold; they can be given specific shapes and forms. Then, under the effect of the aim and station, the insubstantial meaning acquires firmness and body. Three conditions mould a single meaning: have you not observed that when some external matter affects your conscience, your heart is agitated? Your emotions are excited, insubstantial meanings take flight and desires are born. Some of these are attained. Then some of these take form. And some of these latter are inhibited. In each of these levels, some of the meanings become established and some contract and yet others are suspended, like part of the voice is suspended when forming certain letters, and like part of an ear of corn becomes the husk as the grains are formed. Thus, the mark of the eloquent speaker is his expressing clearly those things intended by his speech and required by its station, and demanded by those he is addressing. The other levels of meaning he refers – in relation to their proximity to the main aim – to what the sense infers and the words indicate and the particular circumstances evince and the exordium betokens and the style implies and his own attitude suggests.

Then there are the suspended meanings; they are ephemeral significative (*ḥarfīyya*) meanings, not expressed by particular words. They are itinerant travellers with no fixed abode. Sometimes they are concealed in a word,

sometimes they are absorbed by a phrase, and sometimes they take refuge in a story; you can distil them if you press where they are found. Like the disappointment expressed by Mary's mother in the verse, "*O my Lord! Behold I am delivered of a female child!*," (3:36) and the regret in the lines, "Were my youth to return one day, I would tell it of the woes of old age." And such meanings as longing, self-praise, addressing others, allusion, suffering, bewilderment, wonder, and boasting.

The relations between all these competing meanings are good on condition attention and care are allotted to them proportionately to their serving the main aim. If you want examples of this matter, the clearest are provided by this sura, from the beginning up to here, and by the manner in which it is expounded.

### ***The Seventh Matter***

Know that if imagination has a place in a style or literary device (*uslūb*), it definitely has to sprout from a seed of truth, and to be like a mirror reflecting onto non-material matters (*ma'nawiyāt*) the physical laws and causes and effects in the chains of external beings. The philosophy of grammar (*al-naḥw*), the works of which contain the above-mentioned relationships, is also of this sort – just as it is said that the nominative is the right of the doer, for the powerful takes the powerful. You can make further examples in the same way.

### ***The Eighth Matter***

Know that Sibawayh<sup>43</sup> stated categorically that particles that express numerous meanings like 'from' (*min*), 'to' (*ilā*), and 'by' (*al-bā'*), and others, in fact express only a single, unchanging, meaning. It is rather that they absorb a suspended meaning related to the context (lit. station – *maqām*) and aim, drawing it into themselves, and their original meanings become forms or modes of expression (*uslūb*) for their guests. Similarly, when someone well versed in the science of language studies these closely, he knows that a shared word [bearing several meanings] mostly has a single meaning. Then, because of the relationships between them, the meanings have become similies and some have become tropes (*majāzāt*), and others, becoming part of the common language, have lost their original meanings (*ḥaqā'iq 'urfiyya*). In this way single words have come to have numerous meanings. The word *al-'ayn*, which means 'eye' or 'spring,' was applied to the sun also, figuratively, for by means of it the celestial world looks down

43. 'Umar ibn 'Uthmān Sibawayh (d. 180/796), the pioneer Arabic grammarian.

on the lower world, or because the water of life which is its light, floods down from that source onto lofty white peaks. You can make analogies with this for the rest.

### ***The Ninth Matter***

Know that the highest degree of eloquence, which confounds the faculty of will, personal thought and simple conceptions, is the speaker observing and preserving all together the relationships of the parts of his speech as well as the relations of the words and the balance of the sentences. Each of these with its fellows should display an embroidery, and interlinking [in their totality, form] a vast tapestry. It is as though the speaker employs other brains as well as his own, like the builder of a palace placing multi-coloured stones in such a way as to obtain a wondrous design out of their balance and proportion, or like some calligraphic designs featuring the letter ‘*ayn*, shared by the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs.<sup>44</sup> One of the clearest examples of this matter is the verse, “*Alif. Lām. Mīm. \* This is the Book concerning which is no doubt; guidance sure for those who fear Allah,*” (2:1-2) as you heard above.

Another reason for speech being elevated is its resembling a family tree, with the branches and twigs of its generations all denoting aims that point to the main aim and station (*maqām*). A further reason is the speech assuming such a form that many aspects and branches can be deduced from it, like the story of Moses (UWP).

### ***The Tenth Matter***

Know that speech acquires smoothness and fluency, the source of its subtlety and agreeableness, when the meanings and feelings it evinces are blended and combined, or are various yet ordered, for then the surroundings do not attract the power of its expression and aim, but the centre draws strength from the surroundings. Speech also acquires fluency when the aim is well defined, and when the point at which all the intended aims come together, is clear.

### ***The Eleventh Matter***

Know that the integrity of speech, which is the reason for its correctness and power, lies in the following: just as speech should indicate first principles and proofs, and allude to primary and secondary meanings; so too with

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44. Their names all begin with the letter ‘*ayn*: ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī. ‘Atīq was the title of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph.

the elements of the subject and predicate and their modes of expression, it should infer the repulsion of doubts and delusions – as though each part of it is the answer to an implicit question. If you want an example, study the Opening Sura of the Qur'an!

### *The Twelfth Matter*

Know that there are three sorts of style or modes of expression (*uslūb*):

*The First* is a sheer or abstract style (*al-uslūb al-mujarrad*); it is of a single colour and is characterized by its conciseness, naturalness, correctness, and integrity. It is smooth and even, and used for business, discussions, and the instrumental sciences. If you want a fluent example of it, study the works of Sayyid al-Jurjānī.<sup>45</sup>

*The Second* is the embellished style (*al-uslūb al-muzayyan*); it is characterized by embellishment and illumination, and by its arousing the heart with either longing or disgust. It is suitable for addresses [intended to] praise or censure and so on, and for persuasion and similar things. If you are looking for an embellished example, enter *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* and *Asrār al-Balāgha*, for in them you will happen upon many an ornamented garden.

*The Third* is the high style (*al-uslūb al-'ālī*), which is characterized by its intensity, power, grandeur, and spiritual loftiness. It is suitable for discourses on divine matters, the principles of religion, and philosophy. If you want a perspicuous and inimitable example, study the Qur'an, for in it are found eloquent truths that have been seen by no eye nor occurred to any heart.

This section is concluded here in summary form.

\* \* \*

Consider this: The noteworthy points in the verse we were discussing, “**Their parable is that of people who kindle...** (*Mathaluhum ka-mathal alladhī istawqada...*)” (to the end of the verse, 2:17), are as follows:

*Firstly*: Its positioning in regard to what precedes it.

*Secondly*: The positioning of [and relationships between] its phrases.

*Thirdly*: The positioning of [and relationships between] the constituents of its phrases.

Bearing in mind the above [discussion on eloquence], know that having given a clear description of the dissemblers' circumstances and their crimes, the Qur'an cites the following comparison (*tamthīl*) for three reasons:

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45. Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) was a polymath who wrote on numerous subjects including the Arabic sciences, logic, and *kalām*.

*The First of these:* To make [the new or unfamiliar] appear familiar to the imagination (*al-khayāl*), which accepts the products of imagination more readily than rational ideas; and to make the surmising faculty (*al-wahm*), which is given to doubts and questioning and opposing the reason, submit by showing the strange in a familiar form, and by depicting the hidden as visible.

*The Second:* To arouse the conscience and excite disgust in it, so by representing what is mental (abstract) as tangible to unite the mind and emotions.

*The Third:* To bind together scattered meanings by means of the comparison, and point out the true bonds between them. Also, to plant [the desired facts] before the eye of the imagination so that it may garner the subtle points that the tongue fails [to express].

Consider this: The meaning of this verse's phrases corresponds both to the meaning of the whole story of the dissemblers, and to all the verses that [relate] it. Don't you see that they believed outwardly for worldly advantages then inwardly they disbelieved. They were then confused and disconcerted. They then did not search out the truth so were unable to return [to it] that they might recognize it. How this resembles the situation of people who light a fire or a lamp but cannot keep it alight and it goes out. They are plunged in darkness. They can see nothing and it seems to them that everything has ceased to exist. Due to the silence of the night it is as though they are deaf; and because the night seems blind and their lights have been extinguished, it is as though they are blind; and because there is no one they can turn to for help and they receive no assistance, it is as though they are dumb; and because they cannot return, it is as though they are lifeless spectres, devoid of spirits. The main points in the comparison look to the main particulars of their subject [lit. the things compared – *mushabbah*]. For instance, the darkness looks to [their] disbelief, and the bewildered confusion to [their] vacillation, and the fire to dissension. You can make further analogies in the same way.

- *If you were to ask:* Light [is mentioned] in the comparison, but how can the dissembler have light, that the comparison be applied to him?

*You would be told:* If a person has no light, it may be found in his surroundings, from where he may seek it. If there is none there, it may be found among his people, from whom he may take it. If there is no light among his people, there may be some among the human race from which he may benefit. And if not, there may be [a spark that] emanates from his

own inborn nature, from which he may receive effulgence, as has been discussed. If you're not convinced by this, there may, in the view of others, be [light] on his tongue, or according to himself, in order to obtain worldly benefits. If you're still not persuaded, [the dissemblers may have had a light] because some of them believed at first, then apostatized. If this doesn't convince you, it may be that the light here alludes to what they benefited from, while the fire indicates the dissension [they caused]. And if you're not satisfied with this either, the fact that guidance was possible through the revelation [of the Qur'an] [meant] it was existent, as is indicated by the [preceding] verse, "*These are the people who have purchased error [at the price of] guidance. (Ūlā'ika alladhīna ishtaraw al-ḍalālata bi'l-hudā.)*" For this is the close neighbour of the comparison.

**Now for the positioning of [and relationships between] the phrases of the verse**

Consider this: The positioning of the phrase "*who kindle a fire (alladhī istawqada nāran)*" is absolutely fitting. For the lighting of fire in this way was entirely consistent with the situation of the first people the Qur'an was addressing. They were the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and without exception had experienced such a situation, or had heard about it, and had suffered its upsetting effects. They had taken refuge in the night from the sun's tyranny, travelling in darkness. Very often the skies would press down on them and they would feel the weariness of travel, and sometimes their road would lead them to the abyss. They would also roam in the gloom of caves filled with noxious creatures. Then they would lose their way and need to kindle a fire or light a lamp to see their companions or feel close to them even, and to see their possessions and protect them, and make out the path they should take, and so that ferocious beasts and other perils would be visible to them and they could avoid them. Then, when they were well lit up with the light it would be suddenly extinguished at a blow from the heavens. Filled with hope and about to accomplish their goals, they would be cast into the deepest despair. [The Qur'an] states this clearly with the words: "*but as soon as it has illumined all around them, Allah takes away their light (fa-lamma aḍā'at mā ḥawlahu dhahaba Allāhu bi-nūrihim).*"

The "*but (fa-)*" at the beginning of the phrase indicates that they kindled the fire for light and it lit up [all round them] and they felt confident at this. But they were immediately overcome by frustration and disappointment. How powerfully effective is this being thwarted at the very moment of

success! The light being taken away in the [consequence – that is, second half – of the] conditional sentence is apparently necessitated by the illumination [but the necessity of this is not obvious]. The necessity being hidden indicates the existence of implied [sentences], as follows:

When all was lit up around them they busied themselves with the light yet did not preserve it. They did not give it due importance and were not aware of its value. They did not keep [the fire] alight and it went out. For being preoccupied with the result, they neglected the means. As inferred by the verse “*But man doth transgress all bounds, \* In that he looks upon himself as self-sufficient (Inna’l-insāna la-yaṭghā; An rāhu’staghnā),*” (96:6-7) [their preoccupation with the light] was the cause of its ceasing and being extinguished, as though the very illumination caused the light to vanish.

As for the phrase “*and leaves them in utter darkness (wa tarakahum fī zulumātin),*” having pointed out how they lost the bounty of the light, [the Qur’an] describes their disappointment at the calamity of being plunged into darkness.

The phrase “*[wherein] they cannot see (lā yubṣirūn):*” Know that when darkness falls and a person loses his way, he may stop and be consoled by the sight of his companions and possessions. But if he does not see them, stopping may be as bad for him as moving on, or even worse.

The phrase “*Deaf, dumb, blind – and they cannot turn back. (Ṣummun bukmun ‘umyun fa-hum lā yarjī’ūn):*” When a person is overcome by such a calamity, he finds solace by hoping for salvation and seeking it from four successive directions:

*Firstly* he hopes to hear the cries of nearby villagers or other travellers and [anticipates] that if he calls for help they will save him. But since the night is soundless and silent, he is no different to a deaf man, so [the Qur’an] calls him “*deaf,*” and that hope is lost.

*Secondly* he hopes that if he shouts or calls out for help there is the possibility that someone will hear and come to his aid. But when the night is deaf and dumb, there is no difference between the speaker and someone dumb, so [the Qur’an] calls [him] “*dumb,*” silencing him and destroying that hope too.

*Thirdly* he hopes to be saved by espying some sign or a fire or light that will show him the way to his destination. But when the night is overwhelmingly ashen-black, frowning and blind, the seeing and the blind are the same, so [the Qur’an] calls [him] “*blind,*” extinguishing that hope too.

*Fourthly:* Nothing now remains to him but to try to return. But the dark-

ness has descended on him and he is like someone who has got stuck in a quagmire of his own accord and can find no way out. Indeed, how many matters there are that you get involved in willingly then against your will you cannot turn back; you desist from them but they do not let you go. So the Most High says: “*and they cannot turn back*” to shut this door on them too, severing this last cord that they were clinging on to. So they fall into the darkness of despair, desolation, wretchedness, and fear.

**Now for the third aspect, I mean the positioning of [and relationships between] the constituents of the phrases**

Consider “*Their parable is that of people who kindle a fire (Mathaluhum ka-mathal alladhī istawqada nāran)*,” and see how the sparks of fine points fly off in all directions from its words.

The word “*parable*” indicates the strangeness of the dissemblers’ situation and that their story is remarkable. For a parable is something that is on every tongue and people recount it to each other because it is odd and unusual; its most salient characteristic is its curiousness. It is because fundamental principles are included in parables and proverbs that they are called “common wisdom” and “popular philosophy.” What is intended here by the parable is [to describe] this characteristic strangeness and their curious story and abhorrent state. In other words, the figurative (*majāz*) use of the term “*parable*” to describe their situation indicates their being unusual and odd. And this indication implies that characteristically, this attribute of theirs is met with disgust and condemnation by everyone, as with a proverb.

As for the “*ka-*” of “*ka-mathali – is that [the parable] of:*”

- *If you were to ask:* If this had been omitted (*ḥadhḥ*) it would have been an elegant simile. Wouldn’t that have been more eloquent?

*You would be told:* It is of greater eloquence in this context (*maqām*) to mention it, for its explicitness alerts the mind, causing it to look on the parable in second place and to transfer from the main points [the parable is making] to what it is alluding to. For if [the reader’s mind] were to become intentionally absorbed in [the parable itself], its subtleties that should be applied [to what it is alluding to] would elude it.

The second [instance of the word] “*parable (mathal)*” indicates that with its strangeness and existence in the common mind, the situation of the one kindling the fire is as though proverbial.

Now for “*who (alladhī):*”

- *If you were to ask:* Why is this [relative pronoun] singular when [the dissemblers] are plural?

*You would be told:* If the part and the whole, and the individual and the collectivity are equal and membership [of the collectivity] neither increases nor diminishes the individual's attributes, it is permissible [to use it for both the singular and plural] in two respects, as in “[their similitude (*mathal*) is] that (*mathal*) of a donkey.” The use of the singular indicates that each individual independently represents the consternation and abhorrence of all of them. Or it may be that “*alladhī*” is an abbreviated form of “*alladhīna*” [the plural form].

The *sīn* of “*istawqada – kindle*” [that is, the verb being in the Xth form] alludes to [their] seeking and taking trouble, while its being in the singular although the subsequent “*their light (nūrihim)*” has the plural pronominal suffix is a subtle sign that the person kindles it for the group. It is indeed subtle that the singular is used for the kindling and the plural is used for the being illumined.

The use of “*a fire (nāran)*” instead of ‘the lamp’ or something else alludes to the hardship [involved] in the light of God’s commands [and trials], and indicates that they were kindling the fire of dissension under the guise of a light. “*A fire*” being indefinite indicates that their need for fire was so intense they did not mind what form it took.

Now cast an eye over the phrase “***but as soon as it has illumined all around them, Allah takes away their light*** (*fa-lammā aqā’at mā ḥawlahu dhahaba Allāh bi-nūrihim*),” and see how its words light up the darkness of their bewilderment, which is their main aim. You heard [read] in the Fourth Matter above that the power of speech lies in the mutual response of its parts.

The “*but*” (“*fa-*” in “*fa-lamma*”) hints at the immediate onset of absolute despair after being full of hope.

“*As soon as (lammā)*” comprises a proportionate conditional syllogism which, by demonstrating the certainty of the first [proposition], infers the certainty and realization of the subsequent one; [that is, their being overwhelmed by darkness] and losing their source of consolation.

“*It has illumined (aqā’at)*” indicates that they kindled the fire for light, not for warmth. And this hints at their terrible dismay, for its illumination only served to see the perils [besetting them] and to learn of their existence. Had it not been for [the light], they could have deceived themselves and felt reassured.

While “*all around them (mā ḥawlahu)*” indicates that they were encompassed by terror on all four sides, and that they had to preserve themselves with the light from the harms beleaguering them from all six directions.

As for “*takes away (dhahaba)*,” it is the consequence of the condition and therefore necessitated by [the first part of the conditional sentence] “*it has illumined (aḏā’at)*,” but as discussed above, this necessity is [not clear, it is] hidden and implies [these sentences]: they did not attend to and maintain the fire and did not know its value as a bounty, and the light made them get above themselves and their glee and cockiness made them forget to tend it, so Allah took it from them.

The ascription of “*takes away (dhahaba)*” to Allah indicates the frustration of two hopes: hope of rectifying [their situation] and hope of divine mercy. For it infers that the heavenly visitation does not allow their situation to be put to rights and suggests that it is the punishment for human faults. This is the reason Allah the Most High chastises them. Thus, what they were cleaving to was torn away from them when the causes were suspended, and this was the hope of mercy. For help cannot be sought from the truth in order to nullify it.

The [preposition] “*bi-*” of “*bi-nūrihim*” (“*their light*”) signifies [their] despairing of [the light] returning, for what Allah has taken cannot be sought. For there is a clear difference between “*dhahaba bih*,” which means “he laid claim to it and took it,” and *adhhabahu* [IVth form], which means “he removed it or took it away,” while *dhahaba* [Ist form] means “he went on his way.” In the latter two there is the possibility of return, but in the former there is none.

In “*light (nūr)*” is a slight hint about [the dissemblers’] situation on the Bridge of Sirat. The possessive pronominal suffix “*their (-him)*,” which denotes particularity, infers their terrible grief. For a person suffers greater sorrow if his fire goes out while other people’s fires are burning brightly. See how the very subtlest pearls of eloquence are Allah’s in the Qur’an! Do you not see how all the parts [of the sentence] are turned towards the general aim; I mean, the [dissemblers’] alarm and despair is like a pool at the confluence of rivers?

Now consider carefully “*and leaves them in utter darkness, wherein they cannot see (wa tarakahum fī zulumātin lā yubṣirūn)*.” The [conjunction] “*and (wa)*” indicates that they combine two losses: they are stripped of the light and clothed in darkness.

The use of “*left, abandoned (taraka)*” instead of ‘he made stay’ (*abqa*) or something similar suggests that they have become like lifeless corpses and kernelless shells. It is fitting therefore that they should be abandoned as worthless and discarded.

The “*in (fi)*” infers that in their view everything has ceased to exist and that nothing remains but the darkness, which seems to be non-existence and encases them like the grave.

The plural of “*darkness(es) (zulumātin)*” indicates that the blackness of the night and tenebrous clouds have given rise to the darkness of despair and fear in their spirits, and that where they are found is filled with the darkness of desolation and despondency. For them time too is filled with the darkness of silence and motionlessness. It suggests that they are entirely swathed in multifarious darknesses. The use of the indefinite signifies that the darkness is unknown to them, their never before having experienced it, and this increases its impact on them.

As for “*they cannot see (lā yubṣirūn)*,” it states clearly the worst calamities. For the person who cannot see suffers more tribulations, and because he lacks sight he experiences [to a greater degree] the slightest misfortunes. The imperfect tense is used to depict their condition [vividly] in the eye of the imagination so the listener [actually] sees their consternation and his conscience is affected. The verb is without object to generalize [the meaning]; they cannot see anything that would be of use to them and might protect them, and they cannot see the dangers that they might avoid them; and they cannot see their companions to avail themselves of their intimacy. It is as though each is on his own and alone.

Next consider the phrases “***Deaf, dumb, blind – and they cannot turn back*** (*Ṣummun bukmun ‘umyun fa-hum lā yarji‘ūn*)” and listen to how they confide in one another, for these four [phrases] are a definition shared (*ḥadd mushtarak*) by both the parable or comparison (*mumaththil*) and the thing portrayed (*mumaththal bihi*). They are intermediate between them and are turned to both. They tell of both sides’ conditions and are a mirror to both showing you their characters. They result from both and tell you their stories.

The aspect looking to the comparison: Know that a person who is struck by such a calamity clings onto the hope of being saved by listening closely for the voice of someone who might save him, but the night is so silent and soundless it deafens him. Still he hopes to make someone hear, but the deafness of the night makes him dumb. Then he hopes to be guided by the sight of a fire or light, but the unseeing night makes him blind. Then [he hopes] to return to the start [of his journey] but the door is blocked up against him like someone who falls into a bog and the more he struggles the more he sinks into it.

The aspect looking to those depicted in the comparison: Know that when they get caught up in the darkness of disbelief and dissembling they could be saved from it in four successive ways:

*Firstly:* They could raise their heads to listen to the truth and heed the Qur'an's guidance, but when the rush of desire prevents the sound of the Qur'an entering their ears, and their frenzy takes them by the ears and holds them back from this path, the Qur'an reproaches them with the epithet "*deaf!*" This indicates that this door is blocked up and suggests that their ears have been cut off.

*Secondly:* They should lower their heads and consult their consciences, and ask about the truth and the path. But when obstinacy seizes their tongues and hatred tugs them back into the hollow of their mouths, the Qur'an deals a blow at them with the word: "*dumb!*" This indicates that that door too is shut in their faces and alludes to their failing to endorse the truth.

*Thirdly:* They should make the effort to extract lessons from the evidences in the world around them, but heedlessness places its hand over their eyes and feigned blindness draws down their eyelids, so the Qur'an calls them "*blind!*", a sign that they have strayed from this path too. The omission of the particle '*ka*' indicates that their eyes – the lights of the head – have as though been plucked out.

*Fourthly:* They should recognize the ignominy of their situation and feel disgusted and regret it and repent and return, but because, due to the corruption of their natures caused by their insisting on their way and the dominance of lust and Satan, their souls make these abominations seem appealing to them, so the Qur'an says: "*and they cannot turn back.*" This is a sign that the final paths have been closed up for them and indicates that although they have got into this situation voluntarily they do not have the will to extricate themselves and are floundering like a man caught in quicksands.

## Verses 19-20

أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ  
أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ مِنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ  
بِالْكَافِرِينَ \* يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَارَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ  
مَشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ  
وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

*Or [the parable] of a violent cloudburst in the sky, with utter darkness, thunder and lightning: they put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death; but Allah encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth. \* The lightning well-nigh takes away their sight; whenever it gives them light, they advance therein, and whenever darkness falls around them, they stand still. And if Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and sight: for verily Allah is powerful over all things. (Aw ka-ṣayyibin min al-samā' fīhi ḡulumātun wa ra'dun wa barqun yaj'alūna aṣābi'ahum fī ādhānihim min al-ṣawā'iq ḡadhara al-mawt, wa Allāh muḡīṭun bi'l-kāfirīn. \* Yakādu al-barqu yakḡtafu abṣārahum kullamā aḡā'a la-hum mashaw fīhi wa idhā aḡlama 'alayhim qāmū wa-law shā'a Allāh la-dhahaba bi-sam'ihim wa abṣārihim, inna Allāha 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr.)*

The noteworthy points in these verses may also [be subsumed under] three [headings]: their positioning in regard to the preceding verses; the positioning of the verses' phrases [and the relationships between them]; and the relationships between the constituents of the phrases. These resemble the relationships between the hour, minute, and second hands of a clock.

**That aspect of the composition [that looks to the positioning] of these verses and those that preceded it**

The Qur'an repeats the parables (*tamthīl*) thus extending its descriptions and indicating the need to describe [at length] the dissemblers in their alarm and confusion, which are of two sorts, [as is shown in the following summaries]:

*A Summary of the First Parable:* The dissembler sees himself in the desert of existence apart from his fellows, ostracized from the assembly of beings and outside the jurisdiction of the true sun. In his view everything is non-existent, all creatures are alien; silent and motionless they are forlorn and [doomed to] extinction. Can this compare with the believer, who through the light of belief looks on beings as friendly and is familiar with the whole universe?

*A Summary of the Second Parable:* The dissembler supposes that in its entirety the world is announcing his death with its calamities, and menacing him with its disasters, and screaming at him with its events, and raining down blows on him from all sides, as though all its beings have united in enmity to him and everything beneficial has become harmful. The only reason for this however, is his having no support and no source of help, as has been discussed. Can this compare with the believer, who by virtue of his belief hears the glorifications of all beings and their joyous utterances?

Moreover, the fact there is a second parable indicates that the dissemblers are divided into a common low class, conformable with the first parable, and an arrogant, overweening class, corresponding to the second.

*The relationship of this latter parable with the context (maqām), in respect of the listener:* The first people the Qur'an was addressing were the desert-dwellers whose bed was the floor of the desert and roof the tent of the heavens. They had all experienced these things or heard about them from their fellows, and were therefore familiar with them and found them as effective as proverbs. The relationship of this second parable with the first one is abundantly clear, for it completes and perfects it and in many instances even makes the same points. The relationship between the parable and those depicted by it [the dissemblers] has six aspects:

*The First:* They are both totally overcome by bewilderment when all ways of escape are blocked up and all means of deliverance [are suspended].

*The Second:* They are both overwhelmed by terrible fear and they all imagine that beings are united in hostility to them and that they cannot live in safety even for a minute.

*The Third:* They are both struck by alarm so fearsome they become insane and lose their minds. It is like someone who sees a flashing sword and tries to defend himself by closing his eyes, or hears the roar of guns and tries to avoid being hit by stopping up his ears, or like someone who does not want the sun to set and impedes the workings of his watch so that the wheel of fate will cease to turn. How crazy they are! For the thunderbolts will not turn back when they stop up their ears, nor will the fiery lightning pity them when they close their eyes. From this it is understood that they have nothing left to cling on to.

*The Fourth:* The sun and rain, and light and water are apparently the source of the life of flowers and plants and for the raising of them, but they also cause dead things to putrefy and filthy things to rot. Similarly, if mercy and bounty do not encounter places that are ready and prepared for them and know their value, they are transformed into trouble and revenge.

*The Fifth:* Just as, if one disregards the words, there is a correspondence between the meanings [of the second parable and of the story of the dissemblers it portrays], which form the basis of the parabolic metaphor (*al-isti'āra al-tamhīliyya*); so too there are relationships between the parts [of both of these]. For a cloudburst is the life of plants, as Islam is the life of spirits. The thunder and lightning indicate promise and threat, while the darknesses show you the doubts of disbelief and scepticism of dissembling.

**The positioning of [and relationships between] the verses' phrases**

With the phrase “*a violent cloudburst in the sky (ka-ṣayyibin min al-samā)*,” the Qur'an infers that [the dissemblers] resemble people forced to travel through a wild desert on a dark night in a violent rainstorm, the calamitous rain pelting down on them like bullets from the brimming sky. In this way it is alerting the listener's mind, for he is waiting for an explanation of why the rain clouds, which are essentially much desired mercy, are such a ghastly calamity. So to illustrate their awesomeness, it says: “*with utter darkness(es) (fīhi zulumāt)*,” suggesting that the rain contains the clouds' darkness and denseness. Similarly, because of its abundance and being so widespread and general, it is as though with its black droplets [the rain] contains the fragmenting night. As soon as the listener hears “*with utter darkness*” he expects an explanation, as though the speaker hears the sound of thunder in his brain so says: “*and thunder (wa ra'd)*.” This suggests its menacing threats, for the skies, the commander of beings, are intent on wiping out [the dissemblers] and they rumble and roar at them

with their thunder. In the face of this, the terrified calamity-stricken [dissemblers] imagine that the universe, whose beings co-operate and assist each other, is bent on harming them despite its tranquillity, and despite its silence is howling at them horribly. When they hear the thunder they imagine it is uttering threats at them, for out of fear they think it is roaring at them.

Then as soon as the listener hears the thunder, its constant companion strikes his mind, and for this reason [the Qur'an] says: “**and lightning** (*wa barq*),” which indicates through the use of the indefinite that it is strange and wondrous. Yes, it is indeed wondrous. For when it is born, a world of darkness dies and is wrapped up and cast into nothingness. But on its death another world of darkness is resurrected and raised to life. It is as though it is fire that when extinguished leaves as its legacy a world full of smoke. The person struck by it therefore should examine it attentively and not glance at it superficially due to familiarity, for in this way he may discover the subtle art of divine power.

Having heard these descriptions the listener is moved to ask: “What did they do? Did they attempt anything?” So the Qur'an says: “**they put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death** (*yaj'alūna aṣābi'ahum fī ādhānihim min al-ṣawā'iq ḥadhara al-mawt*),” indicating that [the dissemblers] have no refuge and no place of recourse, and are like drowning men who clutch at what cannot be clutched at. In their terror, they use their fingers instead of just the fingertips, as though their alarm is beating them on the hands so they stuff their hands in their ears out of pain, and in their stupidity they block up their ears so the thunderbolts do not strike them. Following this, the listener's mind [continues to] investigate and he asks: “Is this calamity general, or is it particular, that [escape is still] hoped for?” And [the Qur'an] replies: “**but Allah encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth** (*wa Allāhu muḥīṭun li'l-kāfirīn*),” inferring that the disaster is a penalty for their ingratitude for bounties. Allah the Most High punishes them through it for their remaining exceptions to the divine laws deposited in general run of beings (*al-jumhūr*).

When [the listener] hears the violent peals of thunder, he asks himself: “Won't the lightning be useful for them by lighting up their way?” So [the Qur'an] says: “**The lightning well-nigh takes away their sight** (*Yakādu al-barqu yakḥṭafu abṣārahum*),” indicating that just as the thunder is inimical to them and they are unable to hear, so the lightning is hostile towards them

with its light, blinding their eyes. Then hearing that the universe is united in its hostility towards them, the listener's mind calls out: "What will happen to them? What can they do? What are they trying to do?" So [the Qur'an] says: "**whenever it gives them light, they advance therein, and whenever darkness falls around them, they stand still** (*kullamā aqā'a lahum mashaw fihi wa idhā azlama 'alayhim qāmū*)," indicating that they are confused, hesitant, and bewildered, watching for the slightest opportunity and the smallest glimpse of the road. Whenever it appears to them they move forward, but with their anguished spirits, jerkily like decapitated hens, and then become frozen to the spot.

So by way of enquiry the listener's mind asks: "Why don't they die, or become completely blind and deaf, and be saved from their anguish?" And [the Qur'an] says: "**And if Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and sight** (*wa-law shā'a Allāh la-dhahaba bi-sam'ihim wa abṣārihim*);" that is, they do not deserve to be delivered from their plight. For this reason, [divine] will does not cause them to die. If it were to act, it would take away their hearing and sight. It is more fitting for those who are recalcitrant and deviate from the laws of the Most High that they retain their ears to hear their punishment and their sight to see it.

Containing all these points, from beneath its exterior the story hints at divine sublimity and power, and the disposals of the Most High in the universe, especially the marvels of the thunder, lightning, and clouds. On recalling this, with his conscience aroused the listener declares: "Glory be to Him! How great the power of the One whose awesomeness the universe manifests, and whose wrath these calamities display!" So [the Qur'an] said: "**Verily Allah is powerful over all things** (*inna Allaha 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr.*)"

#### **Now for the relationships between the constituents of the phrases**

Know that the "or" of "**or [the parable] of a violent rainstorm**" (the "aw" of "*aw ka-ṣayyibin*,") indicates that [the dissemblers] represented in the comparison are divided into two sorts, and is a sign that there is a true correspondence both between the two parables, and between them and [the condition of] the dissemblers, and that there is an indisputable similarity between them. Moreover, the "or" comprises the [intensifying conjunction] "*bal al-tarqiyya*" [meaning, but rather, no on the contrary, but, indeed], for the second parable is more terrifying. The lack of correspondence between "**or [the parable] of a violent rainstorm** (*aw ka-ṣayyibin*)" and the dissemblers [that is, the dissimilarity between them, because the dissemblers are

being likened to the rainstorm] necessitates that the thing [the rain] does resemble is implied (*muqaddar*). This implied thing is not stated for conciseness and the words are made concise [that is, the purpose of the ellipsis is] to make the meaning prolix, and the prolix meaning is referred to the listener's imagination so he may seek further meanings from the context. Thus by reason of this lack of correspondence [the Qur'an] is as though saying: "or they resemble people who journey through the empty desert and dark night and are struck by many calamities resulting from a violent rainstorm." The replacement of the familiar friendly word 'rain' (*maṭar*) with "rain cloud; downpour (*al-ṣayyib*)" infers that the droplets of the rain are each calamities (*maṣā'ib*) pelting down on them like bullets finding their mark (*tuṣībahum*), and that [the dissemblers] have nowhere to shelter.

The explicit mention of "(lit. from) *in the sky (min as-samā')*" [stating] specifically that the rain comes from the sky alone, is to express generality. That is, the sky is specified to make it absolute (*iṭlāq*), as in the verse "*There is not an animal [that lives] on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings;*"(6:38) that is, the rain has taken possession of the whole face of the sky. Some Qur'anic commentators concluded from "*from the sky*" here and from the verse "*And He sends down from the sky mountain masses [of clouds] wherein is hail;*"(24:43) that the rain falls from the body (*jirm*) of the sky, and some of them even imagined the existence of an ocean beneath the sky, but [the science of] rhetoric (*al-balāgha*) does not endorse this. No, the meaning is "from the direction of the sky," and the sky is specified for the above-mentioned reason. Moreover, [since] the word "sky" is used [generally] for everything above you, the clouds and atmosphere [may also be said to be] the sky.

**Verification of the Subject (*taḥqīq al-maqām*):** If you consider [divine] power, [you will see that] all sides are equal [before it]; that is, the rain may fall from any direction.

And if you consider divine wisdom, [you will see that it] establishes the optimum order in things, necessitating the preservation of the general balance, and that it chooses the most direct means. As for the rain, it is [formed] through the condensation of the water vapour dispersed through the globe of the atmosphere, one of the ten constituents of which is this vapour in its depths.

**An Elucidation of This:** When divine will commands the [water] molecules, they comply and steal away from all around. They join forces and become rain-laden clouds. Then on the orders of their commander they

condense and become raindrops. The angels, who are the representatives of the laws [in force in the universe] and reflect its order, take them by the hand so they do not crowd together [in masses] and strike each other, and they take them down to the ground. In order to preserve the balance of the atmosphere, the seas and earth vaporize to replace what has been lost through distillation. The reason some people imagined the existence of a heavenly ocean was their conceiving of figures of speech as facts. For to portray the green of the atmosphere as the colour of the sea, and the atmosphere as containing more water than the Pacific Ocean, is a figure of speech not distant from the reality.

Consider the verse: “*And He sends down from the sky mountain masses [of clouds] wherein is hail*” (24:43) and understand that to dwell on its apparent meaning although it has kindled a light with its metaphor (*isti'āra*) is to be coldly insensible and literalist. For just as the verse “*Crystal-clear, made of silver*” (76:16) contains a fine metaphor, so does “*mountain masses [of clouds] wherein is hail*” consist of one that is singularly strange and beautiful. The food dishes of paradise are made neither of crystal nor of silver, but have the transparency of crystal and the shining whiteness of silver. This is indicated by the fact that crystal is not made of silver and that they are different materials, and also by the use of [the partitive] “*of (min)*.” Similarly, “*mountain masses [of clouds] wherein is hail*” contains two metaphors which in the listener’s view are founded on poetical imagining. This imagining is based on observing an analogy and likeness between the representation of the higher world and formation of the lower one. And this observation is based on the idea of a beauty contest between the earth and the sky and a competition in the garments clothed on them by the hand of power. It is as though when the earth appears with its mountains clothed in the white garments of snow and ice in the winter, and is turbaned with them in the spring; and when in the summer it is adorned with its colourful gardens, presenting to the view of wisdom through its transformations the miracles of divine power; the atmosphere responds by imitating it and competing with it in displaying the miracles of divine sublimity. It appears veiled, attired in the broken clouds like towering mountains, hills, and valleys. Tinted with various colours, it depicts the earth’s gardens, intimating with the most shining of evidences divine splendour and majesty.

In consequence of this vision and mutual resemblance and imaginary vista, the simile of the clouds was greeted favourably in Arabic styles of speech, especially the summer clouds being likened to mountains, ships,

gardens, valleys, and caravans of camels, as may be heard in the oratory of the Arabs. Thus, in the view of [the science of] rhetoric [or eloquence] it seems that the summer clouds are travelling floating in the skies, with the thunder [as a shepherd] tending them [like a flock] and spurring them on [with its shouts], whenever it shakes the staff of its lightning at them in the oceans of the skies, the clouds quiver and are convulsed. They appear like mountains crumbling on doomsday, or ships tossed about in a storm, or gardens quaking with earth tremors, or a caravan fleeing from the attack of bandits. Nevertheless, [the clouds] do travel and are swept along; it is even as if all the molecules of water vapour lie hidden and silent in their places awaiting the orders of their Creator. Then when the thunder booms out like a military bugle: “Gather together and form ranks!”, vying with each other they leap up from their places and run with all speed to the one summoning them, and are resurrected as clouds. Then having performed their duties and received the order to retire, they all fly off to their eyries.

It is because of this imaginary relationship and the proximity and neighbourliness between the clouds and the mountains – for in order to draw up moisture the cloud forms on the mountain in accordance with its size and it wears its dress; and because the cloud has the colour of the snow and ice and is fashioned through their moisture and coldness; and because of the brotherhood between the mountain and the cloud, and their exchanging forms and dress in many places in the Qur’an, and their shaking hands in the Revelation as they converse and embrace each other on many lines of the page of the earth in the book of the world; and as you see the cloud resting on the mountain so that the mountain is like a dock or anchorage for the ships of the clouds, or a place where they take counsel, or a nest on which they alight – it is because of all these things that in the view of eloquence they deserve to be neighbours, exchanging and borrowing things. Thus, it calls the clouds mountains without the use of the particle [of likening *ka-*].

If you have understood all you have heard about these relationships, [you will have understood that] “*And He sends down from the sky*” means from the direction of the sky, and “*mountain masses [of clouds]*” means clouds like mountains, and “*wherein is hail*” means in respect of their colour, moisture, and fridity. So since there is an interpretation acceptable to the science of rhetoric, what makes you believe that the rain [which] falls in two minutes [comes] from a distance of five hundred years in opposition to Allah’s wisdom, who makes everything with the finest art and precision?

The relationships and positioning of the phrase: “**with utter darkness** (lit. in which are darknesses) (*fīhi zulumāt*):”

The aim of this is to intimidate. The precedence of “*in which (fīhi)*” is a sign that with their imaginations, both the terrified calamity-struck [dissemblers] and the listener fancy that the darkness of many dark nights has been emptied entirely into this night. Then its being said that the darknesses are within the rain [the cloudburst] although it is vice-versa, suggests that the frightened men suppose space to be a pool filled with rain, and the night to be contained within it, interspersed between its molecules.

“*Darknesses*” being plural alludes to their variety: the darkness of the black clouds and their denseness and covering the whole sky, the heaviness of the rain and the largeness of its drops, and the compounded darkness of the night.

And the word “*darknesses*” is indefinite because [the darknesses] are unknown and particularly because those addressed are ignorant of them. And [its being indefinite] is also corroborative [for not knowing is a sort of darkness].

As for the phrases “**and thunder and lightning** (*wa ra‘d wa barq*),” their aim is to portray the bewilderment and alarm [of the dissemblers], and [to indicate that] disaster-struck and baffled, they focus all their attention on the least significant event. For scrutiny leads a person to understand the wondrously strange revolutions and changes in the thunder and lightning. But when [the dissemblers] see the darkness invading the universe and swallowing up beings – like nothingness – their bewilderment is turned into orphanlike grief and they fall silent as the dead. For they see the clearest evidences of existence, the utterance of those lofty beings [the thunder], then their appearance when the veil is lifted [on the flashing of the lightning], and they are filled with consternation, bewilderment and fear. For when they see the boundless darkness in infinite space, which they can in no way overcome, they look in despair. But then, when those darknesses are suddenly emptied out of space and vanish and everywhere is filled with light, their absolute despair is transformed into hope.

Know that thunder and lightning are two clear signs from the World of the Unseen. They are in the hands of the angels appointed to the world of the clouds to oversee the ordering of its laws. Divine wisdom ties causes and their effects, and when clouds are formed from water vapour dispersed in the atmosphere, some of them are charged with negative electrons and others with positive electrons. When two come close to each other, they

collide suddenly and lightning is produced. Then on one cloud staging an assault and being suddenly uprooted, and its place being filled by another so there should be no vacuum, the layers oscillate and undulate which produces the sound of thunder. However, these atmospheric conditions occur within the order and laws represented by the angel of thunder and lightning.

The rain (cloudburst) being shown to contain [the thunder and lightning] although [in reality] it is the clouds that contains them is because the terrified [dissemblers], and the listener who is alarmed at their terror, look on the pelting rain as encompassing everything since it is encompassing them.

The use of the singular for the thunder and lightning although darknesses is plural indicates that the source of the calamity-stricken dissemblers' fright is their imagining the sky to be speaking and menacing them with its thunder, and the flashing lightning revealing [their dreadful situation]. These are the verbal meanings [*ma'nā maşḍārī* – and such meanings are singular]<sup>46</sup> and [resemble] “the shining hand.”<sup>47</sup> Also, each is a different sort of being (*naw'*), although there are numerous instances of each, [and what is intended is the sort, not the individual instances of them].

“Thunder” and “lightning” are indefinite since they are not qualified by adjectives; that is, [the ‘nunation’ signifies implied adjectives such as] crashing thunder and dazzling lightning. It indicates too that [the dissemblers] are unfamiliar [with their reality] because all their attention is focussed on the curious aspects of them. It also hints that they do not recognize the thunder and lightning because they have stopped up their ears and shut fast their eyes.

The parts of the phrases: “***They put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death*** (*yaj'alūna aṣābi'ahum fī ādhānihim min al-ṣawā'iq ḥadhara al-mawt*):”

This sentence is the reply to an implied question and a fine commencement [*isti'nāf* – that is, it is not tied to what precedes it]. For when the listener addresses himself to this emotional, parabolic story (*al-qissa al-ḥissiyya al-tamthīliyya*), he feels an intense desire to discover the circumstances of the calamity. Once this is depicted perfectly, his curiosity is satisfied and he then desires to learn the condition of the calamity-struck men. He as though asks: “What state are they in now? What are they doing to

46. Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmecid], 144.

47. This association of the thunder and lightning with speech and “the shining hand” (*al-yad al-bayḍā'*) is an allusion to two of Moses' miracles. See, Qur'an, 20:22ff; 26:33; 27:12; 28:32. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Bahaeddin Sağlam], 190.

save themselves?” And the Qur’an replies saying: “*They put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death.*” That is, there is no escape for them; they are like drowning men clutching at straws, for they try to protect themselves from the heavenly projectiles by blocking up their ears. But that is impossible and they cannot be saved.

The word “*they put (yaj’alūna)*” is used instead of ‘they put into’ (*yad-khulūna*) as a sign that they searched for some means [of escape] but the only thing they could think of was sticking [their fingers in their ears]. The use of the imperfect tense, which evokes present situations, indicates that [on hearing about] such bewildering circumstances the listener conjures up in his imagination the actual time and place. The imperfect also indicates [the] continuance and perpetual renewal [of the calamity], and in this continuance is a sign that the clouds are attacking them incessantly.

The use of “*fingers (aṣābi’ahum)*” instead of ‘fingertips’ indicates their complete confusion.

And “*into their ears (fī ādhānihim)*” alludes to their awful fright at the sound of the thunder, making them imagine that the thunder is going to enter their ears and their spirits will fly out of the doors of their mouths. In this is a subtle sign that they did not open their ears to the call of truth and good advice so are being punished in this way by the crash of thunder; that is, as they blocked them up [voluntarily] in the first instance, so they are [forcibly] blocked up in the second. Like someone who says something disgraceful is hit in the mouth, and he puts his penitent right hand over his mouth and covers his eyes with his ashamed left hand.

“*[To keep out] the peals of thunder (min al-ṣawā’iq)*” indicates that the thunder and lightning united to harm them, for the thunder(bolt) comprised both a terrible noise and scorching fire, felling whomever it encountered.

As for “*in terror of death (ḥadhara al-mawt)*,” it hints that the calamity has reached its final point and the knife has hit the bone. Everything is finished except life, and now they are concerned with nothing except fear of death and the wish to save their lives.

The parts of the phrase: “***but Allah encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth*** (*wa Allāhu muḥīṭun bi’l-kāfirīn*):”

Consider this: The conjunction “*but* (lit. and) (*wa*)” necessitates a relationship between two clauses, and here it is between the implied outcome of the previous [phrase] and this one. It is as though the conjunction is denouncing them, saying: “These are people who fled from town life and loathe civilization. They rebelled against the law that makes the night the

time of rest, and did not comply with the advice they were given. Now they suppose they can be saved by escaping from the desert, but they are frustrated in this and are encompassed by Allah’s tribulations.”

The word “*Allāh*” signifies the dashing of their final hope. For the only recourse and solace for those smitten by disaster is Allah’s mercy, and when they come to earn His wrath that hope is extinguished.

The word “*encompasses (muḥīṭun)*” infers that those all-encompassing calamities are the works of the Most High’s wrath. Just as the sky, clouds, thunder, and night are assaulting them from all six directions, so the Most High’s wrath and His tribulations surround them. Moreover, the Most High’s knowledge and power encompass all beings, and His command embraces all particles. So it is as though “encompasses” is declaiming at them: “*They cannot pass beyond the regions of the heavens and earth,*” (see, 55:33) and “*whithersoever you turn, there is the countenance of Allah.*” (2:115)

“*All those who deny the truth (bi’l-kāfirīn):*” The [preposition] “*bi-*” prefixing this suggests that [the dissemblers] have happened upon the very thing they were fleeing from and have become the target for its arrows.

This latter phrase indicates that the image of those represented, that is, the dissemblers, is portrayed in the mirror of the parable. This is so that the listener’s mind should not be diverted by the parable and he does not forget the aim. It also indicates that the parable and those portrayed in it are so similar they are virtually the same; the difference between them has almost faded away so they seem identical and reality and imagination have merged. The phrase also signifies the gloominess of their hearts, for their consciences torment them too with their faults and crimes. Those who receive requital for their crimes are not easy in their consciences.

Now the parts of the phrase: “***The lightning well-nigh takes away their sight (Yakādu al-barq yakḥṭafu abṣārahum):***”

This is apparently unconnected [to the previous phrase and therefore] implies that the listener is asking: “Why don’t they take advantage of the lightning to reduce the calamity of the darkness for themselves?” And he is told: “They are scared of its harm more than [wanting] its advantages.”

By reason of its well-known property “*well-nigh (yakādu)*” points to the loss of their sight, but for some reason they did not lose it completely.<sup>48</sup>

“*Snatches away (yakḥṭafu):*” Since this word is usually used with ghouls

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48. *Kāda yakādu*, means on the point of, almost, hardly.

and eagles it denotes here a subtle instance of eloquence that flashes in the brain and indicates that the lightning races with the eye's beam to see which can reach things first to capture their images. It overtakes it and cuts it short, and strikes it on the eyelid, extinguishing its light. It is as though when the eye's light speedily quits its home to capture the images of things, the lightning, which is the beam of the sky's eye, races against it and seizes the image from it before it can get it home. That is, the lightning swipes the image from the eye.

And by virtue of [the eyes] being the mirror of the heart, "*their sight (abṣārahum)*" alludes to the dissemblers' eyes being blind to the decisive proofs of the Qur'an.

Now for the parts of the phrases: "***whenever it gives them light, they advance therein, and when darkness falls around them, they stand still*** (*kullamā aḍā'a la-hum mashaw fīhi wa idhā aḥlama 'alayhim qāmū*):"

The fact that this is a fresh start [and not apparently related to what precedes it] (*isti'nāf*) indicates that it is the answer to the questions the listener asks when he sees all these different calamities and asks about [the dissemblers'] circumstances in both situations.

The fact that "*whenever (kullamā)*" precedes "*it gives them light (aḍā'a)*" and the "*when (idhā)*" precedes "*darkness falls (aḥlama)*" indicates [the dissemblers'] intense desire for light, seizing on the least light they can. [For the former means 'whenever' denoting numerous occasions, and the latter means 'when and if.'] "*Whenever*" also comprises an analogous conditional syllogism.

The [preposition] "*to (la-)*" in "*it gives (to) them light (aḍā'a la-hum)*," signifies causation (*al-ajliyya*) and benefit, and is a sign that the terrified calamity-stricken [dissemblers] are plunged in [concern for] their own needs so that they suppose the light that the hand of power is spreading through the world for thousands of general instances of wisdom is meant for them alone, and that the hand of power is sending it for their sake.

Although [the dissemblers] should seize the opportunity [of the light] to travel on quickly, [the word] "*they advance* (lit. walk) (*mashaw*)" [is used], indicating that the calamity has held them back and they can only move forward slowly at walking pace.

The [pronominal suffix *-hi*] in "*therein (fīhi)*," [referring to the light] indicates that the distance they move forward is [that permitted by the brief instant of] the light, which is the colour of time. Thus it as though limits them as to space.

The [conjunction] “*and (wa)*” in “*and when (wa idhā)*” indicates that the calamity is continuous, which increases its severity. And since contrarily to “*whenever (kullamā)*,” “*when (idhā)*” expresses particularity and neglect [since the generalizing suffix *-mā* has not been added], it points to their extreme revulsion [at the darkness] and their blindness, and that it seizes them when they are lost in the instant of [light], [which affords them] an opportunity.

The ascription of “*darkness falls (aḏlama)*” to the lightning alludes to darkness after light being more intense, and indicates that when in their imaginations the calamity-struck [dissemblers] see the lightning [first] banishing the darkness but then filling where they are found with it, they fancy that [the light] has been extinguished, leaving only smoke behind.

“*Around* (lit. on, against) *them (‘alayhim)*” infers harm and indicates that the darkness is not imposed by chance but is a punishment for their actions. It indicates too that the terrified [dissembler] imagines the darkness to be filling the sky and is directed at him among all beings, despite his insignificance and contemptibility, and that its assaults and harm are aimed at him in particular.

The use of “*they stand [up] still (qāmū)*” instead of ‘they become still, stop’ (*sakanū*) is a sign that due to the calamity and their strenuous efforts [to combat it] they had become bent at the waist as though bowing in prayer, which is characteristic of a person who works earnestly at something, [and had straightened up when the darkness struck them].

Now for the parts of the phrase “***And if Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and sight*** (*wa-law shā’a Allāhu la-dhahaba bi-sam‘ihim wa abṣārihim*):”

Being a conjunction, the “*And (wa)*” hints that the hand of power acts under the veil of causes and that wisdom superintends from above all causes.

“*If (law)*” comprises a non-analogous conditional syllogism (*qiyās istithnā’ī*); that is, its not having been willed is the reason (*‘illa*) for their [hearing and sight] not being lost; similarly, their not being lost is evidence that divine will has not caused them to be lost. It is also a sign that the conditions for their being lost have been virtually fulfilled.

“*Wills (shā’a)*” indicates that the only thing binding cause and effect is divine will and wish, and it is divine power that executes [the act]. Causes are merely a veil to divine dignity and grandeur so that the hand of power is not seen by the mind’s eye[, which sees only the apparent,] to be in contact with lowly things.

The explicit use of the name “*Allāh*” is an indication [warning] people against their addiction to causes and restraining them from becoming immersed in them. It also invites minds to see the hand of power behind all causes.

The omission of the object of the verb “*wills (shā’a)*,” although such an object is necessary according to the usual rules, is permissible here due to the associated meanings (*qarīna*) of other words. The omission infers that divine wish and will are not affected by the events of the universe, and that things have no effect on the divine attributes, whereas human will is affected by things and their beauty and ugliness, and greatness and smallness.

“*He could indeed take away (la-dhahaba)*” indicates that causes do not have control and supremacy over effects so that if they were to be raised, the effects would remain in a vacuum, the playthings of coincidence and tossed around by chance; rather, the hand of power is present behind causes. When it plucks things out [of non-existence] the hand of divine wisdom takes them through the law of balance and order, and sends them to other places; it does not neglect them. [For example,] when heat breaks down the structure of water, through the order [laws] included in the air the steam follows a determined course and its Maker sends it to a specified place. Similarly, in “*dhahaba*” is a sign that [man’s] five external senses are not produced by nature and that there is nothing to necessitate the cavities of the eyes and ears; they are the gifts and bounties of the Most High. Cavities and causes are merely the usual conditions [for their existence].

The verb “*dhahaba*” is made transitive by the following [preposition] “*bi-*,” in “*He could indeed take away their hearing (la-dhahaba bi-sam’ihim)*,” instead of with ‘hamza;’ [that is, the IVth form of the verb]. This is a sign that the hand of power does not take things by the reins of causes, nor are they free to wander with their halters hanging from their necks; rather their halters are [firmly] in the hands of [the laws and] order.

Since “*hearing*” is in the singular and “*sight*” is in the plural, “*their hearing and sight (bi-sam’ihim wa abṣārihim)*” indicates that one thing is audible, while numerous things may be seen, for a thousand men may hear the same thing at the same time, but what they see will be different.

The parts of the phrase “***for verily Allah is powerful over all things (inna Allāha ‘alā kulli shay’in qadīr):***”

Consider this: This phrase is a summary of the study of horrors in the parable and [the people] portrayed in it. It indicates that just as the details

of the calamity-stricken [travellers'] circumstances, which represent faithfully the dissemblers' circumstances, are not neglected [by divine power]; so the disposals of divine power are to be seen in every minute particle.

Together with indicating that this statement is an unshakeable truth, the particle "*inna* (*verily*)" alludes to the vast breadth and delicateness of the matter, and to human impotence, weakness, and faultiness concerning it, arising from [man's] delusions, which are the consequence of his doubts concerning matters of certainty. [That is, with its certainty, "*inna*" dispels the doubts.]

The explicit use of the name "*Allāh*" alludes to proof of the statement [of His omnipotence], for total, all-embracing power is the necessary inherent quality of the Godhead.

As for "*over* (*alā*)," it indicates that divine power, which brings things out of non-existence, will not let them go for nothing, futile and vain; rather, divine wisdom will oversee them and supervise their being raised and reared.

"*All* (*kull*)" suggests that the works of causes, as well as the results (*al-ḥāsil bi'l-maṣdar*) of [man's] voluntary actions, are [brought about] through the power of the Most High.

"*Thing* (*shay'*)," having the meaning of "*thing willed by Allah* (*mashiy'*)," indicates that after coming into existence, beings cannot be independent of their Maker; indeed, they are in need of His efficacy for their continuance – which is the repetition of existence.

As for the use of the word "*powerful* (*qadīr*)" rather than '*qādir*' [the active participle], is a sign that divine power cannot be measured like determined things, for it is an unchanging necessary inherent quality that accepts no increase or decrease. It is impossible for its opposite, impotence, to encroach on it, or for any [degrees of] intensity or weakness [to intervene in it]. It is a sign too that power is like the basic verbal pattern in [Arabic] grammar, that is, *fa'ala*, for all the attributes of action (*al-awṣāf al-fi'līyya*), such as Provider (*al-Razzāq*), Forgiving (*al-Ghaffār*), Giver of Life (*al-Muḥyi*), Dealer of Death (*al-Mumīt*), and so on. [That is, power is their basis.]

Now reflect well and long on what you have heard!

## Verses 21-22

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ  
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ \* الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً  
وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا  
تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

*O you people! Worship your Lord and Sustainer, Who has created you and those [who lived] before you, so that you might remain conscious of Him; \* Who has made the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy, and has sent down water from the sky and thereby brought forth fruits for your sustenance: then set not up rivals to Allah, when you know [the truth]. (Yā ayyuhā al-nās u'budū rabbakum alladhī khalaqakum wa alladhīna min qablikum la'allakum tattaqūn \* Alladhī ja'ala la-kum al-arḍa firāshan wa al-samā' binā'an wa anzala min al-samā' mā'an fa-akhraja bi-hi min al-thamarāt rizqan la-kum fa-lā taj'alū li'llāhi andādan wa antum ta'lamūn.)*

### Introduction

You should know that it is worship that instils the tenets of belief [in the believers] making them a very part of their character. For if matters pertaining to the conscience and reason are not nurtured and strengthened by worship, which consists of carrying out Allah's commands and abstaining from His prohibitions, they remain ineffectual and weak. The present state of the Islamic world testifies to this.

Know too that worship is the cause of happiness in this world and the next, and is a means of ordering life here and there, and a cause of attainment and perfection, both individual and collective. It is an exalted, esteemed relation between Creator and bondsman.

There are several reasons worship is the cause of happiness and prosperity in this world, which is the tillage of the hereafter:

*Firstly:* Man has been created with a strange, subtle nature distinguishing him from all other living beings and making him an exception to them. By virtue of this there have arisen in him the desire to choose, and the wish for the most beautiful things and for fine decoration, and a natural desire to have a livelihood and position befitting humanity.

For his food, dress, and accommodation – the need for which arises due to the above-mentioned desires – to be prepared proficiently man has need of multiple arts and crafts, but he is incapable of practising all of these on his own. He needs therefore to mix with his fellow men and to co-operate with them, and for all of them to assist each other and exchange the fruits of their labour. However, since so as to allow men's progress by means of the mainspring of the will the All-Wise Maker placed no innate limits on the [three] human powers of appetite, anger, and intellect – as with the animals and their limited powers – tyranny and aggression have arisen. And since no limit has been placed on them, the powers [tend to] aggression and the [human] community is in need of justice when exchanging the fruits of its labour. But because the intellects of single members of society are incapable of comprehending justice, the human race as a whole needs a general or universal intellect [to establish] justice from which all may benefit. And that intellect is the universal law, and that law is the Shari'a. Then in order to preserve the effectiveness of the Shari'a and its enforcement, a law-maker is necessary, someone to lay claim to it and promulgate it, an authority, and that is the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace).

Then in order to perpetuate his outward and inward domination over [people's] minds and hearts the Prophet needs to be eminently superior both physically and spiritually and morally, and in conduct and appearance, and by nature and in character. He is in need too of proof of the strength of his relations with the Lord of All Sovereignty, the Master of the World, and such a proof is his miracles. Then in order to secure obedience to [its] commands and avoidance of [its] prohibitions he is in need of perpetuating the idea of the Maker's grandeur, the Master of all Sovereignty, and that is [possible] through the manifestation of the tenets of belief. Then in order to perpetuate this idea and fix the tenets of belief firmly in their minds, he needs a constantly repeated reminder and renewed act, and that reminder is nothing but worship.

*Secondly:* The purpose of worship is to turn minds towards the All-Wise

Maker. And this turning towards induces obedience and submission, and this includes [the worshippers] under the perfect order [in the universe] and binds them to it. To follow this order leads to the realization of the mystery of wisdom, and the wisdom is testified to by the perfect art in the universe.

*Thirdly:* Man resembles a pole to the top of which are joined electric cables, for attached to his head are the tips of all the laws of creation; the natural laws extend to him, and the rays of the divine laws and principles in the universe are reflected and centred on him. So man has to complete them and adhere to them and cling on to them to facilitate the general current lest his foot slips and he falls and is crushed under the wheels of the machinery turning in the levels [of the world]. And this is achieved through worship, which consists of conforming to the commands and prohibitions.

*Fourthly:* By complying with the commands and prohibitions, numerous connections are formed for a person with the many levels of society, and the individual becomes like a species. For many of the commands, especially those that touch on the marks [of Islam] and the general good, resemble threads to which are tied [people's] honour and through which their rights are set in order. If it were not for them, all those rights and duties would be torn up and scattered to the wind.

*Fifthly:* The Muslim has firm relations with all other Muslims and there are strong bonds between them. By reason of the tenets of belief and [the Muslims'] Islamic traits, these relations give rise to unshakeable brotherhood and true love. And it is worship that makes manifest the tenets of belief and renders them effective, and roots them firmly in the psyche.

***How worship is the cause of personal attainment and perfection***

Consider this: Together with being physically small, weak, and powerless, and being one of the animals, man bears within him an exalted spirit, and has vast potentiality, unrestricted desires, infinite hopes, uncountable ideas, and unlimited powers, and he has a nature so strange he is as though an index of all the species and all the worlds. As for worship, it expands his spirit and raises his value; it causes his abilities to unfold and develop, allowing him to become worthy of eternal happiness. Worship is also a means of rectifying and purifying his inclinations, and of realizing his hopes and making them fruitful, and of marshalling his ideas and setting them in order, and also of reining in and limiting his [three] powers [of appetite, anger, and intellect]. Worship also removes the rust of nature from his members, physical and spiritual, each of which when transparent is like a window onto his private world and that of humankind. Also, when

performed with both conscience and mind and heart and body, worship raises man to the dignity of which he is worthy and to his appointed perfection. It is a subtle, elevated relation, an illustrious lofty connection between the bondsman and the One Worshipped. This relation constitutes the utmost degree of human perfection.

Sincerity in worship is this, that it is performed only because it is commanded, although it comprises numerous instances of wisdom [and benefits]. Each of these may be a reason (*'illa*) for performing worship, but sincerity makes it imperative that the [true] reason be the command to perform it. If the wisdom or benefit is made the reason, the worship is null and void, but if it merely encourages the person to perform the worship, it is permissible.

When those addressed hear the words “*O you people! Worship..*,” they ask through the tongue of disposition: “Why and for what reason? What is the wisdom in it? Why should we? And what for?” You learnt the wisdom in the introduction above; concerning the reason (*'illa*), the Qur’an replies with proof of the Maker and His unity with the words: “*Your Lord and Sustainer who created you...*” Then with the verse: “*If you are in doubt about what We have revealed,*”(2:23) it proves prophethood.

## An Introduction

### Explaining Certain Points [arising from] This Verse

Consider this: A proof (*burhān*) is [in the form of] either the argument from material cause to material effect (*limmī*), or the argument from effect to cause (*innī*). This latter is sounder and it is either based on contingency (*imkānī*), that is, the argument that since contingent beings are equal in respect of being and non-being there must be [a Necessary Being] to choose this (*al-murajjih*); or it is based on createdness (*ḥudūthī*); that is, the argument that since there is constant change and renewal in beings, there must be One to give them existence (*al-mūjid*). Each of the above proofs is in respect of either the essences of things or their attributes, and in respect of either the giving of existence or the continuation of it. And all of them are either the proof that things are given existence out of nothing (*dalīl ikhtirā’ī*) or the proof of divine providence (*dalīl ‘ināyatī*). The present verse alludes to all these types of proof. Included here is [only] a summary of them, for we have explained them in detail in another book.<sup>49</sup>

49. Nursi, *Muhâkemat*, 107 ff.

The proof of divine providence (*dalīl 'ināyatī*) is the proof of the Maker indicated by this verse and consists of the order included in the universe. For the order is a thread to which is attached all benefits and instances of wisdom. All the Qur'anic verses that enumerate the benefits of things and mention their purposes are 'the weaver' of this proof and are where this argument is manifested. For just as the order, with which all the instances of wisdom and benefits comply, proves the existence of the Orderer, so it demonstrates the Maker's intention and wisdom, and repulses the delusion of blind chance and unseeing coincidence.

Now see! If you cannot encompass this elevated order, adorned with bezels of wisdom, with your sight, and you are incapable of understanding it through inductive reasoning, look through the prying eyes of the sciences – which are the senses of your species and are formed through the meeting of minds and conjunction of ideas, and are like the ideas of the human race – for you will see an order that dazzles the mind. You will know too that each of the physical sciences discloses through the universality of its principles, the order and harmony, the more perfect than which cannot be conceived of. For there is a science [to study] every area (*naw'*) of the universe, or there will be [that is, each could sustain a science].

Science consists of universal principles, and this universality demonstrates the beauty of the order. For there can be no universality in something without order. Don't you see that if we say: "All religious scholars wear white turbans," it is confirming the universality, for there is order among that group (*naw'*)? It leads on from this that by reason of the universality of their principles, all the sciences demonstrate through inductive reasoning a total, all-embracing order; each is a shining proof pointing to the benefits and fruits hanging in bunches from the links of the chains of beings, indicating too the instances of wisdom and advantages concealed in their changing states. The sciences raise the banner of divine unity and testify to the Maker's purpose and wisdom. Each of them is a shining star piercing the darkness and repulsing the devils of delusion and doubt.

If you like, now disregard the general [order] and consider the following example: a microscopic organism so small it is invisible to the naked eye comprises an extremely fine and wonderful divine machine. Necessarily and self-evidently, this machine, which is contingent in both its essence and attributes and states, did not come into existence of itself without a cause. Like the pans of some scales, contingent beings are equal in respect of both existence and non-existence; if one preponderates, they remain in

non-existence. Thus, as all reasonable people agree, there has to be a cause to make the choice. It is impossible that this should be a natural cause. For the exquisite order of [the machine] necessitates infinite knowledge and perfect intelligence, and it is impossible to conceive of these in such causes, about which [the Naturalists] deceive themselves. The causes are simple, few, and lifeless and cannot specify their course or restrict their motions, hesitant as they are between thousands of possibilities, some of which have no primacy. So how does [a cause] follow a specific course and travel a defined path, and how can it choose certain aspects of the possibilities so that it produces this marvellous, well-ordered machine the subtlety of the instances of wisdom of which leave minds in astonishment? You could only convince yourself and feel happy at it if you ascribed to every single particle the intelligence of Plato<sup>49</sup> and wisdom of Galen<sup>50</sup> and you believed that all these particles communicated with each other. And this is a sophistry that would put even the Sophists to shame.

Although the forces of attraction and repulsion form the basis of physical matter in the smallest indivisible atoms, this appears to be the combining of opposites. Yes, the law of attraction and that of repulsion and others are the names of the laws of divine practice and the Most High's Shari'a of Creation (*al-sharī'at al-fiṭriyya*), which is called nature. Such laws are acceptable on condition they do not cease being principles and become nature, and exist only in the mind and are not ascribed external existence, and do not cease being merely theoretical and become real, and do not cease to be seen as means and are considered effectual.

Now if you have understood this example [of the microscopic organism] and you have seen its vastness despite its infinitesimal size, and its breadth despite its narrowness, raise your head and observe the universe: you will see the clarity of the proof of divine providence (*dalīl al-'ināya*) and that it is as clear and obvious as the universe. All the Qur'anic verses that recount the bounties of things and recall their benefits manifest this proof. When the Qur'an enjoins reflective thought, it generally directs the one it addresses to the method of this [deductive] reasoning (*istidlāl*): "So turn your vision again; do you see any flaw?"(67:3) As for this verse, how [clearly] it points to this proof: "Who has made the earth a resting-place

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49. Plato (c. 428-348 BC), the great Athenian philosopher and pupil of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. His most famous work is *The Republic*.

50. Galen, the Greek physician and philosopher of the 2nd century AD who for centuries was the supreme authority in medicine.

*for you and the sky a canopy, and has sent down water from the sky and thereby brought forth fruits for your sustenance.”(2:22)*

The proof that things are given existence out of nothing (*al-dalīl al-ikhtirā’ī*), which is alluded to by the verse “*who has created you and those [who lived] before you (alladhī khalaqakum wa alladhīna min qablikum),*” is this: Allah the Most High gave every species and all the members of each, a particular being which is the source of its particular works and the perfections of which it is worthy. Since all species [and realms of beings] are contingent, as are the never ending chains of causes, none can go back in unbroken succession to pre-eternity. Also, since there is [constant] change in the world, it proves [the world’s] createdness, sometimes through observation and sometimes through rational necessity. It has also been demonstrated by biology and botany that there are more than two hundred thousand sorts of species and that each has a progenitor and forefather. Contingency and createdness prove therefore that necessarily these progenitors and forefathers emerged without intermediary from the hand of divine power. Moreover, [causes] cannot be imagined [at the first creation] as they are imagined in the chains of causes. Furthermore, the delusion of the splitting off of some species from others is invalid. For [since either the offspring are barren or the line becomes extinct,] an intervening species mostly does not become the start of new chains through reproduction. It is most likely therefore that since the origins and beginnings are thus, the successive members will also be thus. How can it be imagined that simple, lifeless natural causes, which are devoid of intelligence and will, should be capable of bringing into existence these chains [of beings] which astound the mind, and of creating (*ikhtirā’*) the individual beings, each of which is a marvel of art and miracle of divine power? Hence, all beings and the chains of which they are parts testify decisively through the tongues of their createdness and contingency to the necessary existence of their Creator, may His glory be exalted.

• *If you were to ask:* Why when there is this decisive testimony do people believe in such misguided [ideas] as the pre-eternity of matter and its motion?

*You would be told:* If a person looks at something indirectly he may consider the impossible to be possible, like the old man searching the sky for the crescent moon of the festival (*īd*) saw the white hair resting on his eyelid [and thought it was] the moon. For by virtue of his lofty essence and noble nature, man pursues truth and right. And if the false and invalid fall

into his hand, then involuntarily – so long as he has not sought or searched for it – but because of his superficial, indirect view, he is forced to accept it. Because when he ignores the order [of the universe], which is the thread [to which is tied] all the instances of wisdom, and fails to see the contrariness of the motion [of particles as the source of matter] and the pre-eternity of matter, it becomes possible in his indirect view to ascribe the unique embroideries and wondrous art to blind chance and unseeing coincidence. As al-Jisrī<sup>52</sup> has said, if someone who enters a palace filled with the embellished works of civilization does not see its owner, he will believe that it has none and will be forced to ascribe the building and its decorations to chance, coincidence, and the laws of natural selection. Moreover, when he ignores the testimony to a total will, all-encompassing knowledge, and perfect power of all the instances of wisdom and uses and benefits in the order of the world and is heedless of them, it will appear possible to him – since he sees them by the way – to prove the actual effect of lifeless causes.

Now how about this! Disregard the subtleties of the Most High’s art and study the most obvious of the works called “nature” and that is the visible manifestation (*irtisām*) and reflection [of things], on condition you rend the veil of familiarity: how can your soul be convinced and your reason accept that the properties of the face of a mirror can constitute an effective cause conducive to revealing the face of the skies and attracting [and reflecting] in its glass its image with its altitude and inscribed with stars? And how can your reason be persuaded that in reality the imaginary thing called gravity is an effective cause holding the earth and stars with their motions and rotations in firm order?

*In Short:* If a person looks at something impossible and invalid superficially and by the way and does not see the true cause, he may deem it to be possible and valid. But if he considers such a thing intentionally and for itself, and studies it as his own, it is impossible that he should accept any of those matters that they drone on about in natural philosophy, unless he is so foolish as to suppose all minute particles possess the intelligence of the philosophers and the wisdom of the politicians!

• *If you were to ask:* What are nature and the laws and forces that they mutter about and try to console themselves with?

*You would be told:* Nature is a pattern, not a source; it is a printing press,

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52. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Muṣṭafā al-Jisr. b. Trablus (Syria) 1261/1845 d. 1327/1909. He graduated from al-Azhar 1284 AH. His most famous work was translated into Turkish under the title *Risale-i Hamidiyye*.

and not the printer; it is a code of laws, and not a power; it is the divine Shari‘a of Creation, which imposes an order on the acts of the limbs of the Manifest World’s body. Just as the Shari‘a is the product and summary of the rules governing voluntary acts, and the system of government is the sum of political principles; so the Shari‘a and order are two theoretical matters that exist only in the mind; and so too nature is a theoretical matter that is the summary of Allah’s external practices in creation. The delusion of its external existence is like a savage imagining when he sees a military division performing disciplined drill that the soldiers are tied together with [physical strings that have] external existence. It is people with the consciences of savages, therefore, who imagine that because of its continuance nature has effective external existence.

*In Short:* Nature is the art of Allah the Most High and the code of His creational laws. Its laws are the articles of the code, and its forces, the matters of the articles.

Now for the proof of divine unity (*dalīl al-tawhīd*), indicated by “*Worship! (u‘budū)*,” that is, ‘profess Allah’s unity’ (*waḥḥadū*). According to the commentary of Ibn ‘Abbas it is as follows: the Qur’an of Miraculous Exposition has omitted nothing from its proofs of divine unity. Sufficient evidence is the proof [called] *burhān al-tamānu‘* contained in the verse “*If there had been in them [the heavens and earth] gods other than Allah, they would have caused confusion in both;*” (21:22) it is a shining beacon [proving] that independence is a necessary essential and inherent quality of the Godhead. This verse [also] alludes to a subtle proof of divine unity which is [indicated by the following:] the co-operation of the heavens and earth and their relations in producing the products [to support] the livelihoods of mankind and the animals; the similarity of the works in the world, and all sides of it embracing each other, each taking the other by the hand so to complete the order; the mutual response of its different parts to each other’s needs; all of it looking to a single point; and all being in regular motion on the axis of a single order. All this implies, indeed states clearly that the Maker of this single machine is One. So too it recites the lines:

*In everything is a sign indicating that He is One.*<sup>53</sup>

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53. The authorship of these lines is disputed: they are attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in *Ibn Kathīr*, i, 24, and to Abū al-Atāhhiyya in Bayḥaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān*, i, 130-1. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü l-İ‘caz* [Abdülmecid], 162. In Abū al-Atāhhiyya’s *Dīwān* they are attributed to Imam ‘Alī (ibn Abī Ṭalib), see, Nursi, *Ishârât al-I‘jâz* [Ihsan Qasim], 154.

Now consider this: the Maker is necessarily existent and one, so too He is qualified by all the attributes of perfection. For whatever the traces of perfection found in an artefact, they are derived from the shadow of the manifestation of its Maker's perfection. So necessarily, the beauty, perfection, and goodness of the Maker (May His glory be exalted) must be of a degree infinitely higher than all the beauty, perfection, and goodness found in the universe. For beneficence (*ihsān*) is derived from the wealth of the Beneficent (*al-Muhsin*) and is evidence for it, and the giving of existence (*ijād*) proves the existence (*vujūd*) of the Giver of existence (*al-mūjjid*), and making necessary proves the existence of one who makes necessary, and making beautiful points to the beauty of one who makes beautiful. Moreover, the Maker is exempt from all defects, for defects arise from the essential inability of material beings and the Most High is free of materiality. So too is He free of the attributes necessarily arising from the contingent essences of beings. Glory be unto Him! There is none like unto Him, May His glory be exalted! He alludes to these two truths with His words: “*Then set not up rivals to Allah (fa-lā taj'alū li'llāhi andādan).*”

Now for the proof of contingency (*al-dalīl al-inkānī*), which is alluded to by the verse, “*For God is indeed self-sufficient, whereas you stand in need [of Him]:*”(47:38) you see that in respect of its essence and all its attributes and every one of its states and all its facets, every single atom in the universe [exists] hesitant and wavering amid endless possibilities. Then suddenly one springs to life, stands, and follows a specific path; it is clothed in particular attributes and assumes an orderly state and mounts an apposite law; it is turned to a fixed destination; then it yields wise results and benefits that could be obtained only in that determined way. Does it not proclaim in its particular tongue its Maker's intention and wisdom, enunciating them clearly?

Just as each particle singly is a proof, so its evidence multiplies as it becomes a part of ever-growing compounds one within the other. For it has a position in each compound, and it has relations in each position, and it has functions resulting from each of the relations, and each of its functions bears the fruit of benefits and uses. At each degree it recites with its tongue proofs of the necessary existence of its Maker. It resembles a soldier, [who has relations and duties] in his platoon, his regiment, his division, and so on.

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Now we commence with the positioning and ordering (*naẓm*) of the above-mentioned verse in respect of [firstly] the relationship (*naẓm*) of the verse as a whole with what preceded it, [secondly] the relationships of some of its phrases, and [thirdly] the relationships between the parts of the phrases.

**The positioning of this verse and its relationship with what preceded it**

Having spelled out the categories of human beings; the pious believers charged with worship, the obdurate disbelievers, and the wavering dissemblers, the Qur'an now addresses all of them with the words: "*O you people! Worship...*" It makes this the consequence of what preceded it in the same way that a building follows the plan, and commands and prohibitions pertaining to actions proceed from laws [that exist as] knowledge, and the divine decree (*al-qaḍā'*) is executed in accordance with divine determining (*al-qadar*), and composition and creation follow on after the story and quotation. For when [the Qur'an] mentions the three different [groups] and describes their characteristics and outcomes, it is paving the way for the [main] subject and alerting the listener[s]. Then it addresses [them] directly. This regard, I mean its referring to them firstly in the third person, then here addressing them directly, is a device (lit. point) generally [acceptable to the literary science of] *al-bayān*. It is this: when either the virtues or vices of a person are mentioned by degrees, it alerts and excites [the listeners] and increases in [them] feelings of either admiration or disgust. These gradually grow stronger until they drive [the listeners] to speak in person to the person concerned. Here, as required by the context (*maqām*) and to satisfy those wishes of the listeners, the speaker (*al-mutakallim* – the Qur'an) fetches the person, brings him to their presence and addresses him directly.

This contains a point particular to this context, which is to alleviate the burdens of the obligation [of worship] with the pleasure of being addressed directly.

It indicates furthermore that in worship there are no intermediaries between the Creator and His bondsman.

**The relationships between the phrases**

The phrase "*O you people! Worship...*" addresses all the people of every class of the three groups, of the past, present, and future: O genuine believers who worship surely and regularly! O middling [worshippers], try to increase your worship! O disbelievers, perform your worship and all it

entails connected to belief and the affirmation of divine unity! And O dissemblers, worship with true sincerity! Thus, the word “*Worship*” here is like a shared word expressing many meanings. So ponder over this!

“**Your Sustainer and Lord** (*Rabbakum*);” that is, worship Him for He is the lord who raises and sustains you! It is incumbent on you to be a bondsman who worships and serves Him.

**A Short Note:** In “*your Sustainer and Lord*” is a subtle allusion to the contingency of the essences [of those addressed]; and in “*has made the earth a resting-place for you*” is a sign indicating the contingency of their attributes, and “*who has created you and those who lived before you*” hints at the createdness of their essences and attributes. Also, the following verses offer clear evidence that the essences of those addressed are contingent: “*For Allah is indeed self-sufficient, whereas you stand in need [of Him];*” (47:38) “*That to your Lord is the final goal;*” (53:42) “*Now verily, these [false deities] are my enemies, [and that none is my helper] save the Lord and Sustainer of all the Worlds;*” (26:77) “*Say: Allah [sent it down], then leave them to plunge in vain discourse and trifling;*” (6:91) “*So flee unto Allah;*” (51:50) “*For verily in the remembrance of Allah do [men’s] hearts find their rest.*” (13:28) Now think of further examples in the same way!

As for the phrase “**who has created you** (*alladhī khalaqakum*):” Know that when Allah the Most High commands worship, which necessitates three things: firstly, the existence of the object of worship (*ma’būd*); secondly, His unity; and thirdly, His fitness to be worshipped, He replies to these three implied questions by indicating three evidences of them: the evidences of [His] existence, which are of two sorts: those in the outer world (*āfāqī*) and those in man’s self (*anfusī*). The latter are also of two kinds: evidences in the self (*nafsī*) and those pertaining to origins (*uṣūlī*). [The Qur’an] alludes to evidences in the self (*nafsī*), which are the nearest and most evident, with the phrase “*who has created you,*” and to those pertaining to man’s origins with “*and those [who lived] before you.*”

As for the positioning of “**so that you might remain conscious of Him:** (*la’allakum tattaqūn*),” know that since the Qur’an relates worship to [men’s] creation and that of their forefathers, it necessitates two points:

*The First:* [Human beings] being created with a propensity to worship and their having the ability to be conscious of and fear Allah (*al-taqwā*), so [much so] that anyone who observes such an ability would expect worship from them. Like someone who sees [an animal’s] claws understands that they are for tearing at or grasping things.

*The Second:* That the purpose of their creation, and the function with which they are charged and the perfection to which they are turned, is the fear of Allah. This is the most complete and perfect worship.

That is to say, “*so that you might remain conscious of Him;*” that is, the aim of your creation, and your perfection, and that for which your innate disposition has been made, is the consciousness of Allah and fear of Him.

Now for the phrase “*has made the earth a resting-place for you (ja’ala la-kum al-arḍ firāshan):*” This points out the most likely evidences of the Most High’s existence furnished by the outer world. It is also an allusive rebuttal of the actual effectiveness of causes, which is the source of a sort of associating partners with Allah (*shirk*); that is, its ascribing the spreading-out of the earth, or its preparation as man’s cradle, to the Most High and not to nature.

The phrase “*and the sky a canopy (wa al-samā’ binā’an)*” indicates by mentioning the sky, which is contiguous with the earth, the most elevated of the simple proofs in the outer world.

Then with the phrase “*and has sent down water from the sky (wa anzala min al-samā’)*” [it indicates] the evidence of their Maker’s existence [offered by] compound beings and things animal, vegetable, and mineral.

Moreover, all the previous phrases point to proof of [the Maker’s] existence. Similarly, as a whole they indicate His unity. And the way they are set out indicates the order [of the universe] and alludes to the bounties. With the evidence [offered by] “*for your sustenance (rizqan la-kum),*” it establishes the fitness of the Most High to be worshipped, for it is compulsory to thank the bestower of bounties. “*For your sustenance*” also indicates that just as the earth and things animal, vegetable and mineral have been made to serve you, so you should serve the One who subjugated them to you.

Now the positioning [and relationships] of “*then set not up rivals to Allah (fa-lā taj’alū li’llāhi andādan):*” Know that extending from its position are lines to “*O you people! Worship your Sustainer and Lord;*” and to “*who has created you;*” and to “*who has made ... for you;*” and to “*and has sent down.*” That is, when you worship your Lord, associate no partners with Him, for it is He who is the Lord and Sustainer, and is your Creator and the Creator of the human race; do not set up lords and masters in derogation of Allah; and because it was He who created the heavens and made them the roof to your dwelling-place, so do not believe that natural causes have an actual effect, which is the source of idolatry; and because it is He

who sends down rain to the earth for your food and livelihoods. There is no bounty but His, so thanks and worship are due to Him alone.

### **The positioning and relationships of the parts of the phrases**

Consider this: The interjection [introductory to the vocative] “*Yā ayyuhā*” in the phrase “*Yā ayyuhā al-nās u‘budū – O you people! Worship*” appears frequently in the Qur’an since it contains [a number of] fine points. Here the address is corroborated in three respects: by the “*yā – O,*” which is to arouse; by the “*ayyū,*” [the purpose of] which is to distinguish; and by the “*-hā,*” [the purpose of] which is to alert. For the address here alludes to three benefits: the replacing of the hardship of the obligation [of worship] with the pleasure of [being] address[ed], and [informing that] the only means of man’s progress from the depths of absence to the [high] station of presence is worship. It indicates too that those addressed are charged in three respects: in respect of their hearts, with submission and obedience; in respect of their intellects, with belief and affirming divine unity; and physically, through action and worship.

[The address] infers too that those addressed consist of three groups [the believers, the unbelievers, and the dissemblers]. It hints too at the three classes of the elite, the middle class, and the mass of the people. It betokens too the familiar manner and order of things, which is that a person first of all calls out to a person to stop him, then he recognizes his features and turns to him, then he addresses him and gets him to do something.

*In Short:* The above subtle points [in the use of the vocative case] corroborate and reinforce the address [by] establishing the mentioned aspects [and meanings].

Concerning the interjection “*yā – O!*,” since it is addressing the people and they consist of various classes including the heedless, the absent, the idle, the ignorant, and so forth, it both arouses the heedless, and summons the absent, and calls the idle to action, and informs the ignorant, and arrests the busy, and gives direction to those who turn away, and excites the lovers, and encourages the seekers, and urges the perfected to increase [their worship], and it also gives people a jolt.

The distance [inferred] by the “*yā – O!*,” although the context (*maqām*) is one of propinquity [and worship], indicates the grandeur and sublimity of the obligation and its trust (*amāna al-taklīf*).

It alludes too to the distance from when and where the address appeared, of the times and places of those on whom the obligation has been laid.

So too it is an allusion to the depths of mankind’s heedlessness.

As for the “*ayyu*,” it is used to single out [a person or a group] from the mass and infers that the whole universe is being addressed, and humankind is specified since men bear the trust in the form of “*fard kifāya*” [that is, it is human beings that are charged with performing worship]. So if they are lax [in doing this], they transgress against the rights of all [other] beings.

Also, in “*ayyu*” is an eloquent subtlety in that its conciseness is followed by the descriptive “*people (al-nās)*.” Then the “*hā*” being a substitute for the second part of the genitive construction indicates that [its purpose] is to alert those summoned with the vocative interjection “*yā – O!*”

“*People (al-nās)*.” Being an active participle derived from [the verbal noun] *nisyān*, meaning forgetfulness, it indicates censure or reproof. That is, “O you people! How can you forget the pre-eternal covenant (*al-mithāq al-azālī*)? It indicates too an excuse; that is: “O you people! Your neglect can be due only to a mistake or forgetfulness; it can’t be deliberate or serious!”

As for “*Worship! (u’budū)*,” since it is the conclusion (or apodosis) of the general summons to all the classes [of people] mentioned above, it points to obedience, and indicates sincerity, and hints at continuance, and alludes to divine unity. That is, obey! Be sincere and constant [in worship]! Increase [your worship]! Profess the divine unity!

“*Your Lord and Sustainer (rabbakum)*” indicates that just as worship should be desired and sought since it is an elevated relation, an illustrious connection; it should be sought too since it is [a way of] serving and offering thanks to the One who nurtures and raises you, of whom you are in need.

Now for the parts of the phrase: “*Who created you and those [who lived] before you (alladhī khalaqakum wa alladhīna min qablikum)*.”

As a relative pronoun, “*who (alladhī)*” is known only in so far as it is qualified by the relative clause. [For instance, all that is known about “the one who went” is that he has gone.] Thus, [here “*Lord and Sustainer*” being governed by “*who*”] it infers that knowledge of Allah the Most High can only be in respect of His actions and works, and not His essence.<sup>54</sup>

Then by virtue of its signifying determined, regular creation rather than the [mere] giving of existence (*ījād*) or giving rise to (*inshā*), “*created (khalaqa)*” indicates that by nature the human being is turned toward the obligation [of worship]. It infers too that worship is a duty, for it is the

54. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmecid], 169.

result and ‘wage’ of creation. But [this wage is not the reward for worship;] the reward is purely a favour of Allah the Most High.

Because of the uncertainty of [who or what is governed by] “*those [who] (allahīna)*” it is as though hinting: “Nothing is now known of those who came before you and have died and departed. You are tottering on the brink of the grave, so take a lesson and don’t be deceived by this world. Be steadfast in worship, the means to everlasting happiness.”

Concerning “*so that you might remain conscious of Him (la’allakum tattaqūn)*,” “*la’alla*” signifies hope, and when it precedes something desirable it is used to increase eagerness, and when it precedes something repugnant, its function is to put [the listener] on his guard. Here, the hope cannot refer literally to the Speaker [that is, to Allah], so it is either figurative (*majāz*), or refers either to the addressee or to observers or listeners.

If it refers to the Speaker, it is a parabolic metaphor (*isti’āra tamthīliyya*). [For instance,] if one equips a person with the gear for a job, one hopes and expects that he will do it. In the same way, Allah has decked out humanity with the potentiality to be perfected, and the capacity [to perform the religious] obligations, and the means of will.

The metaphor indicates too that the purpose (*ḥikma*) of man’s creation is fear of Allah and consciousness of Him (*taqwā*). It also infers that worship results in the degree (*al-martaba*) of fear of Allah. So too it is a sign that the fear of Allah is the highest degree.

Moreover, in the style of kings, the metaphor suggests encouragement and the holding out of hopes and [the making of] certain promises.

If [the hope signified by *la’alla*] refers to those addressed, it is as though saying: “Worship seeking [to aspire to] the fear of Allah, between fear and hope.” This implies that man should not feel confident about his worship. It suggests too that he should not suffice with his [present degree of worship], but should confirm the saying “it is incumbent on you to act without cease” and look beyond the degree at which he is found [and aspire to more].

And if [the hope signified by *la’alla*] refers to observers and listeners, it is as though whoever observes human beings equipped with such abilities and potentialities will hope and expect worship from them – just as a person who sees the claws and fangs of a predator will expect it to be rapacious. It indicates too that worship is required by man’s inborn nature.

Since the fear of Allah results from the worship of all the classes [of men] mentioned previously, the words “*they may fear Allah (tattaqūn)*” allude to all [types and] levels of *taqwā*. That is, *taqwā* [preventing] the

association of partners with Allah (*shirk*), *taqwā* [preventing the committing of] grievous sins, *taqwā* [causing one] to preserve one's heart from [attachment to] things other than Allah the Most High, and *taqwā* [causing one] to avoid [things leading to] punishment, and *taqwā* [causing one] to restrain oneself from anger. It is also a hint that [true] worship is that which is [performed] with sincerity. And it indicates that worship should be the sole aim, and not a means, and suggests too that worship should not be [performed in the hope of] reward or [to avoid] punishment.

Now the elements of the phrase “***Who has made the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy*** (*Alladhī ja‘ala la-kum al-arḍa firāshan wa al-samā’ binā’an*):”

Consider this: By describing the vastness of the Maker's power, this indicates that it is spurring [the people] on to worship, and by mentioning His favours encouraging [them]. It is as though saying: “O man! The One who subjugates the earth and heavens to you deserves your worship.”

It also indicates man's virtue and his high worth and his nobility in Allah's sight, as though saying: “You should show through worshipping the One who has ennobled you by making the heavenly and lowly bodies [in such a way] that you might benefit from them despite their vastness, that you are worthy of His favour.”

Moreover, it is a hint rebutting chance, coincidence, and the [actual] effect of nature. That is: “All the attributes you see [in nature exist] through the making of a Maker, the intention of an Intender, the specification of a Specifier, and the order of an Orderer. How sublime is His wisdom!”

So too it infers rebuttal of the Naturalists' school, and that of the Sabeans, which gave rise to the school of idolators (*al-wathaniyyīn*).

Furthermore, it draws attention to the fact that the attributes of bodies point through their contingency to the Maker. For their atoms are equal in that they can assume [an infinite number of] general states and modes, and all contingent attributes are hesitant amid a great many possibilities. So in respect of their attributes and states all [physical] bodies are in need of intention, purpose or wisdom, and the specifying of one to specify [these].

As for the precedence of “*for you (la-kum)*,” it indicates that the earth has been spread out for man; as though it is only man who benefits from it, and the rest [in this respect] are superfluous. Ponder over this carefully!

“*A resting-place (firāshan)*” indicates a fine point of eloquence which is the strange fact that although the earth's nature requires that it should have been submerged in water, [it was not] and this implies that it was spread

out contrarily to its nature. For according to this, the water should have overrun the [whole] globe. But in His wisdom and mercy, the Maker drew out a part of it and spread it out and laid on it the table of His bounties.

Similarly, in accordance with the rule “If a thing is proved, it is proven together with the things it necessitates,” the word “*resting-place*” [derived from the verb *farasha* to spread out] indicates that the earth is like the carpeted floor of a house, and the species of plants and animals it contains like its furniture, placed in it intentionally and purposively.

It suggests also that intentionally and purposively [the state of] the earth is a middling one; it is neither so liquid that it cannot be walked upon, nor is it so hard that it cannot be utilized or tilled. For if it had been thus it would have been useless even if made of gold. Its intermediate [state] therefore indicates that it has been specified, made, and intended by one [who acts] with wisdom and purpose.

“*And the sky a canopy (wa al-samā’ binā’an)*” indicates this, that when the Most High made the heavens a canopy and roof for you, its stars became your lamps, so don’t imagine that chance [has any part] in their dispersal, as you might imagine it does if you scatter some jewels on the ground.

In this verse is the hint, the suggestion, the intimation of a wondrously subtle and precious mystery, which is as follows:

*If you were to ask:* Man is a mere atom in relation to the earth, and the earth is an atom in relation to the universe. Similarly, a human individual is an atom relatively to the human race, and the human race is an atom compared with its partners in benefiting from this lofty home. Moreover, the extent to which mankind utilizes the house’s advantages and aims is [only] an atom’s [worth]. And its aims that the human intellect can perceive are a [mere] atom in relation to the uses [existent] in pre-eternal wisdom and divine knowledge. So how is it that [the Most High] created the earth for humankind and made man’s utilizing it its ultimate aim?

*You would be told:* Yes, that’s right, but despite all that, on account of the breadth of man’s spirit and the expanse of his intellect and extent of his abilities, and the many, far-flung ways in which he utilizes the universe; and because of the absence of overcrowding and fragmentation and resistance in respect of its utilization, like the relation of the whole with its parts – for the whole is present in its entirety in all its parts and there is therefore no crowding and no fragmentation; the Qur’an made man’s utilization the ultimate aim although it is only one out of the myriad aims of the heavens

and earth, and that is how it appears to man. That is, man benefits from the earth as though it were the courtyard of his house and the heavens were his roof. The stars are lamps for him and the plants, his food, so each [person] has the right to say: “My sun, my skies, my earth.” Now think about this together with your reasoning faculty!

Now for the particulars of “***and has sent down water from the sky and thereby brought forth fruits for your sustenance*** (*wa anzala min al-samā’ mā’an fa-akhraja bi-hi min al-thamarāti rizqan la-kum*):”

Consider this: The [implied] pronoun in “*has sent down (anzala)*” [referring to Allah] indicates that the raindrops are sent down with an intentional balance and with wisdom [and purpose]. In fact, each droplet is encompassed by a particular order, as is suggested by none of them ever colliding with its brothers during its long descent despite the buffeting of the air. This announces that the raindrops are not left to their own devices, but that the reins of each are held by an angel representing the order and reflecting it.

The use of the noun in “*from the sky (min al-samā’)*” although a pronoun would have been in place [since it is repetition], infers that what is intended is the direction of the sky, not from the sky itself (*cirmahā*).

The use of the word “*water (mā’an)*” although what falls is snow, hail, and rain, indicates that water is the source nearest and most useful. Indeed, “*And [that] We made out of water every living being.*” (21:30) While its being indefinite suggests that it has wondrous properties and a strange structure and that its chemical compound is unknown to you.

The conjunction “*fa-*” in “*fa-akhraja – has thereby brought forth*” is so positioned as to follow on without break, but there is a [considerable] delay between the falling of the rain and the bringing forth of the fruits. This implies such [missing] sentences as “... the earth trembled and swelled, then grew green and produced every sort of plant in pairs, *and has thereby brought forth..*” As for the [implied] pronoun of “*has brought forth,*” [which refers to Allah], it indicates that the fruits are not brought forth through mere reproduction or compounded substances, but that the All-Wise Maker creates and raises them through attributes and characteristics not present in their physical matter.

“*[With it] (bi-hi)*.” Since the true meaning of [this preposition of instrument qualifying “*water*”], that is, to affix or bring close (*iḥṣāq*), has absorbed [the meaning of] causality, it indicates the luscious freshness of the fruits. For contrary to its nature, the water rises to them and fills their goblets at close quarters.

“[Some] fruits (*min al-thamarāt*):” According to Sibawayh, since [the partitive] “*min [some]*” does not entirely lack the meaning of a subject [it cannot be the object of “*has brought forth,*”] and this indicates that the object will vary according to the understanding of the listener[s]; that is, “such various fruits as you feel appetite for.”

As for the ‘nutation’ (indefiniteness) of “*sustenance (rizqan)*,” it indicates that the causes by which you obtain this sustenance are unknown to you, for it comes to you from where you would not expect.

And “*for your* (lit. you) (*la-kum*)” is a hint strengthening the meaning of gracious bestowal. It infers too that the sustenance is for you, but there is no harm if others profit from it after you. Also it implies that the Most High has singled you out for His bounties, so you should offer thanks to Him alone.

The positioning [and relationships] of the parts of “***then set not up as rivals to Allah*** (*fa-lā taj'alū li'llāhi andādan*):”

The “*fa-* (then or so)” [of “*fa-lā*”] looks to the four sections [above]: that is, He is the true Object of Worship, so associate none other with Him; He is absolutely Omnipotent and the heavens and earth are in the grasp of His power, so don’t believe that He has any partners; He is the Bestower of [all] bounties so offer your thanks to none but He; and He is your Creator, so don’t imagine that He has any partners.

The use of “*set up (taj'alū)*” instead of ‘believe’ (*ta'taqidū*) indicates the meaning of the verse “*These [allegedly divine beings] are nothing but empty names you have invented.*”(53:23) That is, meaningless names you imagine exist and are of your own making.

The precedence of “*to Allah (li-llāh)*.” By drawing immediate attention to [Allah] shows on the one hand the necessity of [remembering Him]; while on the other it infers that the reason for the prohibition is the fact that partners are associated with Him.

“*Rivals (andād)*.” [The singular] “*nidd*” has the meaning of like, equal, or peer, and anything ‘like’ the Most High will be His exact opposite; between them will be contrariety. In this is a subtle hint that the [term] rival or equal is essentially futile. Then the use of the plural indicates the utter ignorance of those who associate partners with Allah (*al-mushrikīn*), and infers derision of them: “How can you ascribe to Allah, who is without like, hordes of equals and opposites?”

It also infers the rejection of all sorts of partners; partners in His essence, in His attributes, and His actions. It intimates too rebuttal of every type of

associator of partners with Allah: the pagans (*al-wathaniyyūn*), the Sabians, the Christians (*ahl al-tathlīth*), and the Naturalists, all of whom believe that causes have an actual effect.

Note: The source of paganism or idolatry is either the deification of the stars or the indwelling or incarnation of Allah.

“**Now that you know** (*wa antum ta‘lamūn*):” Like similar concluding phrases of verses (*fawāṣil*), this indicates that the source of Islam is knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) and its basis is reason (*al-‘aql*), and that it accepts the truth and rejects sophistry and delusion.

Moreover, through its conciseness in attaching no object to the verb “know,” [the Qur’an] prolongs the speech. That is, “You know now that other than Him there is no true object of worship and no creator or possessor of absolute power or bestower of bounties. And you know too that all gods and idols are nothing and are incapable of doing anything. They are all created, mere inventions you have fancied.” You should give this due thought!

## Verses 23-24

وَأَنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّمَّنْ مِثْلِهِ  
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ \* فَإِنْ لَمْ  
تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ  
أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

*And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed, step by step, to Our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto; and call your witnesses [and helpers if there are any] besides Allah, if what you say is true. \* But if you cannot, and of a surety you cannot, then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, which is prepared for those who reject faith. (Wa in kuntum fī raybin mimmā nazzalnā ‘alā ‘abdinā fa-’tū bi-sūratin min mithlihi wa ad’ū shuhadā’akum min dūn Allāhi in kuntum sādiqīn. \* Fa-in lam tafalū wa lan tafalū fa-’ttaqū al-nār allatī waqūduhā an-nās wa al-ḥijāra u’iddat li’l-kāfirīn.)*

### An Introduction Verifying Prophethood

Consider this: Just as the previous verse proves the first of the four main aims of the Qur’an, and that is divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), so this one (2:23) proves the second, the prophethood of Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace),<sup>55</sup> through the most consummate of his miracles, which was his challenging [opponents] with the Qur’an’s miraculousness and inimitability (*i’jāz*). We have set out evidences of his prophethood in detail in another book<sup>56</sup> and a part of them is summarized here in six topics.<sup>57</sup>

55. In fact, the second aim of the Qur’an is prophethood generally. But Muhammad’s (UWBP) prophethood may be said to be thus since it was universal and included the essence of the previous prophets’ teachings. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ’caz* [Abdülmeccid], 177.

56. Nursi, *Muhâkemat*, 121 ff. See also, Nursi, *Letters*, 236-46; 257-63.

57. In fact, there are seven Topics.

### ***The First Matter***

It may be concluded from the circumstances of the prophets, through inductive reasoning (*al-istiqrā' al-tāmm*) and the analogy known as 'hidden' (*al-qiyās al-khafī*), [based on] the unvarying order [in similar things], that the pivot and basis of the prophets' missions, and their dealings with their communities were found most perfectly and completely in Muhammad, Upon whom be blessings and peace, who was the master of mankind at the time of its maturity. This furnishes the best possible argument and proof that he was also the Messenger of Allah. For through the tongues of their miracles all the prophets as though testified to Muhammad's truthfulness (Upon whom be peace), who was a luminous proof of the Maker's existence and unity. Now reflect on this!

### ***The Second Matter***

Consider this, that although they were not necessarily wondrous, all Muhammad's (Upon whom be peace) conduct and actions pointed initially to his truthfulness and finally to his justice and fairness. Do you not see how he acted in situations similar to the incident of the cave when there was no hope of aid: he declared with complete certainty, confidence, and earnestness: "*Grieve not; verily, Allah is with us!*"(9:40) Thus, his conduct at the start [of his mission] – his unconcern in the face of opponents, and his lack of fear and hesitation, and complete confidence – indicates that he adhered to the truth. Then his establishing at the end – the rules essential for attaining happiness in this world and the next – and the rightness of his actions and his adhering to the truth are all evidence for his justice and fairness. This was true for each of his actions. But if you take a look at all he did and all his conduct there will appear before your eyes a proof of his prophethood as brilliant as lightning. So reflect on this!

### ***The Third Matter***

Understand that the past and the present – that is, the Era of Bliss [the time of the Prophet] – and the future are united in affirming his prophethood, just as his own self was evidence for it. We should now study the following four pages. Firstly we seek blessings by studying his self, first of all by calling to mind four points:

*Firstly:* Even if they are of the highest standard, artificial and man-made things can never be equal to what is natural and 'real' or take their place. The slips and blunders of artificiality will surely show up the imposture.

*Secondly:* The only thing that fixes high morals in the ground of reality is seriousness, and the only thing that perpetuates them in their totality is truthfulness (*ṣidq*). If truthfulness departs from their midst they become as straw winnowed by the wind.

*Thirdly:* Just as attraction and [mutual] inclination are present in things that are harmonious and congruent; so contradictory and opposing things give rise to repulsion and mutual disgust.

*Fourthly* is [the rule] “there is in the whole what is not present in the parts,” like a rope being strong though its strands are weak.

If you have grasped these points, understand now that as was acknowledged by his enemies, Muhammad’s (UWBP) works, and the course and story of his life, all testify that he had the finest character and that combined in him were all the highest moral qualities. Such a combination is marked by personal dignity, gravity, and self-respect, and these do not permit a person to stoop to trivial inanities. Just as the angels do not permit devils to mix with them, so in no way when they come together do these elevated morals permit trickery and falsehood to enter amongst them. Have you not observed that someone famous only for bravery does not stoop to lying, except if forced? So how could a person in whom all [those qualities are present]? Thus, it is established that [the Prophet’s] own person (UWBP) furnished evidence for himself as clear as the sun.

Moreover, if you study his conduct (Upon whom be peace) from the age of four till forty, you will see that although this is the period of youth when the natural passions are rampant and hidden traits and any latent slyness or trickery in a person’s character come to light, he lived these years in complete righteousness, constancy, and chastity, and in regular and orderly fashion. There was no hint of trickery in any of his conduct; not even the obdurate and clever [enemies] he was faced with [observed any wiles in him]. And then you see him when he is forty years old, when the character becomes fixed and habits ingrained, and he emerges as a marvel who brings about a mighty unprecedented revolution in the world. This could have occurred only through Allah’s [will].

#### ***The Fourth Matter***

Know that the page of the past, which contains the stories of the prophets, recounted [by the Prophet] (Upon whom be peace) in the Qur’an, is a proof of his prophethood. This [page comprises] four points:

*The First:* If a person grasps the basic principles of a science and recognizes its essential usefulness and employs it proficiently where he should, and constructs his cause on it, this is evidence of his skill and expertise in that science.

*The Second Point:* If you are cognizant of human nature [you know that] you will never see a person being so bold as to oppose [the majority] without hesitation or concern or constraint, or to lie even if insignificantly, among a people even if they are few, for a cause even if lowly, with dignity even if small. So how could someone – with the utmost dignity, for a cause of the utmost gravity, among people who were extremely numerous, in the face of extreme obstinacy despite his being unlettered – how could he speak of matters unattainable by reason alone and disclose them with the greatest seriousness and proclaim them over the heads of witnesses? Does this not point to his truthfulness, and that [what he proclaimed] was not from him but from Allah?

*The Third:* There are many sciences that for the civilized are axiomatic and teach customs, events, situations, and actions, but that are unknown and theoretical to [primitive] nomads. So if someone wants to interrogate [them] and investigate their circumstances, especially in past centuries, he has to imagine himself among them in those deserts.

*The Fourth:* This is that if a person debates with experts in a science, even if it is only grammar, and propounds his views concerning the matters it entails, corroborating what is agreed upon and correcting points of dispute, would this not demonstrate to you his superiority and that his knowledge is God-given (*wahbī*)?

If you have understood these points, understand now that despite his being unlettered, Muhammad the Arabian (Upon whom be peace) recounts to us through the tongue of the Qur'an the stories of the prophets and early times as though he had been present and witnessed them. He describes their exploits and divulges their secrets to the whole world in the way of a mighty cause that has attracted the attention of intelligent men. He recounts these without concern. For he took their vital points and fundamental principles as the basis of his own cause, confirming matters unanimously endorsed by the previous scriptures and correcting matters of difference. As though with a fleet spirit reflecting divine revelation he traversed time and space and entered the depths of the past, then proclaimed [what was there] as though he had witnessed it. Thus, his doing this is a proof of his prophethood and one of his miracles. All the evidences of the prophethoods

of the previous prophets are in effect evidence for his prophethood, and all their miracles are in effect a miracle of his.

### *The Fifth Matter*

This elucidates the page of the Age of Bliss, especially the question of the Arabian Peninsula. It also consists of four points:

*The First:* If you study the world you will see that to extirpate customs and habits is difficult in the extreme even if they are unimportant, or characteristics even if they are insignificant, among people even if few, or a group even if wretched, for a king even if he is powerful with resolution even if great, over a long time and expending much effort. So how about a person who is not a ruler yet succeeded in a short time with little effort proportionately to what was achieved, in extirpating customs and morals that were totally ingrained and had been practised since time immemorial, and in their place planting morals and habits in the hearts of a people who were exceedingly numerous and were utterly attached to and bigoted in their customs? Wouldn't you look on him as a wonder and marvel?

*The Second Point:* A state or government is a corporate body (*shakhs ma'nawī*); it takes form gradually like a growing child. And its conquest of former states, whose laws have become a very part of their people's natures, takes time. So wasn't it extraordinary that Muhammad (Upon whom be peace) founded a mighty state [almost] instantaneously, equipped to progress to the highest degree, comprising eternal, lofty fundamental principles, and which conquered powerful states at once, and perpetuated its rule not only outwardly and physically but also inwardly and spiritually?

*The Third Point:* It is possible to dominate outwardly and superficially through compulsion and force, but to conquer minds and affect spirits by instilling in them one's refinement, and to hold sway over people's dispositions while perpetuating one's domination of their consciences must surely be extraordinary; it can only be the outstanding characteristic of prophethood.

*The Fourth Point:* To direct and guide public opinion by means of the subterfuges of intimidation and enticement, and fear and threat, has only a partial, superficial, and temporary effect and in time blocks up the path to rational thinking. So if a person penetrates to the very depths of people's hearts with his guidance, excites their finest emotions, reveals their potentialities, awakens their highest morals, discloses their hidden talents, makes the essence of their humanity well forth, and makes manifest their value as

rational beings, all these acts of his can only be the very rays of reality, and indeed extraordinary. You see a person so hard-hearted he buries his daughter alive without compunction or sorrow, then when you see him again one day later, having become a Muslim, he [refrains from stepping on] an ant since he pities it and feels the creature's pain. Can you ascribe such a revolution of the emotions to any law? Tell me, for God's sake!

If you have understood these points, reflect on another. It is this:

The history of the world testifies that unique geniuses are those men who are capable of developing the innate talents of all the people, and revealing their particular traits, and arousing their emotions, for if he does not arouse those dormant emotions, his efforts will all be in vain, or temporary, no matter how illustrious he is in himself.

History also shows us that even the greatest people are successful at arousing only a few of those general emotions, like the feeling of patriotism, and the sense of brotherhood, and feelings of love, and the desire for freedom, and so on. Is it therefore not a wonder and extraordinary to arouse thousands of such emotions, latent and elevated, and make them burst forth and unfold in a nomadic people scattered through the endless deserts of Arabia? Indeed it is so! It is a light from the sun of reality. Anyone who has not got this point into his head, we shall thrust the Arabian Peninsula into his mind's eye! And now it is after thirteen centuries and after mankind has climbed the rungs of civilization and progress. So, O obdurate one! Pick a hundred eminent philosophers and let them strive for a hundred years and see if they can do one hundredth of what Muhammad the Arabian (UWBP) did in his time. And if they cannot, and they will not be able to, you should beware of what happens to the obdurate! For his achievement was indeed extraordinary and was only one of his [many] miracles (Upon whom be blessings and peace).

You should understand too that a person who wants to succeed has to [act] in accordance with the divine laws (*'ādāt Allāh*), be knowledgeable of the natural laws, and conform to social relations, otherwise the innate disposition of things (*al-fiṭra*) will respond to him by denying him success and will confound him. Also, a person who follows a [particular] way in society should not oppose the general current, otherwise it will work against him rather than for him. Consequently, if a person is aided by success within the general current, as was Muhammad (Upon whom be peace), it is proved that he adhered to the truth.

If you have understood this, consider the truths of the Shari'a: you will

see that despite all the momentous clashes and revolutions down the long centuries, they have preserved the balance of the natural laws and social relations, which because of their minuteness are not apparent to people's minds (*al-'uqūl*) although they are completely in conformity and harmony with them. The more time passes, the more their interconnection becomes clear. It is plain from this that Islam is the natural religion for humankind and that it is truth (*ḥaqq*). For this reason, it can never cease or diminish. Don't you see that the healing antidote for the fatal poison in society is the proscription of interest and usury (*ribā*) and the obligatory payment of the purification tax (*zakāt*)? And these are only two of the thousands of matters of the Shari'a.

Now, if you have grasped the above four points and three points that follow them, know too that although Muhammad al-Hashimi (UWBP) was unlettered and could neither read nor write, and had no outward power and no sovereignty, and neither did his forefathers, and although he had no desire for domination and rule, with all his heart and confidence and assurance in a position of the gravest danger and importance, he undertook a matter of supreme gravity and conquered minds and became the beloved of spirits, and dominated dispositions, and uprooted from the depths of their hearts their many habitual entrenched familiar savage practices and customs. He then planted in their place with the utmost firmness, as though fusing with their very flesh and blood, elevated morals and fine customs. He replaced the hard-heartedness of a people degenerated in the far-flung corners of barbarity, with fine sensitivities and he disclosed the jewel of their humanity. He took them out of their barbarity and raised them to the peak of civilization and made them teachers of the world of their time. For them he founded a state that swallowed up [other] states like Moses' staff. It appeared like a brilliant flaming light that burnt up the [social] ties of tyranny and corruption, and in a short time established the seat of that state [which extended over] East and West. Doesn't this situation prove that his way was truth and reality, and that he was truthful in what he was claiming?

### ***The Sixth Matter***

This is about the page of the future, and especially the question of the Shari'a. Four points have to be considered in this matter:

*The First:* Even if he is exceptional, one person can become expert and proficient in only four or five sciences.

*The Second Point:* The same speech differs according to who says it, so just as it may point to the superficiality and ignorance of one person, it may indicate the skill and proficiency of another – although the words are the same. For one of them looks to the source and conclusion of what he says, and its context and what precedes it; he thinks of it in relation to its brothers [the other things said] and places it appropriately. He employs it most aptly and seeks out fertile ground in which to sow it. It is clear from this that he is a singular [speaker] and has mastered the subject about which he is speaking. All the concluding phrases of Qur’anic verses related to the sciences and what they have gleaned, are of the above sort.

*The Third Point:* Due to the perfecting of ways and means, many things that are now commonplace and even toys for children, two centuries ago were considered marvels. So whatever preserves its youth, freshness, and novelty over these long centuries must surely be extraordinary and unique.

*The Fourth Point:* Guidance is beneficial only when commensurate with the intellectual capacity of the majority of the people. And the great majority are common people, and the common people are not capable of contemplating the sheer truth; they are accustomed to seeing it clothed only in the dress of their familiar imaginings. Because of this, the Qur’an depicts such truths in allegorical form (*mutashābihāt*), with metaphors (*isti’āra*) and similes (*tashbīh*), and it protects the mass of people, who have not advanced, from falling into the abyss of error. Thus, it is vague and obscure in matters that they necessarily believe to be contrary to actuality [since they conceive of them] as they appear to their external senses (*bi’l-ḥiss al-zāhirī*), yet it still makes allusion to and indicates the truth.

If you have grasped these points, now consider this: The Islamic religion and Shari‘a are founded on rational proof, and are the sum and substance of the branches of knowledge that comprise the vital essence of all the basic sciences: the science of refining the spirit, and of training the heart, and of educating the conscience, and the science of physical training, and domestic science, and the science of local government, and that of international relations, and the legal sciences, and the science of human relations, and that of social behaviour, and so on and so forth. Moreover, the Shari‘a explains and elucidates where is necessary or needed, and is concise where this is not necessary or [people’s] minds are not ready or the times do not allow, and lays down principles that can be elaborated, deduced, and expanded through consultation and the exercise of reason.

At the present time, all these sciences or even a third of them after one

thousand three hundred years – having grown through the meeting of minds and the expansion of their results – could not be found in a single person even in civilized places and among clever people, so whoever decks out his conscience with fairness will confirm that the Shari‘a is always beyond human power, and was particularly so at that time. And he will endorse the statement “you haven’t been able to do it and you won’t be able to.”

Virtue is [true virtue when it] is acknowledged even by enemies. For the American philosopher Carlyle<sup>58</sup> quoted the famous German literary figure, Goethe, who asked after close study of the truths of the Qur’an: “Could the civilized world be further advanced within the bounds of Islam?” And he told himself: “Yes, indeed! For in one respect scholars now benefit from it.” Carlyle said too that Islam appeared like a flaming light and devoured the religions of the time. And it had the right to do so, for it contained nothing of the “vain janglings” of some of the Christian sects or the “rumours ... and idle wiredrawings” of the Jews. He confirmed the meaning of the verse: “*Then produce a Sura like thereunto... But if you cannot ... then fear the Fire...*”(2:23-4)

*If you were to ask:* The Qur’an, and likewise its expounder – I mean Hadiths – have only taken summaries from all the sciences, but isn’t it possible for a single individual to comprehend numerous summaries?

*You would be told:* Through their apt positioning and fitting use in fertile ground, in matters that are only hinted at – as we indicated in the second point above – such summaries reveal like glass a full cognizance of the science [in question] and complete proficiency in it. So the summary becomes like the science and it would not be possible for such a person [as you mention to comprehend it].

Now understand that the conclusion of the above arguments is that firstly you should bear in mind the following rules: one person cannot be a specialist in a plethora of sciences; the same speech or words differ [when uttered by] two [different] people; [when uttered by] one they will be gold, and [when spoken by] the other they will be coal; the sciences result from

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58. The famous historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was actually Scottish. He was born in Scotland and died in London. The two passages cited here are taken from his work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: 1841), the chapter entitled: The Hero as Prophet. Mahomet: Islam. It is not known what Nursi’s source was, for the first is rather a loose translation (See, pp. 74-5). Carlyle was actually praising the moral discipline and direction that Islam, and its Prophet, gives its adherents while at the same time not denying the pleasant things of life. It is not clear which remarks are his and which are Goethe’s. The second (pp. 64-5), is closer to the original, though there it is Islam that swallowed up the existing religions, not the Qur’an.

the meeting of minds and are perfected with the passage of time; many matters that were theoretical in the past are now commonplace; to compare the past and present is a false comparison [the difference between them is too great]; due to their simplicity and candour, desert-dwellers cannot hide trickery and deception, as they may be concealed beneath the veil of civilization; many of the sciences result only from instilling customs in human nature and teaching it events and circumstances, when the time and environment are favourable; the light of man's vision cannot penetrate the future and he cannot perceive its particular circumstances; just as human life has a natural span which will come to an end, so too laws have a natural lifespan which comes to an end, of course; in terms of both time and place, the environment is vastly influential on people's circumstances; very many wonders of the past have become commonplace through the perfecting of means; human intelligence, even if exceptional, is not capable of creating a science and perfecting it all at once; the science is rather like a child; [its development] is gradual.

Now that you have settled these matters in your head and can picture them, free yourself from the fancies of the present and the delusions of its environment, and plunge into the sea of time from the shore of this century. Then pass under the sea till you emerge at the Age of Bliss and behold the Arabian Peninsula. Raise your head and dress yourself with the ideas that that time sews for you, and take a look at the boundless desert. What appears to you first is a single person who although without helper or power is challenging the whole world on his own. He is disputing everyone. He is bearing on his shoulders a truth more glorious than the globe. He is holding in his hand a Shari'a that guarantees the happiness of all men. This Shari'a of his is as though the sum and substance of all the divine sciences and the sciences of reality. It is living like a skin rather than like clothes, and expands as the human potentialities unfold, producing the fruits of happiness in this world and the next. It orders the affairs of humankind as if all men were the members of a single gathering. If its laws were to be asked from where they had come and where they were headed, they would reply through the tongue of their miraculousness: "We come from pre-eternal [divine] speech and we shall accompany human thought through all eternity. When the world ends we shall apparently part from men in respect of the religious obligations, but we shall always accompany them through the mystery of our meanings and shall nourish their spirits and assist and guide them."

So now, doesn't what you have witnessed up to here recite to you the verse with its taunting command: "... *then produce a Sura like thereunto ... But if you cannot, and of a surety you cannot...*"?

Now consider this: The verse "*And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed*" indicates that because some people are heedless of what the Lawgiver (*al-Shāri'*) intends in guiding the mass of people and are ignorant of the necessity of offering guidance commensurate with their mental capacity, they fall into doubt, the source of which is three matters:

*The First:* They say: "The existence of allegorical verses and obscurities in the Qur'an is contrary to its miraculousness, which is based on eloquence (*al-balāgha*), and eloquence is based on clarity of expression.

*The Second:* They say: "The Qur'an is vague and general concerning the truths of creation and the physical sciences (*funūn al-kā'ināt*), but this is contrary to its way and method (*maslak*), which is to teach and guide.

*The Third:* They say: "Some of the Qur'an's literal meanings tend to be contrary to rational proof so may be opposed to reality, and this is contrary to its veraciousness.

*The Answer:* Success is from Allah alone. O you doubters, listen to this! What you suppose to be causes of defect, in reality are truthful witnesses to the mystery of the Qur'an's miraculousness.

*Answer to the first doubt,* which is the existence of allegories and obscurities:

The Qur'an's guidance is for all people, and most of them are common people. In [matters] of guidance, the minority follows the majority, for when the common people are addressed, the educated classes can benefit from it and receive their share. But if the reverse is true, the common people are deprived [of their share]. The mass of people cannot free their minds from what they are accustomed to and imaginary things, and are therefore unable to apprehend sheer truths and abstract ideas except through the telescope of their imaginations and by depicting things familiar to them. However, [when doing this] they should not fix their attention on the apparent forms [of those things] lest it necessitates something impossible like their embodiment or having 'sides;' they should look beyond [the form] to the truths [behind them].

For example, the masses can conceive of the reality of divine disposal over the universe in the form of a king seated on the throne of his power holding sway over his dominions. It is for this reason that [the Qur'an] chooses [to use] a metonymy in the verse: "*the Most Gracious, established*

on the throne of His almightiness.”(20:5) Since the feelings of the mass of people are thus, it is imperative according to eloquence and guidance that their understanding is taken into account, and their feelings are respected, and their intellects are deferred to, and allowance is made for their ideas. Like someone who speaks with a child has to come down to his level so that he can get the child to understand in a friendly manner. The literary devices and styles of the Qur’an (*al-asālib al-Qur’āniyya*) in such places, that show regard for the mass of people are called “divine condescension to human minds (*al-tanazzulāt al-ilāhiyya ilā ‘uqūl al-bashar*).” It is to put [people’s] minds at ease. For this reason it sets the forms [depicted by] the allegorical verses before the people’s eyes like telescopes. Haven’t you seen how most of the eloquent literati use metaphors (*al-isti’ārāt*) to depict subtle meanings or to portray disparate ideas. Thus, the allegorical verses are figures of speech of an abstruse (*ghāmiḍ*) kind for they depict abstruse truths.

As for there being obscure (*mushkil*) expressions, this is due either to the subtlety and profundity of what they signify, and the conciseness and loftiness of the style, and the obscurities of the Qur’an are of this sort; or to the ambiguity of the words and tangled expressions, which is contrary to eloquence and the Qur’an is exempt from this. So now, you sceptic! Isn’t it pure eloquence to so easily bring close to the common people’s understanding these profound truths which are so distant from everyone? For eloquence is to speak conformably to any given situation. Dwell on this!

***The Answer to the Second Doubt***, which is the Qur’an’s vagueness concerning the shaping of creation, although the modern sciences are explicit.

Understand that included in the tree of the world is the desire to be perfected (*mayl al-istikmāl*), out of which branches the inclination to progress found in man. The inclination to progress resembles a seed that sprouts and grows as a result of numerous experiences, and takes form and expands through the meeting of minds [and exchange of ideas] and produces the fruits of successive sciences, whereby the following can arise only after the previous one has come into being, and the previous one can only be preliminary to the subsequent one after it has been universally accepted. Consequently, if ten centuries ago a person wanted to teach science – remembering that sciences are born only as the result of numerous experiments – and call people to it, all he would have done would have been to confuse their minds and caused them to fall into error. For instance, if the Qur’an had

said: “O people! Behold the stationary sun<sup>59</sup> and rotating earth and the swarming millions of living beings in creation, then conceive of the Maker’s grandeur!”, it would have driven the people either to denial, or to deceive themselves or to compete with it. For because of their superficial view, rather their false view, they look on the earth as self-evidently flat and the sun as rotating. So indeed, to confuse people’s minds, especially over the period of a thousand years just to satisfy a few people of our times would have been contrary to wise guidance and opposed to the spirit of eloquence.

Friend! Don’t assume that you can draw an analogy between theoretical future matters and the conditions of the hereafter. [That is, don’t suppose that the matters of the hereafter and its conditions, which are unknown to us, are similar to theoretical matters that will be discovered in the future.] For since the external senses cannot perceive any aspect of [the matters of the hereafter], they remain within the bounds of the possible and may be believed in confidently. What they clearly require is to be elucidated. However, when it comes to our subject [the discoveries of science], since in the view [of the people of those times] they were outside the bounds of possibility and probability, and due to their erroneous perceptions [what they thought to be true] was self-evident, what was required in the view of eloquence was for those discoveries [to be mentioned] in vague and general [terms] out of respect for the people’s feelings and so as not to confuse their minds. Nevertheless, the Qur’an indicates, hints at, and makes allusion to the truth, and opens the door to minds and bids them enter by planting signs and associated meanings (*qarā’in*). Friend! If you are fair-minded, reflect on the rule “Speak to people in accordance with their level of understanding,”<sup>60</sup> and understand that since the times and environment of those people had not equipped them mentally they would have been unable to support or sustain such matters [as the discoveries of science],

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59. One time when I was ill, in a state between sleeping and waking, [the following] occurred to me about “*And the sun runs its course to a place appointed;*” (36:38) that [it turns] “in” its appointed place so that its [the solar] system can be upheld. That is, by rotating [the sun] generates the force of attraction [gravity] which holds the solar system in its order. Otherwise, it would fall apart. (This sleepy footnote is subtle and meaningful) – *Said Nursi*

In his work *Lemeât* (1921) (See, *The Words*, 732), Said Nursi expressed this idea in “semi-verse:”

*The sun is a fruit-bearing tree; it shakes itself so that the planets fall not, its fruits.*

*If it rested motionless the attraction would cease, and they would weep through space, its ecstasies.*

60. See, al-Suyūfī, *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*, x, 307; *al-Firdaws*, v, 359.

which were [later] born of the meeting of minds and conjunction of ideas, and concede that the Qur'an's choosing to be vague and general is pure eloquence and evidence of its miraculousness.

*The Answer to the Third Doubt*, which is some of the literal meanings of verses tending to be contrary to rational evidences and the findings of science.

Consider this: The Qur'an's main aim is to instruct the mass of people (*al-jumhūr*) about its four basic principles, which are proof of the Single Maker, prophethood, the resurrection of the dead, and justice. Thus, its mention of the universe is secondary and digressive, for purposes of deduction (*al-istidlāl*), for it was not revealed to teach geography or cosmography (astronomy). It mentions the universe in order to conclude from the divine art in it and its unique order [the existence of] the True Orderer (May His glory be exalted). It is a fact that traces of art, purpose, and order are to be seen in all things, but however they were formed does not concern us since it is unconnected with the main aim. For seeing that the Qur'an speaks of beings for purposes of deduction, and seeing that their existence has to be known before the proposition, and seeing that the evidence has to be clear, how could guidance and eloquence not make it imperative that [the Qur'an] should incline with some of its apparent or literal meanings (*ẓawāhir al-nuṣūṣ*) towards their emotional views and literary knowledge, making concessions to them? Such literal meanings are not for affirming or indicating their knowledge, but are allusive (*min qabīl al-kināyāt*) or associative expressions (*mustatba'āt al-tarākīb*). In any event, [the Qur'an] includes signs and indications for investigators of the truth (*ahl al-taḥqīq*) that point to the truth.

For example, suppose when presenting its argument (*fī maqām al-istidlāl*) the Qur'an had said: "O people! Ponder over the sun's being stationary although it apparently moves, and the earth's daily and annual rotations although it is apparently stationary. Reflect on the extraordinary gravity holding the stars [in place]. Behold the marvels of electricity, and the infinite combinations of the seventy elements, and the massing together of uncountable organisms in a droplet of water, and know that Allah is powerful over all things!" Had it spoken thus, the evidence would have been more obscure and far less clear than what was being claimed, and that is opposed to the rules of deduction.

Moreover, since [the literal meanings of verses that apparently tend to contradict science] are allusive, their meanings are not either true or false

[that is, their meanings should not be taken literally]. Don't you see that the *alif* in the word “*qāla*” denotes lightness, so it makes no difference whether its root was *yā* or *wāw*, *qāf* or *kāf*?

*In Short:* Since the Qur'an was revealed for all people of all times, these three points [which are thought to raise doubts] are evidence of its miraculousness. I swear [by Allah] Who taught the miraculous Qur'an, that the view of the Bringer of Good News and Warner and his critical insight were too fine, brilliant and penetrating to confuse truth and illusion, and his way of truth was too elevated, pure and exalted to deceive people or mislead them.

### ***The Seventh Matter***

The books of [the Prophet's] biography and works of history have described numerous of his perceptible miracles (*mu'jizāt maḥsūsa*), and the famous wonders he performed in the presence of the people, and these have been commented on by authoritative scholars. To teach what is already known would be superfluous, so we refer detailed discussion to their books and here we shall summarize [the miracles] by mentioning [only] their categories.

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This strange shape did not appear by chance in the middle of this discussion of strange things, for just as I was writing out a [fair] copy in Diyarbekir in Cevdet Bey's house on 19th Şubat [3 March 1916] on the night [before] Friday, Bitlis fell and the author (Bediuzzaman) was taken captive. The strange shape [of spilt ink] on this page on that night was a sign – but Allah knows best – of the spilt blood of those of Bediuzzaman's students who were with him and their being taken prisoner that night in Bitlis. (*Abdülmecid*)

Moreover, [this spilt ink] took the shape of a serpent whose tail encircled the author and whose head had been severed. This [signified] the Russians. It also depicts the water conduit into which the author fell wounded, where he remained for thirty hours awaiting death every moment.

(*Hamza*)

Concerning [the Prophet's] manifest wonders: although each of them has been transmitted from only one source (*āḥādīyan*) and there is no consensus concerning them (*ghair mutawātir*), as a type and there being many in these categories they may be considered as being unanimously reported in respect of their meanings (*mutawātir bi'l-ma'nā*). They consist of three categories:

*The First:* [The various paranormal events that took place before the prophetic mission but which were related to it, called] "*irhāṣāt*." [These included] the Zoroastrians' fire being extinguished, the drying up of Lake Sava, the breaking into two of Chosroes' portico, and the prognostications of hidden voices. A person might even fancy that the century in which the Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace) was born was a highly sensitive wonderworker that had premonitions of his coming.

*The Second Category:* The many predictions of the future, including the conquest of the treasuries of the Persian and Byzantine rulers, the defeat of the Byzantines, the conquest of Mecca, and so on. As if [the Messenger's] ethereal, winged spirit rent the bonds of fixed time and space, roamed in the climes of the future, then told us what it had witnessed.

*The Third Category:* Wonders that could be perceived by the physical senses and were performed during [the period of] his challenging [the existing order] and calling [to Islam]. [These included] stones speaking, trees moving, the splitting of the moon, and water flowing [from his fingers]. Al-Zamakhsharī stated that there were as many as a thousand [miracles] of this category. Some of these have been reported unanimously but not literally (*mutawātir bi'l-ma'nā*). In fact, even those who denied the Qur'an could not tamper with the verse "*And the moon is split.*"(54:1)

• *If you were to ask:* Something like the splitting of the moon should have become world famous and known by everyone?

*You would be told:* [Factors like] differences in the time of its rising, and the existence of cloud, and there being little observation of the skies at that time, and its occurrence at an hour [people are] inattentive, during the night, and its occurring instantaneously, all meant that it was not seen by everyone or most people. Nevertheless, it has been established in narrations that it was witnessed by many caravans for which the moon's position was similar to that [of Mecca].

However, the chief of these miracles is the Perspicuous Qur'an whose proven miraculousness in seven aspects is indicated by this verse.(2:23)

Friend! If you have understood these matters listen now to what you will be told about the three aspects of the verses' positioning and ordering

(*naẓm*): the verse's positioning in relation to what preceded it; the positioning [and relationships] of some of its phrases; the positioning [and relationships] of the parts of the phrases.

**Concerning the first: there are two aspects to the relationship of this verse and the preceding ones**

*The First:* According to Ibn ‘Abbas’ commentary, when in order to prove divine unity [the Qur’an] says: “*O you people! (Yā ayyuhā an-nās),*” it also proves the prophethood of Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace), who was the clearest proof of divine unity. Now, prophethood is proven by miracles. And the greatest of miracles is the Qur’an. And the most subtle facet of the Qur’an’s miraculousness lies in the eloquence of its composition (*naẓm*).

Muslims agree that the Qur’an is miraculous and inimitable. The authoritative scholars however differ as to the ways in which this is so. Nevertheless, these ways do not conflict, for some prefer one aspect [and others another aspect]. Some say that its inimitability lies in its relating facts about the unseen realms (*ikhbāruhu bi’l-ghuyūb*); according to others, it is its bringing together [all] truths and sciences; others assert it is its freedom from contradictions and inconsistencies; according to others, it is the originality of its styles and the singularity of the beginnings and ends of its verses and suras; others say it was its appearance from someone illiterate who could neither read nor write; according to others it was its composition being so extraordinarily eloquent as to be beyond human power; and so on and so forth. Detailed knowledge of this [latter] sort of miraculousness may be obtained by studying Qur’anic commentaries such as the present work, or it may be learnt summarily in [the following] three ways, as it was ascertained by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, the Master of Eloquence (*al-Shaykh al-Balāgha*), and al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Sakkākī, and al-Jāhiz:

*The First Way:* The Arab people were illiterate nomads [who lived] in an unusual environment that suited them. They were awaked by the mighty revolutions [occurring] in the world. Their [only] books (*dīwānuhum*) [of their proud exploits consisted of] poetry and their [only] science was rhetoric (*al-balāgha*), and [the source] of their pride and vainglory was eloquent speech (*al-faṣāḥa*) in such fairs as ‘Ukāz. They were the cleverest of peoples and therefore the most needy for mental exercise and activity, and mentally they were experiencing a period of burgeoning youth. Then the Holy Qur’an rose upon them with its majesterial eloquence and outshone their eloquence, represented by the Seven Hanging Odes (*al-mu‘allaqāt al-*

*sab'a*), inscribed in gold [hanging] on the walls of the Ka'ba. Despite their being eloquent orators – the commanders of rhetoric and eloquence and rulers of correct Arabic – they could not dispute the Qur'an nor utter a single word in argument, despite the severe taunts of the Messenger (UWBP) and his rebuking and chiding them, and discrediting their intelligence, and provoking them over a long period, and his humiliating them although some of their orators' heads touched the skies in their pride and others reached the stars. So if they had not wanted to dispute [the Qur'an] and put it to the test and if they had not been aware of their impotence, they surely would not have remained silent. Their total inability [to dispute the Qur'an] was therefore proof of its miraculousness and inimitability.

**The Second Way:** Punctillious scholars and critics with knowledge of all the parts of speech and their properties and fine points, have studied the Qur'an sura by sura, passage by passage, verse by verse, and word by word, and they have testified that it brings together truths, qualities, and subtleties not found all together in human speech. There are thousands of such [scholars]. Evidence for the veracity of their testimony are the momentous changes that the Qur'an wrought in the world of humanity, and the widespread religion it founded, and its perpetuating down the ages what it contains of the sciences, and its growing younger as time grows older, and its becoming sweeter the more it is repeated. Hence "*It is only revelation inspired.*"(53:4)

**The Third Way:** As is pointed out by al-Jāhiz, despite the intense need of the masters of oratory and rhetoric to invalidate and frustrate the Messenger's (Upon whom be peace) cause, and in spite of their hatred of him and obduracy, they gave up disputing him verbally, which was the safest, easiest, and most direct way, and they took up arms against him, despite this being the most difficult and lengthy way, beset with dangers and of uncertain end. Moreover, their political acumen was such that the differences between these two ways could not have escaped them. So the person who avoided the first way although it was possible [to attempt it] and would have been more effective at thwarting the [Messenger's] cause, and took the way that threw his property and life into peril, must have been either stupid – and this could not be ascribed to those who ruled the world after they were rightly-guided – or he felt powerless to take the former way and was compelled to take the latter.

- *If you were to ask:* It was possible to dispute [the Qur'an], but perhaps for some reason or other it was not attempted?

*You would be told:* If it had been possible some people would have striven to do so since the provocations were [severe] and the need was intense. And if they had disputed it, it would have been known, for it was much sought after and there were many reasons for its being known. And if it had become known, there would have been many who supported [such an attempt to dispute it], and to defend it, and they would have said that it had been disputed, particularly at that time. And had there been opposers and defenders, even if only out of bigotry, it would have become famous, for it was a matter of great import. And if it had been famous, it would have been reported in the chronicles, just as they reported the ravings of Musaylima [the Liar] when he said [in imitation of the Qur'an]: "An elephant, what is an elephant? How can you recognize an elephant? It has a short tail and long trunk."

• *If you were to ask:* Musaylima was an eloquent orator, so how is it that his words have been so mocked and scorned by people?

*You would be told:* Because he was [his words were] compared with something far higher than himself. Haven't you noticed that if someone is compared with Yūsuf (Joseph) (Upon whom be peace), he appears ugly even though he may be good looking? It is therefore not possible to dispute the Qur'an, so it must be miraculous.

• *If you were to ask:* The sceptics have voiced many objections and doubts on grammatical grounds about the Qur'an's phrases and words, such as, "*in hādihān – these two*,"(2:63) "*al-ṣābi'ūna – Sabeans*,"(5:69) and "*alladhī istawqaḍa nāran – who kindle a fire*"(2:17)?

*You would be told:* You should consult the conclusion of al-Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ*, for he effectively silences [such objectors] saying: "Don't they understand that a person whose eloquently correct speech is unanimously acknowledged would know whether or not what he had repeatedly stated over a long period of time contained the errors noticed by unthinking people like them?"

### **The second aspect of the verse's positioning [and relationship with the previous verses]**

When the previous verse commands worship, the listener asks in his mind: "How should we worship?" And it as though answers: "As the Qur'an teaches you!" So then the person asks: "How can we know that it's the word of Allah the Most High?" And it replies saying: "*And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed, step by step, to Our servant...*"(2:23)

### The positioning of the verse's phrases

The sentence “*And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed, step by step, to Our servant* (*Wa in kuntum fī raybin mimmā nazzalnā ‘alā ‘abdinā*)” has fallen into place most aptly, for when the Qur’an commands worship, it is as though it is asked: “How can we know that it’s Allah’s command, that we have to comply with it?” And it replies: “If you doubt it, try [to produce something similar] yourself; then you’ll be certain that it’s Allah’s command.”

Another aspect of the verse’s positioning is this: the Qur’an, having praised itself with the sentence “*This is the Book concerning which is no doubt, guidance sure for those who fear Allah,*”(2:2) and followed this with praise of the believers, and having gone on from this to censure the disbelievers and dissemblers and then proceeded to command worship and the affirmation of divine unity, it now returns to the beginning and directs attention to “*concerning which is no doubt.*” That is, no doubts can be levelled at the Qur’an; if you have doubts, they arise from your diseased hearts and sickly characters.

*One denied the sunlight due to disease of the eyes,  
And felt disgust at the taste of water due to sickness.*

The positioning of the phrase: “*then produce a Sura like thereunto* (*fa-tū bi-sūratin min mithlihi*):” This is the apodosis [of the protasis (condition) “*if you are in doubt*”], and the apodosis has to be the consequence of the conditional verb. And since the command [“*then produce a Sura...*”] is provocative (*ta’jīzī*), it necessitates the implied command “make the attempt to! (*tashabbathū*).” And since the command expresses something new (*inshā’*), and this cannot be a consequence, the consequence of the command has to be something other than the apodosis. And this is the necessity that is one of the basic meanings of the command. Now, the necessity of attempting also does not appear to be the consequence of their doubting, so this requires implied sentences concealed beneath the verse. The implied sentences are these: “If you doubt that this is Allah’s word, you should study its miraculous nature, for something miraculous cannot be human and Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace) is human. If you want its miraculousness to be evident, try yourself [to produce something similar] and that you’re incapable will become clear. That means you are obliged to attempt to produce a sura similar to it.”

How excellent is Allah’s Revelation! How concise! How miraculous!

Now for the positioning of “*and call your witnesses [and helpers if*

**there are any] besides Allah** (*wa'd'ū shuhadā'akum min dūn Allāh*),” it has three aspects:

*The First:* They say: “Just because we are incapable [of producing its like] it does not prove that all mankind is incapable.” So it dumbfounds them with the words: “*and call your witnesses [and helpers if there are any] besides Allah;*” that is, your elders and leaders.

*The Second:* They declare: “If we dispute [the Qur'an], who would support us and defend us?” So it silences them saying: “Whatever the outlook, it has its adherents. Were you to dispute it, supporters would emerge to defend you.”

*The Third:* It is as though the Qur'an is saying: “The Messenger (Upon whom be peace) calls on Allah the Most High as witness, and Allah testifies to his truthfulness by placing the stamp of miraculousness on his cause. So if your gods and witnesses are any use to you at all, call on them!” In this way, [the Qur'an] pours scorn on them.

The positioning and relationship of “**But if you cannot** (*Fa-in lam taf'alū*)” is clear. For it implies the following phrases: “So attempt it, but look! [You can't!] And if you can't, it's clear you're incapable of doing it!”

The positioning of “**and of a surety you cannot** (*wa lan taf'alū*):” It is as if when it says “*and of a surety you cannot,*” one of them says in reply: “Just because we haven't been able to do it, it doesn't mean mankind will be incapable of doing it in the future.” So it replies: “*of a surety you cannot* (lit. will not).” This signifies its miraculousness in three respects:

*The First:* Its foretelling the future, and as it predicted so it was. As you know, millions of Arabic books have attempted to imitate the style of Revelation, as well as numerous obdurate [deniers], yet none of them has been successful, as you will see if you scrutinize them. It is as though it is the single one of its kind. So it is either inferior to all of them, and this is un-animously agreed to be impossible, or it is superior.

*The Second Respect:* Its silencing and snubbing them, and censuring them for not doing it, and provoking them, while [the Messenger] was in that precarious situation [furthering] his great cause. This is a sure sign that he was reliable, trustworthy, and confident in his message.

*The Third Respect:* It is as though the Qur'an is saying: “You're the leaders in eloquent speech and the ones most needy [to produce the like of the Qur'an], yet you haven't been able to, so no one else will!” Moreover, it infers that just as the past could not produce anything similar to Islam, the result of the Qur'an, so will the future will be incapable of producing anything similar.

Now the positioning of “*then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones* (*fa-ttaqū al-nār allatī waqūduhā an-nās wa al-ḥijāra*):” Consider this: “*and if you cannot*” being followed by “*then fear*” necessitates according to the tastes of eloquence the following implied sentences: “Since you haven’t been able to do it and you won’t be able to, it’s obvious it’s miraculous, so it [must be] Allah’s word. Hence it is incumbent on you to believe in it and comply with its commands. And one of its commands is ‘*O you people! Worship!*,’ that you may fear Hell-fire, so fear the Fire!” See how concise it is, how miraculous!

The positioning of “*whose fuel is men and stones* (*allatī waqūduhā al-nās wa al-ḥijāra*):” The purpose of “*then fear* (*fa-ttaqū*)” is to frighten, and [here, being followed by “*the Fire*”] it has a strengthened, intensified meaning, in order to terrify them with “*whose fuel is men.*” For a fire fuelled by human beings is more appalling and horrifying. Then it further intensifies it by adding stones. For [the fire] that burns stones is even fiercer. It also infers that it is restraining them from idolatry. That is, if you don’t comply with Allah’s command and you worship stone idols, you will enter the Fire that consumes both worshippers and their objects of worship.

The positioning of “*prepared for those who reject faith* (*u’iddat li’l-kāfirīn*):” This elucidates and establishes the consequence (*luzūm*) between the conditional verb “*if you cannot*” [the protasis] and its apodosis “*then fear.*” That is, this calamity is not like storm and tempest and other [natural] disasters which do not strike wrongdoers alone but encompass the righteous and elect; it is particular to offenders and caused by disbelief, and the only means of salvation from it is to comply with the Qur’an.

Moreover, “*prepared* (*u’iddat*)” indicates that Hell is created and existent at the present moment, contrarily to what the Mu‘tazilites asserted. The following will show you, and allow you to surmise, that Hell is eternal: if you reflect on the world from the point of view of wisdom (*al-ḥikma*), you will see fire to be a vast creature, prevailing and overwhelming, a primordial element of the lofty and lower worlds. And you will understand that it consists of a huge head and strange fruits that hang over into eternity. Don’t you see that someone who spies a long stalk trailing along [the ground] will understand there to be a melon at the end of it; similarly whoever sees the creatures of fire will understand that at their extremity are the bitter fruits of Hell. Likewise, whoever sees bounties and good things and pleasures will surmise that their extracts and the place they are poured out and their garden is Paradise.

- *If you were to ask:* If Hell exists now, where is it located?

*You would be told:* We Sunnis believe that it exists now, but we cannot specify where.

- *And if you were to ask:* The literal meanings of some Hadiths indicate that it is under the earth,<sup>61</sup> and in one it says that its fire is two hundred times fiercer and hotter than worldly fire,<sup>62</sup> and that the sun also will enter Hell?

*You would be told:* The expression “under the earth” means its core, for the centre is under the globe. It has been established by scientific theories that the heat (lit. fire) at the [earth’s] centre reaches two hundred thousand degrees. For every thirty-three commercial cubits (*dhirā’ al-tujjār*) one digs down into the earth, the temperature increases one degree, and at the centre it is approximately two hundred thousand degrees. This theory is in conformity with the Hadith that says that it is two hundred times hotter than worldly fire.

Moreover, in another Hadith it says that a part of this fire [of Hell] is freezing (*zamharīr*)<sup>63</sup> and that it burns with its coldness. This corresponds to the theory, for the fire at the centre – [from the centre] to the surface – comprises all degrees of fire [heat]. And it has been established by natural science [*al-ḥikmat al-tabī’iyya*] that there is a degree of heat (lit. fire) that spontaneously attracts surrounding heat and burns it with its coldness and freezes water.

- *If you were to ask:* The fire inside the earth, that it contains, is very small, so how will it encompass Hell, which will encompass the heavens and earth?

*You would be told:* Even if in respect of this manifest world (*al-mulk*) and [Hell] being ‘rolled up’ (*al-maṭwīyya*), it is contained by the earth, but in respect of the hereafter, it will become so vast it will encompass thousands [of globes] similar to the earth. Yes, the Manifest World (*ālam al-shahāda*) is like a screen preventing contact between this [present] fire and its branches. Also, its being under the earth does not necessitate its being conjoined with it, for the branches of the tree of creation have produced such fruits as the sun, the moon, and the stars, and our earth, and other earths. So what lies beneath the fruits includes the area between the

61. Al-‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khafā’*, i, 281; see, al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, iv, 568.

62. See, *al-Bukhārī*, Bad’ al-Khalq, 10; *Muslim*, Janna, 30; *al-Tirmidhī*, Jahannam, 7.

63. *Al-Bukhārī*, Mawāqit, 9; *Muslim*, Masājid, 32; *al-Tirmidhī*, Jahannam, 9; *Ibn Māja*, Zuhd, 38.

branches where it is found. The dominions (*mulk*) of Allah the Most High are indeed wide and the tree of creation is spread [throughout them], so wherever Hell travels it cannot be repulsed.

It says in a Hadith: “Hell is folded up.” This possibly means that Hell is an egg of the bird of our flying earth, and when the veil of the Manifest World is rent, [the earth] will lay its egg and [Hell] will emerge, baring its teeth at the people of rebellion. It is also possible that it was this [question of Hell] being ‘folded up’ that caused the Mu‘tazilites to fall into the error [of believing] that Hell is not now existent, and to cling onto it.

**Now for the positioning [and relationships of] the parts of the phrases**

The [conjunction] “**and** (*al-wāw*)” in “*And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed, step by step, to Our servant (Wa in kuntum fī raybin mimmā nazzalnā ‘alā ‘abdina),*” is [so placed] because of the relationship between [this verse and “*O you people! Worship...*”, but no such relationship is apparent. It becomes apparent only through two implied questions and their answers: firstly is the implied answer to the question arising from the first verse: “How should we worship?”, that is,] “as the Qur’an has taught you.” [In reply to the second implied question: “How can we know the Qur’an is Allah’s word?”, it says: “*And if you are in doubt...*”]<sup>64</sup>

The use of “*if (in)*,” which expresses hesitation, instead of “*idhā*,” which infers certainty and resolve, [although it is certain that they are in a state of doubt,] indicates that because means had arisen to dispel their doubts, their very existence should be doubtful or impossible even; they could only be hypothetical.

Also, the doubt expressed by “*if (in)*” looks to the [literary] style and not to the Speaker (May He be exalted).

The substitution of “*you are in doubt (kuntum fī raybin)*” for [the verbal form] ‘you doubt’ although the latter is more concise, indicates that the source of their doubt is their sick natures and characters.

And the doubt encompassing (*zarfīyya*) them although it is contained (*mazrūf*) by their hearts hints that the darkness of doubt has spread from their hearts and overwhelmed their whole physical beings, enveloping in darkness all ways [of possible illumination].

The use of the indefinite for “*doubt (rayb)*” is to make it general. That is, whichever of the sorts of doubt you feel, the answer is the same, and that

64. Nursi, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz* [Abdülmecid], 203-4

is: [the Qur'an] is miraculous and true! Thus, your accusing [the Qur'an] of error due to your superficial view is an error and it is not necessary to answer every doubt specifically. You can surely see that a person who [happens upon] a spring and tastes its pure, sweet water does not need to taste all its subsidiary streams and branches.

The [partitive] “*min*” in “*mimmā nazzalnā – as to (lit. a part of) what we have revealed*” infers the implied words ‘about a part of what of We have revealed’ (*fī shay’in mimmā*).

The word(s) “*we have revealed (nazzalnā)*” indicates that the source of their doubt is [the Qur'an's] revelation (lit. descent). And the decisive reply proves its revelation.

The choice of [the IInd form] “*nazzalnā*,” which denotes gradual revelation, instead of [the IVth form] ‘*anzalnā*,’ which suggests that it was sudden, alludes to the excuses they advanced saying: “Why isn’t it revealed to him all at once?” Indeed, the Qur'an was revealed gradually as events required, according to circumstances, verse-by-verse, sura-by-sura.

The choice of the word “*servant [or bondsman] (‘abd)*” rather than ‘the Messenger’ or ‘Muhammad’ indicates exaltation of the Messenger, and hints at the elevated nature of worship, and corroborates the command “*Worship!*,” and infers the repulsion of delusions, for the Messenger (Upon whom be peace) performed more worship than anyone and recited more of the Qur'an. So reflect on this!

The phrase “*then produce a sura like thereunto (fa-tū bi-sūratin min mithlihi)*:” [The purpose of] the command “*then produce*” is to display their impotence, and it comprises a challenge, and censure, and calls on them to try to dispute it, making clear their inability to do this.

While the word “*a sura*” indicates [the Qur'an's] silencing and dumbfounding them utterly, as follows:

*The First Level of Challenge:* It says: “Produce the like of the whole Qur'an together with its truths, sciences, predictions, and elevated composition, all from someone illiterate.

*The Second Level:* It says: “If you can’t do that, fabricate something, but its composition must be similarly eloquent.

*The Third Level:* It says: “If you can’t do that either, produce around ten suras.

*The Fourth Level:* If you’re not capable of doing that either, just produce [the equivalent of] a long sura.

*The Fifth Level:* If that’s too difficult for you as well, just bring one sura

even if it's very short like "*Behold We have bestowed upon thee (Innā a'taināka)*,"(108:1) and from someone illiterate like him.

*The Sixth Level:* If it isn't possible for you to have it produced by someone illiterate, get an adept scholar or skilful writer to do it.

*The Seventh Level:* If that's too hard for you too, a number of you cooperate to produce it.

*The Eighth Level:* And if you can't do that, seek the help of all men and jinn, and the assistance of all the results of their shared knowledge from the time of Adam till the end of the world, as well as those ideas found in the books available to you about the Arabic language and its styles, written with the desire to imitate [the Qur'an] or out of obstinacy by those wanting to dispute it. To say nothing of authoritative scholars, if a person of scant intelligence or an ignorant one even were to study them, he would declare that none of them was similar to [the Qur'an]. So it is either inferior to all of them, and this is impossible as is unanimously agreed, or it is superior to all. And this is what was wanted, as was mentioned above. Indeed, it has not been [successfully] disputed in thirteen centuries. And as that was true in the past, so it will be in the future, till the end of time.

*The Ninth Level:* It says: Don't remonstrate saying you don't have any witnesses and we don't testify for you either. Go and call your witnesses and your partisans and let them consult their consciences; will they be so bold as to uphold what you claim disputing [the Qur'an]?

If you have understood these levels, consider now how the Qur'an is miraculous in its conciseness, indicating these levels, silencing them effectively and loosening their bridles [giving them the opportunity to reply].

Understand too that human incapability to dispute even the shortest sura is a clear argument from effect to cause (*innīyatuhu badīhīyya*). As for its being argued from cause to effect (*limmīyyatuhu*), it is said "Allah the Most High prevented men from disputing it." The most correct school in the latter question [the argument from cause to effect] is that followed by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Sakkākī. This states that "it is beyond human power [to emulate the Qur'an's] elevated composition." Moreover, al-Sakkākī preferred [the view] that its miraculous inimitability can only be sensed (*dhawqī*) and cannot be expressed or explicated. It can only be experienced." But the author of *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* [al-Jurjānī] preferred [the view] that it is possible to express it [in words], and we subscribe to his school in this question.

The choice of "*sūra*" rather than such words as *najm*, *ṭā'ifa*, or *nawba*,

indicates [the Qur'an's] silencing them [by answering] the source of their doubts, namely, "Why wasn't it revealed to him all at once?" That is, [the Qur'an told them:] "You produce some and let's see it, even if only a single short piece!"

The choice of the word "*sūra*" signifies too that there are numerous benefits in the Qur'an being divided into suras, as has been elucidated by al-Zamakhsharī, and that this unusual method contains many subtle points.

The phrase "*like thereunto (min mithlihi)*" signifies two [possible] things: That is, [the suffixed pronoun "*hi*" refers] either to the thing revealed (*al-munzal*) [the Qur'an – that is, "produce a sura like one of the Qur'an's"], or to the one to whom it was revealed (*al-munzal 'alayhi*) [the Messenger – that is, "get someone unlettered like him to produce it"]. If it is the former, it should be phrased "*mithli sūratin minhu,*" but it is expressed as "*min mithlihi,*" indicating that the second possibility is taken into account. That is, "You can invalidate his case with your disputing only if someone unlettered like him [the Messenger] does it." It indicates too that [the Qur'an's] miraculousness could be invalidated only if disputed by a collection [a literary work, *majmū'a* – that is, if the sura produced was part of a complete work] like [the Qur'an].

The phrase also allusively directs attention to the other scriptures that were revealed like the Qur'an, so that the listener may weigh them up in his mind and understand the Qur'an's elevated nature.

The sentence "***and call your witnesses [and helpers if there are any] besides Allah (wa'd'ū shuhadā'akum min dūn Allāh):***" The choice of "*call (ud'ū)*" instead of 'seek the help or assistance of' indicates that those who might respond to them and defend them are not non-existent but are there [with them] and do not need to be called.

The word "*witnesses (shuhadā')*" comprises three meanings: your authorities on the Arabic language, those who observe [witness] you, and your gods.

*In respect of the first* it silences them by rebutting their argument that their own inability does not prove that their literary leaders lack the power [to imitate the Qur'an].

*In respect of the second* it dumbfounds them by cutting short their excuse that they had no witnesses, for every outlook and way has defenders and witnesses.

*In respect of the third* it rebukes and derides them, asking why their gods, which they look to for benefits and to repel harm, do not help them in this matter that is troubling them.

The genitive construction of “*witnesses*” and the pronominal suffix “*your (-kum)*” denotes particularity and strengthens the first meaning [above]: “Your great ones are present with you and there are special [bonds] between you; if they had been capable of helping you, surely [they would have done].” It expresses the second meaning like this: “We accept the testimony of those who support you and are your partisans, for they won’t venture to testify for something whose invalidity is self-evident.” And it takes the third meaning by the arm and mocks it, saying: “Why don’t the gods you worship help you?”

With respect to the first, the phrase “*besides Allah (min dūn Allāh)*” indicates generality; that is, [call] all the eloquent masters of language in the world other than Allah the Most High. It indicates too that [the Qur’an’s] miraculousness is only [miraculousness] because it is from Allah.

With respect to the second, it indicates their impotence and confusion when they say: “Allah is our witness. Allah knows that we can do it.” For it is the habit of those defeated in argument and reduced to impotence to swear by Allah and call on Him to witness what they are incapable of proving.

And with respect to the third it indicates that their disputing the Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace) was exactly the response of associating partners with Allah (*shirk*) to divine unity (*tawhīd*), and of lifeless, unconscious beings to the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

The phrase “*if what you say is true (in kuntum ṣādiqīn)*” alludes to their saying: “If we wanted, we could say something similar.” It also insinuates: “You aren’t truthful. Your truthfulness is only hypothetical; indeed, you only utter sophistries. And you haven’t fallen into doubt because you were seeking the truth, but because you were seeking the false, and you fell into it. Furthermore, the consequence (apodosis) [of the conditional verb “*if what you say*”] is the sum and substance of the previous phrases; that is, “do it!” That is, “If what you say is true, then try to produce something similar.”

The sentence: “***But if you cannot, and of a surety you cannot, then fear the Fire (Fa-in lam taf’alū wa lan taf’alū fa’ttaqū al-nār):***” With the phrase “*If what you say is true*” the Qur’an is confuting them with a conditional syllogism, excepting the opposite of the following phrase to occasion the opposite of the preceding one.

A summary of it: “If you were truthful, you would have disputed it and produced a sura, but you didn’t [coundn’t] and you won’t [be able to]. One

concludes from this that you weren't truthful, while your enemy, the Messenger (Upon whom be peace), is truthful and that the Qur'an is miraculous. So this obliges you to believe in him so that you may fear [avoid] the punishment [of the Fire]!" See how miraculous is this conciseness of the Revelation!

Then, saying: "*if you cannot (in lam taf'alu)*" instead of 'but you haven't [done it]' (*lākin mā taf'alūn*), it indicates through the doubt denoted by "*if*" conformity with their suspicions (*ẓann*), and through its denoting a condition that is the opposite of the following sentence, necessitates the opposite of the previous one. Then, in place of the result, that is, the opposite of the previous one, I mean "but you weren't truthful," it mentions the third of three successive consequences (*lāzim*) of the cause ('*illa*), which is "*then fear the Fire (fa'-ttaqū al-nār)*," to frighten, intimidate, and threaten them.

As for "*if you cannot* (lit. have not) (*in lam taf'alū*):" Its signifying the past by virtue of the "*lam – not*" and the future through the "*if (in)*" is in order to direct attention towards their past, as though it is saying to them: "Look at your decorated orations and gilded Seven Hanging Odes: are any of them equal to [the Qur'an] or close to it even, or in the same class?"

The choice of "*do, make (taf'alū)*" rather than 'bring' (*ta'tū*) suggests two points:

*The First:* It infers that the source of the [Qur'an's] miraculousness and inimitability (*i'jāz*) is their impotence ('*ajz*), and the source of their impotence is [related to] action (*fi'l*) not to the work (*athar*). [That is, the source of their impotence is their inability to 'do' or produce something similar to the Qur'an, not the work itself].

*The Second:* It is for conciseness. For just as in grammar [the verbal root] *fa'ala* is used to depict the patterns and forms of the verb, so in the literary styles it is used as the summary of actions and stories, as though it were a pronoun expressing whole sentences and a metonymy (*kināya*) for them.

"*And of a surety you cannot (wa lan taf'alū)*:" The future and emphasis expressed by "*lan*" infer definiteness, and this indicates that the speaker is confident and serious and that he has no doubts concerning what he is saying. And this is a sign that there is no trickery or deception [in what he says and does].

The use of "*then fear (fa'-ttaqū)*" instead of 'avoid' (*tajannabū*), [both express the same meaning, but *al-ittiqā'* follows on after belief, while avoidance does not have this secondary meaning] implies as a substitute for the consequence [of the above conditional sentence] the sentence: "Believe

and avoid associating partners with Allah (*shirk*), which is a cause of entering Hell-fire.”

The definite article is used in “*the Fire (al-nār)*” because it is well known and firmly fixed in people’s minds, having been heard about from [all] the prophets from Adam up till now. Its being governed by the relative pronoun “*which (allatī)*” although [such pronouns] generally refer to something previously known, is in consequence of the earlier revelation of “*a Fire whose fuel is men and stones,*”(66:6) before this verse, and those addressed had heard this. Thus, the relative pronoun is in place.

“*Whose fuel is men and stones (waqūduhā al-nās wa’l-ḥijāra)*”:” As mentioned above, the purpose of this is to intimidate, and intimidation is made severer by threatening. Thus it threatens with the word “men” as though striking them and reinforces this with “stones” as though castigating them: “What profit or salvation do you hope for from these idols that are now the instruments of your torture?”

As for the phrase: “*prepared for those who reject faith (u’iddat li’l-kāfirīn)*”:” Know that the position [here required] ‘prepared for you’ (*u’iddat la-kum*), however, generally the Qur’an mentions summaries and general rules at the ends of verses to indicate the most powerful evidences for the statements [made in the verse in question]. Thus, what is basically [implied here] is “prepared for you if you disbelieve, since it is prepared for the disbelievers.” For this reason the noun is used in place of the pronoun.

Then “*prepared*” being in the perfect tense indicates that Hell exists at the present time, as was discussed above.

## Verse 25

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ  
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا  
مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَتُوا بِهِ مِمَّا شَبَّاهَا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا  
خَالِدُونَ

*But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that theirs are gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before," for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein companions pure [and holy]; and they abide therein [for ever]. (Wa bashshir alladhīna āmanū wa ‘amilū al-ṣāliḥāt anna la-hum jannātin tajrī min taḥtiḥā al-anhār kullamā ruziqū minhā min thamaratin rizqan qālū hādhā alladhī ruziqnā min qablu wa utū bi-hi muta-shābihan wa la-hum fī-hā azwājun muṭahharatun wa hum fī-hā khālidūn.)*

Consider this: The composition and positioning (*naẓm*) of this verse, like its sisters, has three aspects: the positioning of the verse as a whole [and its relationship] with what precedes it; the positioning [and relationships] of the verse's phrases; and positioning [and relationships] of the constituents of the phrases.

**The First:** Between this verse's meaning and the previous verses are various relations, and different lines stretch out from it to those verses' phrases. Surely you see how at the start of the sura the Qur'an praises itself and the believers for [their] belief and good works, then with this verse indicates the result of belief and fruit of good works. And similarly, how it censures the disbelievers and condemns the dissemblers and describes their way, which leads to eternal perdition, then alludes with this verse to the

light of everlasting happiness, pointing it out to them to increase their sense of loss at having missed that supreme bounty.

And having charged [the people] “*O you people! Worship...*”, although this means hardship and difficulty and giving up immediate pleasures, it flings open to them the doors of postponed [future pleasures]. With this verse it satisfies and assures their souls.

And having proved divine unity, the principal pillar of belief and chief [religious] obligation, with this verse it announces the fruits of divine unity, the title-page of mercy and preface of divine pleasure by pointing out Paradise and eternal happiness.

And having proved prophethood, the second pillar of belief, through the miraculousness of the verse “*And if you are in doubt...*”,(2:23) with this verse and indirectly with the previous one, it alludes to the duties and obligations of prophethood, which are to warn and deliver good news through the tongue of the Qur’an.

And having threatened, intimidated, and warned in the previous verse, in accordance with the mystery of the relation between opposites, in this one it promises, excites desire, and gives good tidings.

Also, if a person is to make the souls [of others] submit and persist in obedience and make [their] consciences obey the dictates of reason, he will have to excite both the sense of fear and sense of longing by bringing together [the obligations] of frightening [away from wrong] and attracting [to right] (*tarhīb wa targhīb*). For the dictates of the intellect are only temporarily [effective], and there has to be in the conscience a permanent motivation and compelling incentive.

Moreover, having indicated one part of the hereafter with the previous verse, so with this one it indicates the other, which is the spring of eternal happiness. Similarly, there it alludes with fire to Hell, and here it explicitly mentions Paradise.

Now understand that Paradise and Hell are two fruits which point to eternity from the tree of creation, and are the two results of the chain of the universe. They are two storage tanks into which the universe is poured, and two pools for it as it flows into eternity. Yes, the universe will be convulsed and shaken up with a violent motion, and Paradise and Hell will appear and will fill up [with the appropriate matters].

***An Elucidation of This:*** When Allah (May His glory be exalted) willed the creation of a world for examination and trial, for numerous instances of wisdom too fine [to be apprehended by] the mind, He willed the change

and transformation of this world for [many] reasons. He combined good and evil, and mixed in harm with benefit, and included ugliness in beauty. He joined [evil, harm, and ugliness] to Hell and sent them assistance from it. And He despatched good things and virtues to be manifested in Paradise.

Furthermore, when He willed trial and competition in [the world of] human beings and [for there to be] differences and change among them, he mixed in bad people with good. Then when the period of testing closes and divine will [commands] that they should be eternal, He will make the bad people manifest the verse: “*Get you apart (...) O you guilty ones,*”(36:59) while the good will be honoured and graced with the address: “*So enter there to dwell for ever!*”(39:73) Then when the two categories are separated out the universe will be purified, and evil and harmful matters will be withdrawn from the good and the beneficial and perfected, and they will collect on one side.

*In Short:* If you study the universe carefully, you will encounter two basic elements, two long crawling stems [like melons], that when [the fruits of which are] collected together and made immortal, will become Hell and Paradise.

## An Introduction

This verse and the preceding ones betoken the resurrection of the dead and great gathering. There are four noteworthy points in this matter:

*Firstly:* The possibility of the world’s destruction and its death.

*Secondly:* Their occurrence.

*Thirdly:* Its repair and being raised to life.

*Fourthly:* Their occurrence.

***The Possibility of the Universe’s Death:*** If a thing is subject to the law of evolution (*qānūn al-takāmul*), it undergoes growth and development. It has therefore a natural lifespan and allotted time of death; it cannot escape death’s call. According to inductive reasoning, [this goes for] most members of the species (*afrād al-anwā’*). So just as man, the microcosm, cannot be saved from destruction; so too there is no refuge from death for the world, the macroanthropos. Similarly, a tree is a miniature copy of the universe and is pursued by demolition and dissolution; so too the chain of the universe is a part of the tree of creation and cannot be saved from the hand of destruction and reconstruction. So if not struck by a violent wind or an

external illness [ordained by] pre-eternal divine will before [the end of] its natural lifespan, and if its Maker does not annihilate it earlier, there will necessarily and certainly and even according to scientific reckoning come a day when the verses “*When the sun is rolled up \* When the stars grow dark*”(81:1-2) and “*When the sky is rent apart*”(82:1) will be realized. Then the macroanthropos will suffer its death agonies and utter a horrible growl, an appalling roar that will resound through space.

***Its occurrence:*** As is agreed by all the revealed religions, and testified to by all sound natures, and indicated by the change, transformation, and renewal of the universe, – and if you wish, imagine the world’s death agonies and its roar – the universe is bound together with a delicate, elevated order and clings to those wondrous bonds. So when one of the heavenly bodies receives the order: “Be!” or “Quit your orbit!” you will see the world [suddenly] smitten by its death agonies and the stars and heavenly bodies beginning to clash and collide. Infinite space will thunder and roar. On one part striking another sparks will fly off as big as the earth or bigger. Can you imagine the awful sound of millions of firing cannons the smallest shells of which are larger than the earth? For that will be the sound of its death. With the onset of its demise, the creation will be convulsed and beings will separate out, and Hell will emerge together with its inhabitants and matters, and Paradise will become manifest, bringing together all the subtleties derived from its elements.

• *If you were to ask:* Why is the universe subject to change and time and [so] will be destroyed, then at the resurrection of the dead will be made eternal, fixed, and unchanging?

*You would be told:* Since pre-eternal wisdom and providence necessitated trial and examination, and the development of potentialities and unfolding of abilities, and the disclosure of the relative truths (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-nisbiyya*), which in the hereafter will be total truths (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-ḥaqīqiyya*), and the existence of relative degrees and many instances of wisdom the human mind is powerless to perceive; the Maker (May His glory be exalted) made the natures and dispositions of things different, and combined harmful things with useful ones, and interspersed evils among good, and He brought together ugly things and beautiful. The Hand of Power kneaded together opposites and the universe became subject to the law of change, alternation, variation, and development (*al-takāmul*).

Thus, the Maker (May His glory be exalted) willed through His grace that when the arena of examination is closed, and the time of trial finished,

and the harvest-time has come, He will purify the various opposites to make them eternal, and separate out the causes of change, and distinguish the matters of difference. Then Hell will be formed with its solid body, receiving the address of “*So get you apart!*” And Paradise will be manifested with its eternal, stable body and foundations. [This will be] in accordance with [the rule] “relations are essential for order,” [That is, there is no contrariety between the elements and parts forming Paradise and Hell; there are only relations and bonds between them]<sup>65</sup> and order is the cause of continuity.

Moreover, through His perfect power, the Most High will give the dwellers of those two eternal abodes stable existences that will not be subject to dissolution or change, for change here, which leads to extinction, arises from the relative differences [that is, the imbalance] between what is formed and what dissolves. But the relative stability there [that is, the balance] will permit change that will not lead to disintegration.

**The Third and Fourth Points**, I mean the possibility of the repair and raising to life of the earth, and their occurrence: since proofs of divine unity and prophethood taken from the Qur’an and Hadiths (*al-dalīl al-naqlī*) alone are not valid as it would necessitate a circular argument,<sup>66</sup> the Qur’an alludes to rational proofs of them [as well]. It is permissible however for the resurrection of the dead to be proven by both reason and the Qur’an and Hadiths [*bi’l-‘aql wa’l-naql*]. For rational proofs, you may consult what we explained to our utmost when expounding “*And have certain belief in the hereafter*”(2:4) Briefly, order, mercy, and grace only become order, mercy and grace with the coming of the resurrection. The transmitted (*naqlī*) evidences consist of what everyone has said [all the prophets],<sup>67</sup> and what the miraculous Qur’an states about its occurrence. For these evidences as well as indications of the rational ones, you may refer to this subject in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s commentary,<sup>68</sup> for he enumerates the verses that prove the resurrection of the dead.

65. Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ‘caz* [Abdülmeccid], 218.

66. This is because the validity of evidences taken from Qur’an and Hadiths is tied to the authenticity and veraciousness of prophethood; to prove prophethood by such evidences therefore would entail an impossibility and circular argument. See, Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ‘caz* [Abdülmeccid], 218.

67. Nursi, *İşârâtü’l-İ‘caz* [Abdülmeccid], 218.

68. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1240) is reputed to have written around 200 works in various of the Islamic sciences including *tafsīr* (Qur’anic exegesis), *kalām* (theology), and the principles of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). The commentary referred to here is his famous *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, known as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. See, (Beirut: 1429/2008), i, 353-60.

*In Short:* A person has only to peruse the samples, examples, and similitudes of the resurrection in very many realms (lit. species – *al-anwā'*) [of beings] to surmise from their diverse signs the existence of bodily resurrection and eternal happiness.

### **The positioning and relationships of the phrases**

You should be aware that the string on which the pearls of this verse are threaded in successive order is this: eternal happiness is of two sorts:

*The First and Foremost:* Allah the Most High's pleasure, and His grace, manifestation, and nearness.

*The Second:* Physical bliss, which is attained through one's house, food, and marriage, and their continuing for all eternity, which completes and perfects them.

The first sorts are not in need of detailed explanation, or anyway such explanation is not possible. As for the second, the most agreeable of dwellings is that set among plants and flowing water. You surely know that the plashing, gurgling waters of rivers, whispering beneath pavilions and gardens, inspire poetry and breathe love into hearts. As for food, it is sustenance, and while the most delicious of basic sustenance is that which is familiar, fruits are best in one respect when varied, for familiarity [allows] one to recognize the high degree of the bounty and its superiority over similar things. Moreover, one of its highest pleasures is knowing that [the sustenance] is the reward for one's actions. Another is its source and store being right before one's eyes, yielding the pleasure of confident assurance. Concerning marriage, one of man's most intense needs is to have someone respond to him with heartfelt love and to share with [his partner] pleasure and intimacy, and for them to together feel wonder [at the divine bounties] and to ponder over them. You must have observed that if someone sees something unusual that perplexes him and makes him think, he calls on someone, if only mentally, to share his perplexity. And the gentlest of hearts, and the kindest and warmest, are those of the second sex. And those whose spirits will blend fully and hearts will achieve complete intimacy, and whose outward union will be pure and chaste are those of the second sex who have been purified and cleansed of bad morals and unpleasant traits.

- *If you were to ask:* [The purpose of] food is to perpetuate a person's [life] for by means of it those parts of the body that dissolve are re-formed, and marriage is to perpetuate the human race, but in the hereafter people will be immortal and not subject to change and dissolution. Anyway, there will be no reproduction in the hereafter, will there?

*You would be told:* The benefits of food and marriage are not restricted to perpetuating life and reproduction; they are a source of great pleasure in this painful world. So why shouldn't there be pleasure of a pure, elevated kind in the realm of bliss?

• *If you were to ask:* Pleasure here [in this world is obtained] through dispelling pain and suffering, [but in the hereafter, there will be none]?

*You would be told:* Dispelling pain is only one cause of pleasure. Also, it is not possible to compare the eternal realm and this world. Indeed, the garden of Horhor<sup>69</sup> here is to the lofty gardens of Paradise, what the [painted] pleasures of this world are to the pleasures of the hereafter. However superior Paradise is to the garden here, its pleasures are superior to the same extent. Ibn 'Abbas (May Allah be pleased with him) alluded to this vast difference when he said: "The only thing in Paradise will be their names."<sup>70</sup> That is, the fruits of this world.

Regarding eternal life and perpetual pleasure, consider this: pleasure is only true pleasure if it is untouched by evanescence, for just as the dispelling of pain is pleasure or a cause of it, so the passing of pleasure is pain; indeed, even to imagine its passing is painful. In fact, the poetry of metaphorical (*majāzī*) lovers all consists of lamentations at such pain. The *dīwāns* of these purveyors of a love that is not 'true' are nothing but their weeping and wailing at this pain, which arises from the imagined passing of the beloved.

Indeed, most temporary pleasures produce lasting pains when they disappear, and every time a person recalls them, regret surges up in him and he exclaims: "Alas! Alack!", cursing this pain of the spirit. Then most suffering yields lasting pleasure when it subsides, and every time the person thinks of his being saved from it, he exclaims: "Praise and thanks be to Allah!", alluding to this immaterial bounty.

Yes, man was created for eternity and he can obtain true pleasure only from eternal things such as knowledge of Allah, love, perfection, knowledge, and so on.

*In Short:* Pleasure and bounty are only pleasure and bounty if they are eternal.

Now that you have seen the string, thread the phrases of the verses on it.

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69. Nursi's medrese in Van, at the foot of the citadel. The onomatopoeic name recalls the bubbling stream that ran through its garden.

70. "The only thing in this world from Paradise is the Names." (Or something similar.) See, Nursi, *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* [Ihsān Qāsim], 196.

The phrase “**But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness** (*Wa bashshir alladhīna āmanū wa ‘amilū al-ṣāliḥāt*):” When the Most High charged the people [with worship], and proved [the Messenger’s] prophethood, and charged the Messenger with conveying His commands – so that by giving the glad tidings [of Paradise] he would ensure they complied with the obligations, which entailed difficulties and the giving up of worldly pleasures – he was commanded both to warn and to convey the good news of Allah the Most High’s pleasure, and His grace, and nearness, and of everlasting happiness.

And the phrase “**that theirs are gardens beneath which flow** (*anna lahum jannātin tajrī*):” As was mentioned above, man’s most essential need, since he has a body, is a place and a dwelling. The most beautiful places are those with plants and trees, and the most pleasant are those with pools among their verdant gardens, and the most splendid are those that have abundant streams flowing among their trees and under their pavilions. This is why it says “*beneath which rivers flow.*”

After somewhere [to live] man’s greatest need, the finest of physical pleasures, is food and drink. These are indicated by [the words] gardens and rivers. And the finest of sustenance is that which is familiar, so one may appraise the degree of its superiority over similar foods. And the most delicious are fruits, as long as they are varied. And the purest pleasure is from [fruits] that are known and picked from close by. But most delicious of all is knowing that they are the fruits of one’s labours. This is why it says “**Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: ‘Why, this is what we were fed with before.’**” That is, in this world or before now.

The phrase “**for they are given things in similitude** (*wa utū bihi muta-shābihan*):” It says in a Hadith that they will be similar in form but different in taste.<sup>71</sup> Hence, the verse indicates that the pleasure of fruits lies in their change and variation, and that perfect pleasure is when the person is served and [the fruit] is given to him.

The phrase “**and they have therein companions pure** (*wa lahum fī-hā azwājun muṭahharatun*):” As you saw above [when describing] the string [for the verse’s pearls], a person needs a wife, a companion, to dwell with, through whose eyes he may look and who may see through his eyes, and whose love he may benefit from, this being the gentlest of the rays of divine mercy. Complete intimacy too is with her.

71. See, al-Mundhirī, *al-Tarḥīb wa’l-Tarḥīb*, vi, 296-9: al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: Mu’assasa al-Halabi, 1968), iv, 669.

And the phrase “*and they abide therein [for ever]* (*wa hum fī-hā khālidūn*):” When a person encounters a bounty or delight, the first thing that occurs to him is “Is it going to continue or will it be spoiled by ceasing?” For this reason, [the Qur’an] indicates with the words “*and they abide therein for ever*” the completion of the bounty through its enduring in Paradise, and it and his wives being perpetual there, and the continuation of the pleasures and his benefiting from them for ever.

#### **The positioning and relationships of the parts of the verse’s phrases**

The phrase “*But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness* (*Wa bashshir alladhīna āmanū wa ‘amilū al-ṣāliḥāt*):”

The [conjunction] “*But* (lit. And) (*al-wāw*)” points to the warning that drips from the previous [verse].

“*Give glad tidings (bashshir)*” is a sign that Paradise is [purely] a favour of the Most High and not incumbent on Him, and moreover, that actions should not be on account of Paradise [that is, in the hope of it]. And [the verb] being in the imperative suggests: “Convey it as though you’re conveying good news!” For [the Prophet] was charged with communicating the message.

Then the use of “*those who believe (alladhīna āmanū)*” instead of the more succinct ‘the believers’ (*al-mu’minūn*), alludes to the “*who (believe in the Unseen) (alladhīna)*” at the beginning of the sura so that the details given there may elucidate the brevity here.

The use of the perfect tense here in “*believe and work (āmanū wa ‘amilū)*” although there [at the start of the sura] the imperfect is used for “*believe (yu’minūn)*” and “*spend (yunfiqūn)*” indicates that the imperfect is appropriate [in connection with] praise and encouragement, but that the perfect is suitable [in reference to] recompense and requital, for reward follows on after service.

The “*and*” of “*and work...*” indicates, due the mystery of dissimilarity, that contrary to [the assertions of] the Mu‘tazilites, actions are not included in belief, and that belief without action is insufficient. While the word ‘work’ (*‘amal*) signifies that the thing about which good tidings are given resembles recompense [though it is not].

As for “*righteousness* (lit. good works) (*al-ṣāliḥāt*),” it is vague and concise. According to Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh of Egypt,<sup>72</sup> it has a general

72. Muḥammad ‘Abduh ibn Ḥasan Khayrullāh (1849-1905). Graduated from al-Azhar University, and after coming under the influence of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī began to work in →

meaning here because people know perfectly well what good works are. But I say that in addition, it is thus since it looks to [the details given] at the start of the sura.

The phrase “*that theirs are gardens beneath which rivers flow (anna la-hum jannātin tajrī min taḥtihā al-anhār):*”

Consider all the parts of this phrase: the confirmative “*anna – that,*” the specifying “*lām*” [of “*theirs (la-hum)*,” the precedence of “*la-hum – theirs,*” the plural “*gardens (jannāt)*” and its being indefinite and the mention of the flowing waters, the mention of “*min*” and “*taḥt – beneath,*” the specifying [the plural] of “*rivers (anhār)*” and its being definite; – like moisture trickling from all sides of the dry earth into a central pool, all these parts assist and respond to each other reinforcing the main aim, which is joy, pleasure, and requital.

[To explain:] “*That (anna)*” indicates that since the mind might be hesitant about the stupendousness of the thing about which the good news is given, it needs to be corroborated. Also, it is characteristic of a context (*maqām*) [inducing] joy that it repels ungrounded fears, for the least anxiety shatters the imagining and chases away the joy. It is also a sign that this is not a mere promise but an actual reality.

The “*lām*” of “*la-hum – theirs*” indicates particularity, ownership, and entitlement, [meaning that the thing about which good news is given] is exclusive [to the believers], and is theirs, and that they are deserving of it, which perfects [their] pleasure and augments [their] joy. Otherwise it would be like a king entertaining a pauper.

The precedence of “*theirs (la-hum)*” indicates that among the people it is [the believers] who are singled out for Paradise. [As a result], they observe the situation of the people of Hell, which will make apparent the value of paradisaical pleasure.

The plural of “*gardens (jannāt)*” indicates the [great] number of gardens or paradises and their various degrees proportionate to the [many] various degrees of actions. It is a sign too that every part of Paradise is a paradise, and infers also that whatever portion is allotted to a person, with its great extent it will seem like the whole of Paradise; [individuals] will not be herded together with their group [or community] to a [particular] place.

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(72. cont.) the fields of *kalām*, philosophy, and politics. Together they brought out the journal *al-Urwa al-Wuthqā* in Paris. In 1899 he was appointed Mufti of Egypt and he applied himself to reforming al-Azhar, notably by founding a faculty of modern science and updating the curricula. His works included *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* and *Risāla al-Tawḥīd*.

“*Gardens (jannāt)*” being indefinite reads out to the minds of listeners: “[The gardens] contain what no eye has seen, nor any ear heard, nor has occurred to the heart of man.”<sup>73</sup> It also refers it to the listeners’ minds so that they may all conceive of it in a manner they find pleasing. Furthermore, it is as though the indefinite is a substitute for “*there will be there all that the souls could desire.*”(43:71)

“*Flow (tajrī)*.” As is known, the most beautiful of gardens are those which have water; and the most beautiful of these are those in which the water is flowing; and the most beautiful of these are those in which the flow of water is perpetual. Thus, the word “*flow*” conjures up the picture of continuously running water.

As for “*beneath which (min taḥtiḥā)*,” you know that the most beautiful of running water is that which flows through plants and shrubs, gushing out pure and clear from the garden, and flowing gurgling beneath its pavilions and in many rivulets among the trees. “*Beneath which*” indicates these three [that is, the waters flowing beneath the gardens, the pavilions, and the trees].

“*Rivers (al-anhār)*.” Running water in gardens is most beautiful if plentiful, and it is most pleasing if in the form of rivulets chasing each other, and if these are symmetrical they increase the charm and beauty of that part. But most beautiful of all is when the water is deliciously sweet and cold, as in the verse: “*of waters incorruptible.*”(47:15) The plural form and use of the definite indicate the above.

The sentence “*Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: ‘Why, this is what we were fed with before’* (kullamā ruziqū minhā min thamaratin rizqan qālū hādhā alladhī ruziqnā min qablu):”

You should be aware that the parts of [this sentence] include many implied sentences [or phrases]. Since it is not tied to the preceding sentence (*istīnāf*), it is the answer to an implied question, and this question is a mixture of eight successive questions. For when given the good news of such a lofty dwelling-place, it occurs to the listener: “Will there be food there or not?” And if there is food, where will it come from and how will it be obtained? And if it is to be obtained from the garden, what does it consist of? And if it is its fruits, do they resemble the fruit of this world? And if they do resemble it, do they resemble each other? And if those fruits do resemble each other, are their tastes different? And if they are different,

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73. From Abu Hurayra; see, *al-Bukhārī*, *Muslim*, no: 2824; *al-Tirmidhī*, no: 3195. See, *Ishārāt al-I’jāz* [Iḥsān Qāsim], 199.

will they diminish [in number] when picked or will they be replaced [with new fruits]? And if they are replaced by others, will these [new fruits] still be food? And if they are still food, will those who eat them feel delight? And if they do feel delight, what will they say?

If you have understood these questions, consider now how the Qur'an replies to them with the parts of the [above-mentioned] section of the verse:

The word "*whenever (kullamā)*" indicates continuity and corroboration.

"*They are fed* (lit. they have been fed) (*ruziqū*)" being in the perfect tense indicates its realization. Also, it infers their being reminded by something similar, of the food of this world. And its being in the passive mood indicates the absence of any difficulty [in obtaining it] and their being served and its being given to them.

The choice of "*with fruits therefrom (minhā min thamaratin)*" rather than 'with their fruits' is in order to give certain answers to two of the above-mentioned questions.

The indefiniteness of "*fruits*" makes it general and indicates that whichever of the fruits it is, it is sustenance.

And "*sustenance (rizqan)*" being indefinite indicates that it is not the sort of food that they know, which assuages hunger.

The word "*they say (qālū)*" has the meaning of "they say to each other" [that is, the VIth form of the verb], which signifies their delight, wonder, and happiness.

The phrase "*This is what we were fed with before (hādhā alladhī ruziqnā min qablu)*:" This being general [and unspecific] it comprises four meanings:

*The First:* "What we are fed with here is the good works [we performed] in the [last] world." The strong tie between actions and requital will as though cause the [good] actions [to be transformed] in the hereafter into embodied rewards. And they rejoice at this.

*The Second:* "We are fed here with the foods of the last world, but there is a vast difference between their tastes." And they feel wonder at this.

*The Third:* "This resembles what we ate previously, but though it is similar in form it is different in meaning since it combines the pleasures of familiarity [on the one hand] and variation and change [on the other]." And they delight in this.

*The Fourth:* "Whatever we eat from the tree's branches is replaced instantaneously, as though with the one we had eaten." It is known from this that the [fruits] will never decrease.

Now the phrase “**for they are given things in similitude** (*wa utū bihi mutashābihan*):” This is a parenthetical clause confirming and explaining the previous one, and is a summary and appendix of it.

The use of the passive mood in “*they are given*” indicates that they are served.

While “*in similitude*” alludes to the combining of two pleasures as you already know.

The phrase “**and they have therein companions pure** (*wa la-hum fī-hā azwājun muṭahharatun*):” By virtue of the relationship between two sentences joined by a conjunction, the “*and*” [here] indicates that just as they are in need of dwellings for their bodies, so are they need a means of rest and tranquillity for their spirits.

“*They have (la-hum)*” indicates particularity and possession, and specifying and restriction, and infers that besides their wives of this world they shall have houris, created specially for them.

And “*therein (fī-hā)*” indicates that these wives will be worthy of Paradise and that their beauty will be proportionate to their elevated degree. Moreover, in this is a concealed sign that Paradise is adorned and decked out with them.

The word “*pure (muṭahharatun)*” indicates that someone has cleansed and purified them, but don’t suppose that anyone cleansed by the hand of power [can be described]! Its being a transitive verb [the IInd form] suggests that the women of this world are cleansed and purified so they become as beautiful as houris, who are of themselves pure.

And the phrase “**and they abide therein for ever** (*wa hum fī-hā khālidūn*)” indicates that both themselves, and their wives, and the delights of Paradise, and all of Paradise, are eternal.

## Verses 26-27

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا  
 الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا  
 فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا  
 وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ \* الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ  
 مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ  
 أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

*Behold, Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that. Now, as for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord and Sustainer – whereas those who reject faith say, ‘What means Allah by this parable?’ By it He causes many to go astray, and many He guides aright; but none does he cause thereby to go astray save those who forsake [the path] – \* Who break Allah’s covenant after it has been ratified, and cut asunder what Allah has bidden to be joined, and spread corruption on earth; these it is that shall be the losers. (Inna Allāha lā yastahyī an yaḍriba mathalan mā ba’ūḍatan fa-mā fawqahā fa-ammā alladhīna āmanū fa-ya’lamūna annahu al-ḥaqqu min rabbihim wa ammā alladhīna kafarū fa-yaqūlūna mādhā arāda Allāhu bi-hādhā mathalan yuḍillu bi-hi kathīran wa yahdī bi-hi kathīran wa mā yuḍillu bi-hi illā al-fāsiqīn \* Alladhīna yanquḍūna ‘ahd Allāh min ba’d mithāqihī wa yaqṭa’ūna mā amara Allāh bi-hi an yūṣala wa yufsidūna fī al-arḍ ulā’ika humu al-khāsirūn.)*

Consider this: There are three aspects to these verses also, that look to the composition [and positioning and relationships] (*nazmiyya*), and the meaning of all them looks to both the preceding verses and the succeeding ones, and to the Qur’an as a whole.

### **Their positioning in respect of what follows them**

You should be aware that when the Qur’an gives examples of gnats and spiders and speaks of ants and date-palms, the Jews, dissemblers, and idolators see it as an opportunity to oppose [it], and ask foolishly: “Does Allah the Most High – despite His sublimity – condescend to speak of such lowly matters, which the people of excellence disdain even to mention?” So the Qur’an deals them a blow in the mouth with this verse.

### **Their positioning with regard to with what precedes them**

With its miraculousness and inimitability the Qur’an proves [Muhammad’s (UWBP)] prophethood; and by challenging [its opponents] it proves its miraculousness and inimitability; and by their silence it proves [the success of] its challenges; and it proves at the start of the sura that it possesses elevated qualities not found together in other speech. [Thus it defeats its opponents who] remain silent in the face of its challenges, with not even their feelings of tribal solidarity being aroused. However, using false arguments they object to one [aspect] of the Qur’an’s perfection, saying that such parables as “*their parable is that of people who kindle...*”(2:17) and “*or [the parable] of a violent cloudburst in the sky...*”(2:19) are about commonplace matters and lower the level of the language putting it on a par with the conversation of ordinary people. So the Qur’an raps them on the head with this verse, dazing them.

**An explanation of this:** Their frail doubts arise from a string of delusions, the source of which are a number of fallacies:

**The First** is a false analogy the source of which is their seeing everything in the mirror of what they are familiar with. For they see a person whose mind is partial, whose thought is partial, whose speech is partial, whose hearing is partial, and who cannot attend to two matters at once, and they know that the criterion for his aspirations is the thing he is preoccupied with and attaches importance to. They consider that worth and greatness are proportionate to ambition and cannot ascribe lowly, inferior matters to a lofty, august person, for they assume that he would not stoop to bothering himself with such things nor go to great lengths concerning paltry matters. With this false view they look to the Necessary One (May He

be exalted) and say: “How in His sublimity and glory does He condescend to speak with men and converse in their way and to talk of trifling matters, especially these contemptible things?”

Do these foolish people not understand that the will, knowledge, and power of Allah the Most High are universal, general, all-embracing, and comprehensive, and that the only measure for His sublimity is His works in their totality, and that the only scale for His manifestations is His words which, if all the seas were ink for them, would never be exhausted. For example, “*And Allah’s is the highest similitude,*”(16:60) if the light of the sun – assuming it possessed will and intelligence – were to fall on a dusty atom, could you ask it: “How with all your glory can you stoop to busy yourself with this atom?”

Yes, just as Allah the Most High created the world and made it with the utmost art and perfection, going to great lengths with it, so too He creates the minutest particle and fashions it with the greatest precision and art. In the view of [divine] power, there is no difference between a minute particle and the planets, for the power, knowledge, will, and speech of the Most High are necessary inherent qualities. They are unchanging, and can neither increase nor decrease, nor have degrees, which would cause them to vary. For being the opposite [of power], impotence cannot intervene in it. There is therefore no difference [for it] between an atom and the sun. For contingent beings are equal in regard to existence and non-existence like some scales with two pans: if they hold two suns or two atoms, it takes no more power to raise one and lower the other. In just the same way, creatures are equal in the face of [divine] power, which is necessary and essential. So there can be no comparison between it and the power of contingent beings, which is accidental and varies on the intervention of impotence.

*In Short:* Minute particles and lowly matters are creatures of the Most High, and necessarily known by Him, so indisputably and self-evidently He will speak about them. It is due to this mystery that He says: “*Should He not know, He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries [and] is well-acquainted [with them].*”(67:14) How should the One who knows [them] not mention them or speak of them, since He is the Mighty, the Wise?

### ***The Second Fallacy***

They claim that they see in the Qur’an’s style an effigy of man behind the Speaker, by reason of its mentioning insignificant things and common-

place matters in the manner of human discussions. But do these people who close their eyes [to the truth] not know that speech looks to the speaker in [only] one respect, and to the one addressed in several, as is required by eloquence, which is [to speak] in accordance with [the understanding] of the one addressed. Thus, since the one addressed is man, and what is discussed is his circumstances, and the aim is to ensure that he understands it, the Qur’an assumes the garb of human style, blended with human emotions and called “divine condescension to the minds of men,” to put man’s mind at rest. You surely know that when you speak with a child, you have to speak in childish language.

• *If you were to ask:* Aren’t the triviality and baseness of things opposed to the sublimity of [divine] power and purity of [divine] speech?

*You would be told:* Their insignificance, lowliness, ugliness and so on are only in regard to their outer face (*mulk*) and the face that looks to us and appears to our superficial view. Apparent causes have been put to act as intermediaries in this aspect, to absolve divine sublimity [of any fault]. However, the inner face of things (*malakūtiyyat al-ashyā’*) is entirely translucent and exalted. This aspect is the locus of [divine] power, and there is nothing outside it. Thus, on the one hand, [divine] sublimity necessitates the placing of causes outwardly, and on the other unity and dignity demand that power and speech encompass all things. However, a Qur’an written in minute particles on an atom is no less eloquent than a Qur’an written in the ink of the stars on the page of the heavens. And the creation of a gnat is of no lesser art than the creation of an elephant. Thus, [divine] speech is the same as [divine] power.

• *If you were to ask:* What then does the apparent insignificance refer to in these parables?

*You would be told:* It refers not to the one relating the parables but to the ones portrayed, and the closer the parables are to the things portrayed the better they are and the higher the level of speech and the more elevated the order of the eloquence. Surely you know that if a king gives his shepherd some suitable clothes and throws a dog an appetizing bone, and so on, it cannot be said that what he has done is an innovation (*bid‘a*) [that is, out of place]; it would be said rather that he had done the best [possible] by giving each what was appropriate. So however insignificant the thing portrayed, its representation is similarly insignificant, and however great it is, its representation is thus. Since idols are the very least of things, Allah sets gnats to pester them. And since worship of them is the most worthless of things, Allah portrays it as a spider’s web.

### ***The Third Fallacy***

*They ask:* “What need is there for such parables, which infer that [the Qur’an] is incapable of setting forth reality?”

*The Answer:* Since the purpose of the Qur’an’s revelation is to guide the masses and they are ordinary people, and ordinary people cannot understand sheer truths and abstract ideas stripped of their imaginings, in His grace and beneficence Allah the Most High clothed the truths in the garments of things familiar to them, to make them more palatable. You have seen this in the discussion about the allegorical verses [in verse 23].

### **The positioning [and relationships] of the verses’ phrases**

The phrase “***Behold, Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that*** (*Inna Allāha lā yastahyī an yaḍriba mathalan mā ba’ūḍatan fa-mā fawqahā*)” refutes and rejects [their] string of objections. It is as though they are asking:

“What is the reason (*ḥikma*) Allah the Most High speaks with men, and reproaches them and complains about them, for it is a sign that they too have the power to act in the world? – Especially if [His speech] resembles the conversations people hold among themselves, doesn’t it infer it is human speech? And especially if man’s image is apparent behind the speech? And especially if [He speaks in the form of] allegories and parables, for this infers the inability to depict reality? And especially if the parables are commonplace, for this is a sign that the speaker’s mind is limited? And especially if they [depict] trifling things, for this indicates the speaker’s frivolity? And especially if they are things that do not have to be mentioned and it would be better to avoid? And especially if some are things self-respecting people would not stoop to speak of? And especially if the speaker is someone grand and important? So the Qur’an replies and demolishes this chain from beginning to end with a single blow. It declares: “*Allah does not disdain...*” For the inner face [of things] (*malakūtiyya*) is not contrary to His grandeur and glory, and He neglects or omits nothing. Godhead necessitates this. Hence He portrays insignificant things [to express] insignificant meanings, for wisdom and true (lit. the mystery of) eloquence necessitate this. And hence He propounds commonplace parables since they are conducive to education and guidance. And hence He depicts truths by means of parables since this is necessitated by divine grace and condescension. And hence He chooses to speak in the manner of human conversation since this is necessitated by dominicality (*rubūbiyya*)

and instruction. And hence He speaks with the people since this is demanded by wisdom and the order [of things].

*In Short:* When Allah the Most High deposited the faculty of will (*juz’ ikhtiyārī*) in man and made him the source (*maṣḍar* – lit. verbal noun, infinitive) of the world of actions, He sent His word (*kalām*) in order to set that world in order.

The positioning [with respect to the preceding phrase] of the phrase “**Now, as for those who have attained to faith, they know that it is the truth from their Lord and Sustainer** (*fa-ammā alladhīna āmanū fa-yalamūna annahu al-ḥaqq min rabbihim*):”

With this phrase [the Qur’an] points out the way to prove the statement made by the previous one. It alludes too to the way to repulse ungrounded fears. That is, whoever looks with the light of belief, and from the point of view of Allah the Most High and His power, bearing in mind His wisdom, grace, and dominicality, will know that this is [the parables are] true and [in conformity with] eloquence. But the person who looks from the depths of his soul and from the point of view of contingent beings is bound to attract delusions. This resembles two people who went up hill and down dale till they encountered a number of streams. One of them continued uphill and came to the spring. He tasted the water and found it clear and fresh. [He then descended and] whenever he came across a small piece of water from the tributaries of the streams, he knew it to be good, though this was on the slightest evidence, and no delusions could mislead him however powerful. The other man, however, went downhill and sought the water from the tributaries. He did not [climb to or] see the spring and therefore needed strong evidence so as to know from the small amounts of water he encountered whether or not each bit was good. The least suspicion cast him into doubt. Or it resembles two people between whom is a mirror: one of them looks at the transparent glass, and the other at its coloured back.

*In Short:* When observing the art of the Most High one has to look from His point of view (*min jānibihi*) and noticing His grace and dominicality. This is to look with the light of belief, while delusions – even the most powerful of them – become flimsier than a spider’s web. But if one looks at [divine art] from the point of view of contingent beings, with the narrow view of a customer, frail delusions will grow powerful in his sight and the truth will be hidden from him, just like a gnat’s wing may prevent the eye seeing Mount Judi.

The positioning of the phrase “*whereas those who reject faith (wa ammā alladhīna kafarū):*”

Having pointed out the way to understand the wisdom in the parables, (*tamthīlāt*) which is to look with the light of belief from the point of view of the Necessary Existent, it explains here the opposite way, which is the source of delusions and distractions. This is because it looks from the side of the soul, through the darkness of unbelief, which imagines everything to be dark, and with a sickness of the heart that causes even the slightest delusion to become oppressive. Then [such a person] strays from the path of truth, then he vacillates, then he starts to ask questions, and then he denies. So concisely and allusively, indicating [the disbelievers’] questioning that smacks of denial, the Qur’an says, “‘*What could Allah mean by this parable?*’ (*mādhā arāda Allāhu bi-hādhā mathalan*)” instead of ‘they do not know,’ although clearly this would have corresponded to [the “*they know*” in] the previous phrase.

The positioning of the phrase “*By it He causes many to go astray, and many He guides aright (yuḍillu bihi kathīran wa yahdī bi-hi kathīran):*”

This is the answer to [the unbelievers’] question [in the previous phrase]. For to be exceedingly concise, it makes the result [of the parable; that is, guidance and misguidance] the ultimate reason for it (*al-‘illa al-ghā’iyya*), [that is, guidance and misguidance are not the underlying reason for the parable; its purpose is to admonish and offer guidance to the people] and they are asking: “Why is it like that? Why isn’t its miraculousness obvious? Why doesn’t it have to be Allah’s word? Why does it provide the opportunity for doubts and delusion through these parables?” So the Qur’an [dispels all these questions] saying: “*By it He causes many to go astray, and many He guides aright.*”

This is because [the Qur’an] increases in light those who ponder over [the parables] in the light of belief, while it increases in darkness those who ponder over them in the darkness of disbelief [with a view to] criticizing them. And this is because [the Qur’an] is speculative (*naẓarī*) and not obvious (*badīhī*). And this is so that elevated pure spirits may be distinguished from lowly turbid ones. And this is so that eminent dispositions may be differentiated through their progress from wicked ones. And this is so that sound natures may be picked out through their development, striving, and exertion from among corrupted rotten ones. And this necessitates man’s examination. And this requires his being tested and tried. And this demands his accountability due to the obligations laid on him (*al-taklīf*), to perfect him and his happiness. How concisely the Qur’an replies!

• *If you were to ask:* You say that the obligations laid on human beings and their accountability are to secure their happiness, but they are the reason for most of them being wretched. If it hadn’t been for this accountability there wouldn’t have been such an enormous difference between people?

*You would be told:* Just as Allah the Most High entrusted man with the faculty of will (*al-juz’ al-ikhtiyārī*) and charged him (*al-taklīf*) through it (lit. through its acquisition – *bi-kasbihi*) to form the world of voluntary actions; so too He made this obligation the means of watering the unlimited seeds planted in the human spirit and their germination. If it were not for that obligation, those seeds would not sprout. If you study the history (*aḥwāl*) of mankind deeply, you will see that all advances of the [human] spirit, and divine perfecting of the conscience, and progress of the intellect, and the productive advances in thought which are so great as to be astounding, have occurred only due to man’s accountability, and [those faculties] being awakened by the sending of prophets, and the fecundation of religious laws, and the inspiration of the religions. Had it not been for them human beings would have remained as animals and those perfections of the conscience and moral virtues would have been non-existent. A minority accepted the responsibility [and undertook the obligations] voluntarily and they both won happiness for themselves and were the means of the happiness of the human race. As for the majority, quantitatively, even though they may have disbelieved in their hearts and in those areas in which they were free, since not every attitude and attribute of every disbeliever arises from his disbelief, because the prophets aroused the sensibilities of the human conscience and awakened its moral sense, the sacred laws [they brought] have been heeded and their works are known, [and the majority] has willy-nilly accepted some of the obligations [with which man is charged].

• *If you were to say:* How can happiness for the few and wretchedness for the majority be happiness for the human race, that the Shari’a may be a mercy? For the happiness of the human race could be [attained] only through [the happiness] of all or [at least] the majority.

*You would be told:* If you have a hundred eggs and you put them under a hen, and twenty hatch and eighty do not, wouldn’t you say that you had brought the species up to full-strength? For twenty living chicks are equal to thousands of eggs. Or if you have a hundred date stones and you [plant and] water them, and twenty become towering date palms while eighty rot, wouldn’t you say that the water was happiness for the species? Or if you

have some metal ore and you smelt it and one fifth becomes gold and the rest turns to dross and ashes, isn't the fire the means of its perfection and excellence (lit. happiness)? You can make further examples in the same way. Consequently, it is only through striving that elevated sensibilities unfold and [high] morals develop, and it is only through the confrontation of opposites and competition that things are perfected. You surely know that if a government or state exerts itself its courage grows, but if it gives up striving its courage expires. [That is, if it abandons *jihād*, it loses its courage and enterprise.] Reflect on this!

Now the positioning of the phrase “**but none does he cause thereby to go astray save those who forsake [the path]** (*wa mā yuḍillu bi-hi illā al-fāsiqīn*):”

Because of the vagueness of the [previous] phrase, “*He causes many to go astray*,” this one alerts the listener’s mind, and perturbed, he asks: “Who are these people who go astray? What is the reason? And how can darkness come from the light of the Qur’an?” So [the Qur’an] answers: “[They go astray] because they are depraved and have deviated from the right path (*al-fāsiqūn*). Misguidance is the penalty for their depravity. And because of it the light becomes fire for them, and the brightness, darkness.” You surely know that sunlight putrefies filth.

[Various] aspects [of sinfulness, depravity (*fisq*)] are described in [the following verse]: “**Who break Allah’s covenant after it has been ratified, and cut asunder what Allah has bidden to be joined, and spread corruption on earth** (*Alladhīna yanquḍūna ‘ahd Allāhi min ba’d mithāqihī wa yaqṭa’ūna mā amara Allāhu bi-hi an yūṣala wa yuḥsidūna fī al-arḍ*):”

This elucidates and spells out [what] depravity [consists of], for it is a renunciation of truth and to exceed the limits and quit the hard shell [of right-guidance]. It is either excess (*al-ifrāṭ*) or deficiency (*al-tafrīt*) in the three powers of intellect, anger, and animal appetites. And excess and deficiency lead to rebellion in the face of the evidences that are like the divine covenants (*al-‘uhūd*) in creation (*al-fiṭra*). They also lead to sickness in personal life; the first attribute [in the above verse] indicates this. So too they incite rebellion in the face of social life and break the bonds and laws of society. The second attribute indicates this. They also cause corruption and revolution, which spoil the order of the earth, as indicated by the third attribute. Yes, when his intellect exceeds the bounds of moderation the depraved person breaks the bonds of the tenets of belief and smashes their strong shell, that is, eternal life. And when his power of anger oversteps the

mark he smashes the shell of social life. And when his power of animal appetites exceeds the limits and he follows his desires, compassion for his fellow humans vanishes from his heart and he corrupts the people and makes difficulties for them in whatever he becomes involved in, and causes harm to the human race and spoils the order of the earth.

The positioning of the phrase: “*these it is that shall be the losers (ūlā’ika hum al-khāsirūn)*.”

Having mentioned the crimes of the depraved and scared them, [the Qur’an] reinforces its threat [by mentioning] their ends and punishment, so as to scare them more effectively. And it says: “They make a loss by trading the hereafter for this world and exchanging guidance for their own caprices.”

### **Now let’s begin [analyzing] the positioning [and relationships] of the phrases’ parts**

Consider this: The verses and their phrases and parts resemble the hands of a clock that show the seconds, the minutes, and the hours. If one proves one thing, another corroborates it to its own extent, and the other assists it as far as it can. Similarly, if this one wants something, that one helps, and the other aids it in such a way that it recalls the following lines:

*Our phrases are diverse but your beauty is one,  
And all of us do point to that beauty.*

It is by virtue of this mystery that the Qur’an’s fluency and its pre-eminent level and the fineness of its embroideries reach the degree of miraculousness.

The parts of the phrase: “**Behold, Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that** (*Inna Allāha lā yastahyī an yaḍriba mathalan mā ba’ūḍatan fa-mā fawqahā*):”

Consider this: The [particle] “*Inna – Behold!* (lit. indeed, verily)” is corroborative and [its purpose is] to dispel hesitation and rebut denial. It also indicates the succession of vacillating [doubts] mentioned previously.

The word “*Allāh*” is [used] to alert [the listener’s] mind against the error of [making the] comparison mentioned above.

The choice of “*does not disdain* (lit. is not ashamed to) (*lā yastahyī*)” rather than ‘does not desist or refrain from,’ – although shame (*al-ḥayā*), which is a retraction of the self, is impossible in reference to the Most High and it is futile to negate the impossible – indicates that since such things as wisdom, eloquence and so on necessitate a fine parable, there is no reason

to refrain [from propounding one] except shame, and since shame is impossible for the Most High, there is absolutely no reason to refrain [from propounding one]. Thus, it silences [the unbelievers] most effectively and subtly. Moreover, it alludes by means of [the literary device by which similar forms express different meanings, called] *mushākala al-ṣuḥba*, to the foolish words they were saying: “Isn’t Muhammad’s lord ashamed by these parables about trifling matters?” [That is, the Qur’an uses the expression they used in order to refute what they were saying.]

The choice of “*to propound (an yaḍriba)*” rather than ‘of lowly parables,’ although the latter would have been more appropriate, indicates a stylistic subtlety which is that a parable resembles striking a seal in order to affirm and authenticate [something], or minting a coin to set the value and credibility [of money]. And this suggests that fine parables and comparisons repel doubts and suspicions. Similarly, it indicates that parables are a well-known and valued device, for propounding examples is an acknowledged method.

Furthermore, the choice of “*to propound (an yaḍriba)*” [which is in the imperfect tense] rather than [the verbal noun] ‘*ḍarb*’ although this is more concise, is to indicate that the source of [the unbelievers’] objections is the triviality [of the thing represented in the parables, not the parables themselves, which are useful.] For being a verb, “*to propound*” is not independent [self-sufficient]; it seems insubstantial, so the mind (lit. aim, intention, goal) passes lightly onto the object. However, because [the verbal noun] ‘*ḍarb*’ is independent, it is dense and impedes the mind.

[The word] “*a parable (mathalan)*” alludes to the particular attribute of parabolic comparisons (*al-tamthīl*), which is to depict abstract things with concrete ones, and represent the imaginary with the real, and portray the hidden with the manifest. And this is a sign that they repel doubts and suspicions.

The indefiniteness of “*a parable*” indicates that what is noteworthy is the parable itself, not the character [it assumes through the thing it portrays], which is related to what is demanded by the context (*al-maqām*) or the situation of the thing it depicts.

The generality of “*what* (lit. the parable of ‘what’ is a gnat) (*mā*)” indicates that the rule [of parables] is a general one, so that the reply should not be [considered] particular to their objections; [and it should be understood that] the thing depicted will take whatever form necessitated and deemed appropriate by [the science of] rhetoric (eloquence – *al-balāgha*).

The specific [mention of] “*a gnat (ba’ūḍatan)*” looks to the frequent parabolic use of them by the masters of eloquence (*al-bulaghā*) in such expressions as: “Smaller than a gnat.” “Stubborner than a gnat.” “He asked me for a gnat’s brain.” “Rarer than a gnat’s brain.” “The gnat told the bee: Hold on tight and I’ll fly off!” “In Allah’s sight the world is not equal to a gnat’s wing.” And so on. It also suggests the flimsiness of their doubts.

The meaning of “*something [even] less than that* (lit. what is above, over, or more than) (*mā fawqahā*)” is what is smaller than it in size or what is of higher value according to eloquence, or what is lower in both value and size. Also, the phrase infers that small things are more remarkable in the view of eloquence, and more exquisite in [their] creation.

Consider this: The parts of these phrases are like silken threads which being brought together display a fine embroidery.

Now the parts of the sentence “*Now, as for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Sustainer – whereas those who reject faith say, ‘What could Allah mean by this parable?’* (*Fa-ammā alladhīna āmanū fa-ya’lamūna annahu al-ḥaqq min rabbihim wa ammā alladhīna kafarū fa-yaqūlūna mādhā arāda Allāh bi-hādhā mathalan*):”

Consider this: The [conjunction] “*Fa- – Now*” [expresses] the branching or ramification (*al-tafīr*) [of this sentence from the previous one], and this indicates an implied proof which yields this sentence with its two parts. That is, [Allah] does not refrain from [propounding] parables because eloquence requires them, and people who are fair-minded know that they are eloquent, true, and Allah’s word. While those who obstinately resist them do not know the wisdom [in them], so are hesitant and ask [about them], then deny [them], then they look on them as trifling. Consequently, since the believer is fair-minded he affirms that the parable is Allah’s word, while because the disbeliever is obdurate, he asks: “What’s the use of this?”

Since “*as for (ammā)*” expresses condition and consequence, [here] it indicates that the predicate [“*they know that it is the truth*”] is the necessary consequence of the subject [“*those who believe*”]; that is, the predicate [to know the truth] is characteristic of the subject [those who believe].

The use of “*those who believe (alladhīna āmanū)*” instead of ‘the believers’ is a clear indication that belief is the reason they know it is the truth, just as knowing it to be the truth is belief.

And the use of “*that it is the truth (annahu al-ḥaqq)*” rather than ‘that this is [most] eloquent,’ although it would have been more apt in this

context, alludes to the [logical] conclusion of their objections, for their purpose is to deny that [the Qur'an] is Allah's word.

The restriction expressed by "*that it is the truth (annahu al-ḥaqq)*" [that is, that being right is restricted to that parable], is a sign that contrary to what they claim, it is [only] this [parable of the gnat] that is approved [by the science of rhetoric] and not found disagreeable. [Accordingly, another metaphor would not be acceptable even if free of defect], for freedom from defect does not prove the perfection [of a thing].

The phrase "*from their Sustainer (min rabbihim)*" indicates that their aim and purpose is to deny [that the parable] is revealed [by their Sustainer].

The [conjunction] "*as for (ammā)*" in "*whereas (lit. as for) those who reject faith (lit. disbelieve) (wa ammā alladhīna kafarū)*" signifies emphasis, corroboration, and particularization.

The substitution of "*those who reject faith (lit. disbelieve)*" for 'the disbelievers,' although the latter is more concise, infers that their denial arises from disbelief and leads to it, as has been mentioned.

And "*[they] say (fa-yaqūlūna)*" is used rather than 'but they do not know,' although as has been mentioned the latter is clearer, because to make allusion is more succinct; that is: the person who disbelieves does not know the truth and this causes him to waver, and this leads [firstly] to denial and then to asking disparaging questions.

Moreover, "*[they] say*" infers that just as they are themselves misguided, so with their words they lead others astray.

Now [the positioning and relationships of] the parts of the phrases "***By it He causes many to go astray, and many He guides aright*** (yuḍillu bihi kathīran wa yahdī bi-hi kathīran):"

Consider this: Here, the arrangement (*al-tartīb*) requires that the second [phrase] comes first [to correspond to the precedence of "*those who believe*" previously in the verse], but since the aim is to refute the [disbelievers'] vacillating, questioning, repugnant objections that smack of denial, "*He causes to go astray*" is of greater importance.

The non-use of the verbal nouns 'guidance' and 'misguidance' and use of the imperfect tense of the verbs indicates that the darkness of their disbelief intensifies proportionately to the gradual revelation [of the Qur'an], just as the believers' faith increases proportionately in luminosity.

Moreover, as the reply [to their question: "*What means Allah by this parable?*"], the verbal form suggests it is elucidating the situations of the two groups, and explaining [the choice of] the reasons [for them].

As for “*many (kathīran)*,” the first, [those who have gone astray], expresses quantity and number, while the second, [the rightly-guided], expresses quality and value. Yes, the generous and noble are numerous [due to their high worth] even if few [in number]. The second “*many*” is also an allusion to the mystery of the Qur’an’s being a mercy for human-kind. Now dwell on this!

The phrase “*but none does He cause thereby to go astray save those who forsake [the path]* (*wa mā yuḍillu bi-hi illā al-fāsiqīn*):”

Consider this: By explaining here who the misguided are, [the Qur’an] allays the doubts, fear, and hesitation [given rise to by] the “*many*” above [“*He causes many to go astray*”], and rejects the accusation that the Qur’an is defective. [It explains] that the source of their misguidance is their depravity, and that the cause of it is what they have done (*kasbuhum*), and that the faults are theirs not the Qur’an’s, and that the creation of misguidance is punishment for their actions. Understand too that each of these phrases elucidates the one preceding it, and is expounded by the one following it, as though each is proof of the preceding and the consequence of the succeeding.

This may be clarified with two lines of reasoning:

*The first is this:* [Allah] does not disdain (lit. is not ashamed) [to propound the parable], because He does not refrain [from doing this], because [the parable] is eloquent, because it is the truth, because it is the word of Allah, because the believer knows this.

*The second is this:* [Allah] does not disdain [to propound the parable], as the deniers say, because they say He should refrain from it, because they do not know the wisdom in it, because they ask what use it is, because they deny it, because they deem it trifling, because they have fallen into misguidance through hearing it, because the Qur’an has led them astray, because in their wickedness they have exceeded the bounds, because they have broken Allah’s covenant, because they have sundered what He joined through His commands both in creation and in the Shari’a, because they spoil the divine order of the earth, consequently they are the losers both in this world by reason of their pangs of conscience, anxious hearts, and desolate spirits, and in the hereafter due to the everlasting torments and divine wrath that shall be visited on them. Ponder now over the fluency of these two sequences!

Now the parts of the sentence “*Who break Allah’s covenant after it has been ratified, and cut asunder what Allah has bidden to be joined, and*

*spread corruption on earth* (*Alladhīna yanquḍūna ‘ahd Allāh min ba’d mithāqihī wa yaqṭa’ūna mā amara Allāh bi-hī an yūṣala wa yufsidūna fī al-ard*):”

Consider this: There is an elevated subtlety in this manner of describing here the depraved, who are doubtful about [the Qur’an’s] miraculous inimitability and composition. It is as though the Qur’an is saying: “It’s not at all unlikely that the depraved should be doubtful and ignorant about the miraculousness and inimitability of the Qur’an’s order, for they can’t see the miraculousness of divine power in the order of the universe, which is the greater Qur’an. For they look on the the universe’s order as [occurring] by chance, and its fruitful changes as purposeless, so the instances of wisdom in it are concealed from them – since their spirits are corrupted. So too, because of their dissolute natures and their rotten folly, they consider the Qur’an’s miraculousness to be a confused muddle and its preliminaries sterile and its fruits bitter.”

The phrase “*break Allah’s covenant* (*yanquḍūna ‘ahd Allāh*):” A high style is indicated here with the use of the word ‘*al-naqḍ*,’ which means undoing the strands of a rope and breaking them, as though the covenant with the Most High were a luminous rope twisted with [divine] wisdom, grace, and will and stretching all the way from pre-eternity to post-eternity. It is manifested in the universe in the form of [its] general order, and has sent out chains to all the species and realms [of beings] and extended the tips of them to the human race. In the human spirit it has bequeathed the legacy of the seeds of [its] potentialities and abilities, which are watered and made to thrive through the faculty of will, [when] regulated by the commands of the Shari‘a; that is, the evidences of the Qur’an and Sunna (*al-dalā’il al-naqliyya*). Thus, the covenant is fulfilled by employing those abilities as they should be, and it is broken by doing the opposite and undoing [the rope and spoiling the order], like believing in some of the prophets and denying others, and accepting some precepts and rejecting others, and approving some verses and disapproving others. And this violates the order, arrangement, and regularity.

Now the phrase “*and cut asunder what Allah has bidden to be joined* (*wa yaqṭa’ūna mā amara Allāhu bi-hī an yūṣala*):” Consider this: The command here embraces legislative (*tashrī’ī*) commands and creational (*takwīnī*) commands both of which are included within the natural laws (*al-qawānīn al-ḥiṣrīyya*) and the laws of divine practice (*al-‘ādāt al-ilāhiyya*). So sundering what the Shari‘a commands to be joined means breaking off

family relations and severing the bonds between the hearts of believers. You can make further examples. And [sundering what is joined by creational commands] means cutting off actions from knowledge, and separating knowledge from intelligence, severing intelligence from innate abilities, and knowledge of Allah from reason, and labour from strength, and *jihad* from courage, and so on. For the giving of strength is a non-material creational command (*amr ma’nawī takwīnī*) to work, and the giving of intelligence is non-material creational command to learn. And so on.

The phrase “*and spread corruption on earth (wa yufsidūna fī al-ard)*” Consider this: In accordance with [the saying] “the more general the calamities the pleasanter they become,” a person who becomes depraved and gets embroiled in the morass wants companions who are similarly embroiled so as to alleviate his terrible plight. Likewise, if [the idea of] revolution settles in someone’s heart, it will lead to the ruin of its perfections and attainments and its high sentiments will gradually decline, and the desire to destroy will born in it. This will make him feel a pleasure at destruction, and he will seek the pleasure by spreading corruption and fomenting revolution.

• *If you were to ask:* How can the whole earth, indicated by the word “*on earth*,” be affected by the corruption of one depraved person?

*You would be told:* That which has order has balance; in fact, the order is based on balance. If even an insignificant thing disturbs the workings of a machine, the machine is affected by it. And a pair of scales holding two mountains in its pans is affected if only a walnut is placed on one of them.

Now the phrase “*these it is that shall be the losers (ūlā’ika hum al-khāsirūn)*”

Consider this: This phrase should have been: “they are the losers since [they did not accept] right-guidance through [the Qur’an].” [It is expressed the way it is to make the following points, concerning:] “*these* (lit. those) (*ūlā’ika*),” and “*they* (*hum*),” and the definite article of “*the losers*,” and its generality:

The purpose of “*these* (lit. those) (*ūlā’ika*)” is to conjure up the idea of something palpable or perceptible (*li-iḥḍār al-maḥsūs*) and this indicates that when the listener hears of their vile situation, it arouses his disgust and makes him angry at them. So he wants to picture them in his imagination in order to vent his anger and express his loathing, and to observe them as their terrible end is described.

The perceptibility indicates that their shameful attributes multiply to the extent they are embodied palpably in the disgusted person’s view. This also alludes to the reason for their loss.

The distance [expressed by “*these* (lit. those) (*ūlā’ika*)”] indicates that they are too far from the way of truth to turn back, and therefore deserve to be censured and execrated, contrarily to those who repent and are within easy reach of return.

“*They (hum)*” indicates that the loss is restricted to them, and that if the believers suffer the loss of some worldly pleasures it is not loss, and that compared with their loss, the loss of some worldly people in their businesses is not loss [either].

The definite article denotes [specific] facts and [classes of things]; that is, anyone who wants to see the truth about the losers should look at them. It is a sign too that their way [results in] pure loss, unlike other sorts of losses, which may contain aspects of gain; the harm is greater. For the definite article is [used] for [things that are] either total or self-evident, or to depict a [specific] fact.

The generality of the loss [that is, its not being defined] indicates [its comprehensiveness]; that is, they have lost by not remaining faithful to the covenant and breaching it; they have lost in [connection with] family relations by severing them, and in [connection with] reform by spreading corruption, and in [connection with] belief through disbelief, and in their wretchedness they have lost eternal happiness.

## Verse 28

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ  
يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

*How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah seeing that you were lifeless and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and then will bring you again to life; and again to Him will you return. (Kayfa takfurūna bi'llāhi wa kuntum amwātan fa-aḥyākum thumma yumītukum thumma yuḥyikum thumma ilayhi turja'un.)*

As in the previous verses, the positioning and composition of this verse has three aspects:

### **The positioning of this verse's meaning in relation to what precedes it**

Consider this: Allah the Most High, having called on the people to worship Him and believe in Him, and having indicated the fundamental beliefs and the injunctions [pertaining to action] and having mentioned their evidences summarily, resumes [the discussion] in this verse and the three subsequent ones by setting out evidences for them and enumerating the bounties that the evidences comprise. The greatest of these bounties is life, indicated by this verse. The continuance of life (*al-baqā'*), that is, life made perfect and complete through the ordering of the heavens and the earth, is indicated by the second verse. Man's superiority and ennoblement over all beings is indicated by the third verse, and his being taught knowledge [is stated] by the fourth.

In respect of their form, these bounties are a proof of [divine] providence and purpose (*dalīl al-'ināya wa'l-ghāya*), so too they are proof of [the obligation of] worship. For it is obligatory to thank the Bestower of Bounties, while reasonably ingratitude is proscribed (*ḥarām*). In respect of reality, [these bounties] are a proof that things are given existence out of nothing

(*dalīl ikhtirāʿī*) [and thus] of the first creation and the resurrection of the dead (*al-mabdaʾ waʾl-maʿād*). Furthermore, just as this verse looks to the preceding ones, so it looks to the earlier ones that discuss the disbelievers and dissemblers. It infers with its amazed rhetorical question that it is hitting them over the head, and condemning, threatening, and intimidating them.

#### **The positioning [and relationships] of the verse's phrases**

Know that here, [the Qur'an] turns from the use of the third person [in the previous verses] to the second person, for previously it was quoting [the disbelievers], now it is addressing them. This is to make a point well-known in eloquence, which is that if one describes a person's iniquities bit by bit, a feeling of anger mounts in [the listener] till if [truly] human he feels compelled to speak with the person face to face. Similarly, if one mentions someone's virtues little by little, the desire to speak with him grows [gradually] stronger till one turns to him and addresses him directly.<sup>74</sup> Thus, since the Qur'an was revealed in the styles and modes [of speech] of the Arabs, it turns to [the disbelievers] and addresses [them directly] saying: "*How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah?* (lit. how can you disbelieve in Allah?)."

Know too that since the aim here is to set out the proofs of the fundamental matters mentioned above, including belief and worship, and to refute disbelief and prevent ingratitude for bounties; and since the clearest evidences are those derived from the chain of human circumstances, and the greatest bounties are those hanging on the stem of that sequence and found in its nodes; it says: "*seeing that you were lifeless and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and then will bring you again to life; and again to Him will you return.*" This indicates the wondrous inter-linked sequence, which has five nodes, from the stem of which hang the bunches of bounties. We shall now set out five matters to decipher those nodes.

**The First Matter** is about "*seeing that you were lifeless (wa kuntum amwātan).*" While physically man consists of lifeless particles [once] scattered through the world, you see that they are brought under a particular law and specific order. Then, while they are hidden and silent in the world of the elements you notice that they are transposed to the world of animate beings through a specific rule and order which betoken purpose and

74. This device called *iltifāt* is widely used in Arabic. See, page 27 fn 13 above.

wisdom. Then, while scattered through that world, you observe that they group together in extraordinary fashion and become sperm. Then through a series of revolutions they become clinging blood-clots, then lumps of flesh, then flesh and bone, and so on and so forth. Although in each of these stages [the particles] are more perfect than in the previous one, they are relatively dead and lifeless compared to the subsequent one.

- *If you were to ask:* Death is the absence of life and its cessation, and [the particles] had no life that it should cease?

*You would be told:* Death here is metaphorical, to prepare the mind to accept the third and fourth ‘nodes’.

**The Second Matter**, concerning “*and He gave you life (fa-aḥyākum).*” Consider this: Life is the most wondrous and subtle miracle of [divine] power. It is also the greatest of all bounties and the clearest of all proofs of the first creation and the resurrection of the dead (*al-mabda’ wa’l-ma’ād*).

*[Life’s] finest and most obscure aspect is this:* The lowest form of life is plant life, and its first level is the awakening of the embryo or vital cells (*al-‘uqdat al-ḥayātiyya*) in the seeds. Despite being so obvious, widespread, and familiar, this awakening has remained a mystery to human science from the time of Adam till the present.

*The aspect of [life’s] being the supreme bounty:* The only relations a lifeless body has are with the place it is located and the things that befall it; it is single, alone, even if a mountain. But you see that the moment life enters a tiny body like a bee, the bee can form relations with the whole universe and may do trade with all species [of beings]. It may then say: “The universe is my home and it’s just like my property.” For on passing to the level of animal life, you see that it roams with its senses and by means of them has disposal over [other beings] in all parts of the universe. Particular relations, commerce, and love are established between it and other species [of beings]. Especially if it rises to the level of human life, you see that it travels through the worlds through the light of intellect. It has disposal over the corporeal world and roams in the spiritual world and makes peregrinations through the World of Similitudes. And as it journeys to those worlds, so they travel to him by being reflected in the mirror of his spirit. He then has the right to say: “The world was created for me through the grace of Allah the Most High!” Thus, his life becomes multiform and expands [to include] physical life, and moral life, corporeal life, and spiritual life, each of which embraces many levels. In fact, it might well be said that just as light makes colours and bodies visible, so life reveals beings and makes

them evident. It is life that makes an atom a world. And it is life that is the means of all the world being bestowed on every living being individually, and this without confusion or division except for a small minority of human beings.

*The aspect of life that is the clearest proof of both the Maker and the resurrection of the dead.* Consider this: The transference and spontaneous change of a number of lifeless particles from one situation and grouping to another opposing one without the intervention of any reasonable cause, is a decisive proof. Indeed, by its nature life is the purest and most sublime truth. In neither its outer (*al-mulk*) aspect nor its inner (*al-malakūt*) aspect is there any soil or blemish, for both are subtle. In fact, the lowest most insignificant animate being is also exalted. It is due to this mystery that no apparent cause intervenes between life and the hand of power, for [the latter's] contact is not contrary to its dignity, although as has been stated previously, apparent causes are [otherwise] placed to preserve the dignity of divine power from contact with things that to the superficial view are inferior.

*You have already heard about that aspect of life which forms the clearest proof of the first creation and the resurrection of the dead, so here we shall just summarize it for you:* Whoever studies life and follows the progressive elementary stages of the body, will see the parts dispersed through the world of atoms. Then he will observe that they have been clothed in another form in the world of the elements. Then he will encounter them in the world of animate beings in another situation. Then he will meet them in sperm, then in a blood clot, then as a lump of flesh. Then he will see that they have suddenly assumed a form in the midst of these transformations. He will observe that throughout these revolutions [they follow] regular motions according to specific laws, from which it is apparent that each particle was programmed at the first stage and as though charged with the duty of travelling to a suitable position in a living body. The person grasps with his mind that it is intentionally driven and purposively sent. Now the second life will appear to him far easier, simpler, and more possible [than the first], and he will feel convinced in his heart.

Thus, this phrase, “*and He gave you life,*” is a proof of the following one, “*then will He cause you to die,*” and both together they form a proof in the face of the denial implied by “*how? (kayfa)*” [in this verse, 2:28].

***The Third Matter***, regarding “*then will He cause you to die.*”

Consider this: The verse “*He who created death and life*”(67:2) shows that death is not annihilation and absolute non-existence; it is rather an act,

a change of abode, and the spirit's liberation from its place of confinement. Moreover, the innumerable signs and tokens human beings have witnessed up to the present have planted in their minds the conviction and surmise that after death man is immortal in one respect, and what has immortality is his spirit. Thus, the existence of this inherent property in an individual is evidence of its existence in the race as a whole, because it is essential. Consequently [in accordance with the rule of logic], the particular proposition necessitates the universal one. Hence, death is a miracle of [divine] power the same as life is; it is not non-existence caused by the absence of the conditions of life.

• *If you were to ask:* How can death be a bounty, threaded [with others] on the string of bounties?

*You would be told:*

*Firstly:* Because it is the introduction to everlasting happiness, and the introduction to something is like the thing itself, whether good or bad, for whatever the obligatory depends on is obligatory, and whatever leads to the proscribed is proscribed.

*Secondly:* And because according to investigative scholars among the Sufis, for the individual person it means being saved from what seems to be a prison filled with vicious animals and [being taken to] a broad plain.

*Thirdly:* And because for human beings it is the supreme bounty, for they would otherwise suffer appalling wretchedness.

*Fourthly:* And because according to some people it is a sought-after bounty, for due to his weakness and impotence [man] cannot bear the burdensome responsibilities of life and the pressures of its tribulations and the pitilessness of the elements. Death for such people is a door [through which they may] escape.

***The Fourth Matter***, regarding “*and then will bring you again to life.*”

Consider this: As indicated by the verse “*Twice has thou caused us to die, just as twice thou hast brought us to life,*”(40:11) and as is indicated by [the above phrase] being followed by “*and again to Him will you return,*” bearing in mind the Qur'an's conciseness, [it may be said that these] point to both the life of the grave, and [the resurrected] life at the resurrection of the dead.

• *If you were to ask:* If a person is incinerated and his ashes are thrown to the wind, how could he be thought to experience the life of the grave?

*You would be told:* According to the Sunnis, the body is not a condition of life, so the spirit may be attached to a few particles.

• *And if you were to ask:* How can one conceive of the torments of the grave, for if one placed an egg on the chest of a corpse and left it there for days, not the slightest movement would be felt in it. So how could there be life and torment?

*You would be told:* The World of Similitudes (*al-'ālam al-mithālī*) has proved it, in the relevant places; indeed, its existence is certain according to the punctilious divine scholars. That world [of Similitudes] is characterized by its embodying meanings, transforming accidents into substance, and making mutable things immutable. The eyes that look to it from this manifest world are true dreams, true illuminations (*kashf*), and wraith-like bodies, for these all intimate its existence. The Intermediate Realm (*'ālam al-barzakh*) is a firmer reality than the World of Similitudes, which is its image or exemplification. While the World of Dreams is the shadow of the latter [intermediate] world, and the World of Imagination is the shadow of the World of Dreams. These bodies are as transparent as mirrors.

Now, if you have understood this, consider the World of Dreams and think of a person who is sleeping near you. He is resting peacefully and silently, but in his world he is fighting and being wounded by the blows he receives, or is bitten by a snake and he suffers pain at this. If it were possible for you to enter his dream, you would say to him: “Hey! Don’t feel hopeless and angry! This isn’t real [it’s a dream]!” You would swear it a thousand times but he would not believe you, and would say: “Can’t you see that I’ve been wounded and the pain I’m suffering? Can’t you see the man and his sword and the snake that’s hissing at me?” For the significations of his painful shoulder or cold in his head had been embodied as a cutting sword, for the result was the same. Or he imagined in the form of a snake what a betrayal that had wounded his heart had signified for him, for the pain was the same. Friend! Now that you have seen this in the shadow of the World of Similitudes, [the World of Dreams,] wouldn’t you accept it in the Intermediate Realm, the reality of which is far firmer and more distant from us?

“*Will bring you again to life,*” in regard to the life of the hereafter: the life of the hereafter is the outcome of all the world. If it were not for that life, there would be no fixed and constant reality, and all truths – such as bounties – would be transformed into calamities. You can think of further examples in the same way. We summarized its proofs when expounding “*And in the hereafter they have certain faith.*”(2:5)

**The Fifth Matter**, regarding “*and again to Him will you return (thumma*

*ilayhi turja'ūn).*” This is the final node in this sequence, so consider the following:

The Creator manifested His power, combining opposites in this world of change (*'ālam al-kawn wa'l-fasād*) for [many] subtle instances of wisdom, and He placed apparent causes and intermediaries to display His dignity, and determined the chains of cause and effect. Then, at the resurrection of the dead when the universe is purified and [opposites] are separated out and join forces, causes will be removed and intermediaries will fall away and the veil shall be raised, and each person will see his Maker and recognize his true Owner.

#### ***An Appendix Summarizing the Positioning of the Phrases***

Consider this: Having rebutted the disbelief implied by the rhetorical question “*How? (kayfa),*” and having prompted the peoples’ amazement at it, the Most High offers [them] proof with what follows the circumstantial “*and*” (*al-wāw al-ḥāliyya*); that is, the four mighty transformations, all of which and each of which testify to the necessity of belief. Each transformation comprises numerous stages and degrees, and each is the preliminary and ‘stomach’ of the one that follows it. From the first stage of the first transformation till the last stage of the last transformation the fundament of the living body is constantly renewed. It casts away one shell and is clothed in one more perfect, then it discards that and is dressed in one finer, then it throws that away and puts on a better form, and so on and so forth. It continuously swaps its form for one more perfect till it reaches the acme of perfection and there it comes to rest on the establishment of eternal happiness. And all this is in accordance with a specified order and regular laws.

With “*seeing that you were lifeless*” it indicates the first transformation, which comprises [numerous] stages the last of which leads to “*and He gave you life,*” which points to the second transformation, which is the most wondrous of the truths of the world. It too comprises many stages the last of which concludes in the transformation of “*then will He cause you to die,*” which also has many stages pertaining to the Intermediate Realm. This finishes in the transformation of “*and then will bring you again to life,*” which comprises many stages pertaining to the grave and then to the resurrection of the dead, and is concluded with [the truth of] “*and again to Him will you return.*” How can anyone who studies these transformations attentively be so audacious as to deny [them]?

**Now we commence with the positioning [and relationships] of the constituents of the phrases**

The first phrase, that is, “*How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah seeing that you were lifeless? (Kayfa takfurūna bi’llāhi wa kuntum amwātan):*”

The interrogative form is [used] here to call attention to [the disbelievers’] error so that they might see it themselves and come to think fairly and acknowledge [Allah].

“*How (kayfa)*” infers through the denial of the circumstantial sentence necessitated by “*how*” that their disbelief is [in reality] non-existence.

The use of the second person in “*you refuse to acknowledge Allah* (lit. you disbelieve)” indicates, as was discussed above, [Allah’s] intense anger [at them], and the non-use of ‘do you not believe’ instead of “*you disbelieve*” indicates their extreme obduracy, for they hold back from belief, for which there are evidences, and accept disbelief for the futility of which there are manifold proofs.

The circumstantial [conjunction] “*and (wa)*” (*al-wāw al-ḥālīyya*) in “*seeing that* (lit. and) *you (wa kuntum)*” implies an unstated phrase. [The conjunction indicates that “*kuntum amwātan*” is circumstantial (*ḥāl*) to the verb “*takfurūn.*” The circumstantial word or phrase has to be together with the factor governing it (*‘āmil dhī-l-ḥāl*). Whereas there are four phrases here, two of which refer to the past (are in the perfect tense) and two of which refer to the future are (in the imperfect tense). They are therefore opposed to the rule of simultaneity. Therefore the circumstantial “*and*” implies an unstated sentence or phrase], which is: “*seeing that* (lit. and) **you know that you were lifeless** (lit. dead).” [In this way, the words “you know” are circumstantial (*ḥāl*) to the doer of the verb “*takfurūn –* (lit.) *you disbelieve.*”]<sup>75</sup>

• *If you were to ask:* They know the first life and death, but they don’t know they are from Allah. Also they don’t accept the second life or agree that they will return to Allah the Most High?

*You would be told:* It is a rule of eloquence to accord the ignorant man the status of a knowing or learned one [that is, not to call ignorance ignorance] if there are clear evidences to dispel his ignorance. Since reflection on the stages of the first death and first life compels one to acknowledge the Maker and knowledge of them convinces one intellectually about the

75. See, *Īṣārātū’l-Ī’caz* [Abdūlmecid], 258.

second life, [the disbelievers] as though had knowledge of that sequence [of events].

The use of the second person in “*you (kuntum)*,” indicates that they had a specific existence in the world of minute particles too. The particles did not come together haphazardly and become a particular body by chance.

And the choice of “*you were lifeless* (lit. dead) (*amwātan*)” rather than ‘lifeless, inanimate (*jamādāt*)’ or ‘particles’ alludes to the meaning of the verse “*Has there not been over man a long period of time, when he was nothing – [not even] mentioned?*” (76:1)

Now the phrase: “**and He gave you life** (*fa-ahyākum*):”

• *If you were to ask:* The conjunction “*fa- – and*” denotes succession and contact [that is, there should be no ‘distance’ between what precedes and succeeds it], but doesn’t it interrupt the stages and isn’t there a long interval between death or lifeless beings and life?

*You would be told:* The “*fa-*” indicates the source of the proof of the Maker, and that is the transformation of particles spontaneously from an inanimate to an animate state without the intervention of a reasonable cause, which compels the mind to acknowledge the Maker. Moreover, the stages in the conditions of inanimate beings are defective and inconstant, and are characterized by [swift] succession.

And the choice of “*He gave you life (ahyākum)*” rather than ‘(lit.) you became alive’ (*ṣirtum ahyā’an*) is for clarification; that is, “you became alive and this was possible only through the Maker’s power. It has to be concluded therefore that it is Allah the Most High who gives life.”

Then the substitution of “**then will He cause you to die** (*thumma yumīt-ukum*)” for ‘you will die’ (*tamūtūn*) indicates, as has been mentioned, that death is a vast act of [divine] power in accordance with the measuring of divine determining (*qadar*). You have surely noticed that it is only a tiny minority who live out their full natural span. This makes one realize that death is not a natural consequence. It is the dissolution of the body, not the extinction of the spirit; it is indeed, the liberation of the spirit.

In the phrase “**and then He will bring you again to life** (*thumma yuhyīkum*),” “*then (thumma)*” indicates the intervention of the Intermediate Realm with its strange wonders.

In the phrase “**and again to Him will you return** (*thumma ilayhi turja’ūn*),” “*then*” indicates the existence of the great veil, while its raising, and the repulsion of causes and dismissal of intermediaries are indicated by “*to Him will you return.*”

• *If you were to ask:* Returning to Allah the Most High necessitates having come from Him in the first place, and because of this some people have imagined there to be union [with Allah] and some Sufis have fallen into doubt?

*You would be told:* Just as in this world there is existence and its continuance, so in the hereafter there is existence and its continuance. In this world of flux and change existence emanates from the hand of power without intermediary, but [its] continuance is encompassed by composition and decomposition, and the disposal of power and change, and for the instances of wisdom mentioned above causes intervene [in it]. But in the hereafter both existence and [its] continuance will appear [directly] from the hand of power with all their necessities and compositions, and everything will know its True Owner. If you think about this, you will understand the meaning of “*return*.”

## Verse 29

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَىٰ  
السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

*It is He who has created for you all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens, and has fashioned them into seven heavens; and of all things He has full knowledge. (Hū alladhī khalaqa la-kum mā fī'l-ard jamī'an thumma astawā ilā al-samā' fa-sawwāhunna saba' samāwāt wa hū bi-kulli shay'in 'alīm.)*

This verse too has three important facets.

### **The positioning of the verse as a whole in relation to the previous verse**

In the previous verse disbelief and ingratitude were disproved by means of evidences pertaining to man's self (*al-dalā'il al-anfusiyya*) and these were the stages of human [development], and now this verse points out evidences in the outside world (*al-dalā'il al-āfāqiyya*). Similarly, the previous verse indicated the bounties of existence and life, while this verse indicates the bounty of permanent existence (*al-baqā'*). Again, in the previous one there was proof of the Maker and matters preliminary to the resurrection of the dead, while this verse indicates the realization of the resurrection and the dispelling of doubts, as though [the disbelievers] were asking: "Where does it come from, this value man has? Why does he have such importance? And what is his position in Allah's sight that He should bring about the resurrection of the dead on account of him?" So the Qur'an replies through the indications of this verse: "Man has high value as is evidenced by the heavens and earth being subjugated [to him] for his use. He also has vast importance as is evidenced by the fact that Allah did not create him for creation, but created creation for him. He also has a [high] place in Allah's sight as is evidenced by the fact that Allah did not give existence to the world for itself, but for man, and He gave man existence that he might

worship Him. It is to be concluded from this that man is superior and pre-eminent and not like the animals, and that he is worthy of receiving the jewel of “*and again to Him will you return.*”

### **The positioning of the verse’s phrases**

Consider this: The word “*all (jami’an)*” in the first phrase, the word “*then (thumma)*” in the second, and “*seven (sab’a)*” in the third all require investigation. We shall discuss them in three matters:

#### ***The First Matter***

*If you were to ask:* This verse indicates that everything on the earth is for man’s use, but how can one conceive of Zayd for example making use of every part of the earth? And how could Habib and ‘Ali derive benefit from a stone at the foot of a mountain in the middle of an island in the Pacific Ocean? And how can ‘Amr utilize Zayd’s property? But this verse and others like it suggest that all of it is for each person without being divided up. Moreover, how with their vastness can the sun and moon and so on be for Zayd and ‘Amr and their main purpose be their tiny benefits? And how can harmful things be useful for human beings? For there is nothing vague or inaccurate in the Qur’an and exaggeration is not in keeping with true eloquence?

*You would be told:* Consider the following six points, which will put such doubts to flight:

**The First:** As has been mentioned, it is characteristic of life that it makes the particular universal, and the part into a whole, the single into a collectivity, and the restricted absolute, and the individual into a world. Thus, each member of all the species becomes like a living race or people and the world becomes its house, and it comes to have relations with all things.

**The Second:** As you know, there are in the world a fixed order, and firm arrangement, and elevated principles, and constant fundamental laws, making it like a clock or machine. And just as each cog-wheel, indeed each tooth of each cog, and even every part of each tooth, plays a part however minor in the working order of the machine, so too through the workings of the machine it has an effect on the machine’s utility and its production. In the same way, through its existence [every being] is in some way useful for living beings, the chief and leader of which is the human race.

**The Third:** As has reached your ears in previous discussions, no [being] obstructs [other beings] in regard to benefiting [from things]. For just as the

sun in its entirety is Zayd’s and its light is his place of relaxation and promenading, so in its entirety is it ‘Amr’s and a garden for him. If for example Zayd were all alone in the world, he would benefit from it no more than if he were together with all the world’s people – with the exception of that part that looks to ‘the two caves,’ [like food, for these might be the object of scrummaging and obstruction].

**The Fourth:** The universe does not have only one fine facet; it has layer upon layer of different, general facets the benefits of which [also] have numerous general and interconnected facets. And the ways of utilizing them are numerous and various. For example, if you have a garden, you benefit from it in one way and the people benefit in another, by receiving pleasure from it through the faculty of sight for instance. For of course man derives benefit through his five external senses, his inner faculties, and his body and spirit, and also by means of his intellect and heart, in his life both in this world and in the hereafter, and from the point of view of taking lessons; you can think of further examples in the same way. There is nothing preventing him utilizing any of these facets of anything on the earth, or even in the world.

**The Fifth:**

• *If you were to ask:* The verses here and others in other places indicate that this vast world was created for human beings and that their utilization of it is the ultimate aim of its creation. However, the planet Saturn, which is larger than the earth, is not proportionately more beneficial for man; it is just a sort of adornment and pale light. So how could this be an ultimate reason [for its creation]?

*You would be told:* A person who profits [from a thing] loses himself in the facet of it that he utilizes, he focuses his mind on it and forgets everything else, and he looks at everything else from his own point of view. Also, [in his view] the aims and purpose of a thing are confined to the facet that looks to himself. Hence there is nothing exaggerated or inaccurate if in the context of gracious bestowal it is said in connection with that person: “Although Saturn’s Creator gave it existence for thousands of instances of wisdom, each of which has thousands of facets, and every facet can be benefited from in thousands of ways, He created it for that person to benefit from.”

**The Sixth:** As you noted earlier, for sure man is small but [in meaning] he is great, hence for him some minor, particular benefit becomes universal and great. So there is nothing futile and useless.

*The Second Matter* concerns “*then (thumma).*”

This verse indicates that the earth was created before the heavens, while the verse “*And after that, the earth: wide has He spread its expanse*”(79:30) shows that the heavens were created before the earth. Then the verse “*the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder*”(21:30) indicates that they were created together and then split apart as (lit. from) the same matter.

Understand secondly that the teachings (*naqliyāt*) of the Shari‘a suggest that Allah the Most High created firstly a substance, that is, matter, then He manifested [His power] on it and made a part of it steam and a part fluid. Then through his manifestation the fluid part thickened and became froth. Out of this He created the earth or the seven globes of the earths. Then a sky was formed for each of these earths out of the wafting atmosphere. Then He expanded the steamy matter and arranged the [seven] heavens out of it, planting the stars in them. So the heavens took form containing the nuclei of the stars.

According to the assumptions and theories of modern science, the solar system, together with the heavens in which it floats, were a simple substance which was transformed into a sort of steam. Out of this, some fiery liquescent matter was formed, part of which cooled down and solidified. Then due to its motion the liquescent matter threw off [into space] sparks and pieces which broke up. These became compressed and turned into the planets, one of which is our earth.

If you have understood this, you may correlate these two explanations, for it is possible that the verse “*the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder*”(21:30) indicates that the earth and the solar system were a sort of dough kneaded by the hand of power out of a simple substance; I mean ether, which compared with beings is a fluid substance that passes through and among them. The verse “*and the throne of His [almightiness] has rested upon water*”(11:7) alludes to this matter, which resembles water.

After its creation, the ether received the Maker’s first manifestation giving existence; that is, He created the ether, then He made it into the fundamental atoms (*jawāhir farda*), then some of these He made dense and out of them created the seven globes, of which our earth is inhabited. Then the earth solidified before all the rest, speedily forming a crust, and over a long period of time became the source of life while up to the present most of the heavenly bodies remained in a fiery fluid state. In so far as this was the

case its creation and formation was before that of the heavens. And since its uses and benefits and its being “spread out” – that is, arranged and set in order – were completed after the arrangement and ordering of the heavens, the heavens were previous in this respect, although [the heavens and earth] were together at the beginning. Thus, the three verses look to the three points [solving the apparent contradictions].

**A second answer:** The Qur’an’s aim is not to teach the history of creation; it was revealed to teach knowledge of the Maker, and so contains different levels (*maqāmāt*). When describing the [divine] bounties, favours, and mercy and the clarity of the evidences, the earth comes first. But on the level of the proofs of [divine] grandeur, sublimity, and power, the heavens precede.

“*Then (thumma):*” this may refer to ‘a being protracted’ or procrastination (*tarākhī*). This may be essential (*dhātī*), and may also pertain to degree (*rutbī*) [or to reflection (*tafakkurī*)]. Thus “*and* (lit. then) *has applied His design (thumma astawā)*” implies the unstated words “Then **know and reflect on** [how] He applied His design to the heavens ...” [That is, the creation of the heavens was first in time but in respect of reflection and thought it is in second place; and the creation of the earth was after that of the heavens but in regard to reflective thought it comes first.]<sup>76</sup>

**The Third Matter**, regarding “*seven (sab‘a)*.”

Consider this: Ancient philosophy asserted that the heavens were nine-fold, and its proponents conceived of it in an extraordinary form. Their ideas dominated mankind for centuries. In fact, very many Qur’anic commentators were forced to bend the literal meanings of verses to [conform with] with their school. Modern science, however, asserts that the stars are suspended in space or in the void, as though it denies the existence of the heavens. That is to say, one went to one extreme and the other went to the other. As for the Shari‘a, it states that the Maker (May His glory be exalted) created seven heavens and placed the stars in them like fish swimming [in the sea]. The Hadith “The heavens are a wave held back”<sup>77</sup> alludes to this. This school [of thought] may be verified on six levels:

**The First:** It has been established by science and philosophy that endless space is filled with ether.

76. See, *Īṣārātū’l-Ī‘caz* [Abdūlmecid], 265.

77. *Musnad*, ii, 370; *al-Tirmidhī*, Sūra al-Ḥadīd, 1 (no: 3298). For further details see, *Ishārāt al-I‘jāz* [Iḥsān Qāsim], 226.

*The Second:* What binds the laws of the lofty bodies and transmits and spreads such forces as light and heat is a matter that is existent in space and fills it.

*The Third:* Although the matter [called] ether remains as ether, like other matter it has various different changeable states, like steam, water, and ice are formed of water.

*The Fourth:* If the heavenly bodies are observed carefully, there appear to be different levels. You have surely seen the river of the heavens known as the Milky Way, which appears as a great splash of clouds; it consists of millions of stars that are being newly formed and are clustering together. And the ether, in which those stars are clustering, is of course different to the level of the fixed stars, and one surmises correctly that this too is different to the levels of the solar system, and so on, till there are seven levels.

*The Fifth:* It is established by both induction and intuition that when matter is subject to both formation, ordering, and arrangement, it gives rise to different states (lit. levels). From carbon (lit. mineral – *ma'dan*) is produced ashes, coal, and diamonds; and fire may be separated into embers, flames, and smoke; and from the combining of oxygen and hydrogen water, ice, and steam are produced.

*The Sixth:* The above are all indications that the heavens are manifold. And the truthful lawgiver (*al-shāri' al-ṣādiq*) said they were seven. And they are seven in the sense that in the Arabic language, seven, seventy, and seven hundred all denote multiplicity.

*In Short:* The Maker (May His glory be exalted) created from the matter [called] ether seven heavens and arranged them giving them a wondrously fine order, and He planted the stars in them, and their layers are various.

Now consider this: If you ponder over the Qur'an's addresses and its meanings and its taking into consideration the understanding of all classes [of people] from the lowest to the highest of the elite, you will observe an extraordinary matter. For example, from "*the seven heavens*" some people understand the levels of the atmosphere (*al-hawā' al-nasīmī*); and some understand the wafting spheres that encircle our earth and its fellows which sustain living beings; others understand the seven planets visible to everyone; others understand the seven etherial layers in the solar system; yet others understand seven solar systems the first of which is our's; others understand the ether giving rise to the formation of seven levels [or states] as was discussed above; then some consider that all that is visible of the adorning lamps of the suns and fixed stars is a single heaven. They form

the skies of this world, above which are six more invisible heavens. And yet others surmise that the seven heavens are not restricted to the Manifest World, and they conceive of them as levels of creation in this world, the hereafter, and the Unseen and their worlds. All of these [classes of people] profit from the Qur’an’s abundant blessings in accordance with their capacities and receive their shares from its table, which encompasses all these understandings.

Now consider the five aspects of the positioning of the verse’s first sentence; that is, “***It is He who has created for you all that is on earth*** (*Hū alladhī khalaqa la-kum mā fī’l-ard jamī’an*):”

*The First:* The previous verse pointed out the bounty of life and existence, while this one indicates the bounty of permanent existence (*al-baqā’*) and its causes.

*The Second:* When the previous verse proves that man is at the highest degree, that is, he will return to the Most High, it arouses the listener’s mind and he asks: “How could lowly man have had the capacity [to sustain] this high rank if it hadn’t been for the Most High’s grace and His drawing him to it?” So this phrase as though replies to the question, saying that man has a truly elevated place in his Creator’s sight since He has subjugated the whole world to him.

*The Third:* On the previous verse indicating the occurrence of the resurrection of the dead and Great Gathering for mankind, the listener starts to ask: “What is man’s importance that the resurrection should be brought about for him and the world destroyed for his happiness?” And this phrase as though replies: “Seeing that all that the earth contains has been prepared for his use and all its species [of beings] have been subjugated to him, he must have supreme importance since this shows he is the fruit of creation.”

*The Fourth:* With the words “*to Him will you return*” the previous verse implies that [in the hereafter] intermediaries will be removed and all recourse and authority will be confined to the Most High. In this world however man has numerous things and authorities to which he has recourse, so this phrase states that causes and intermediaries disclose the hand of power and that the true place of recourse [in this world too] is Allah the Most High, and that causes only intervene for certain instances of wisdom. For the Most High creates everything man needs.

*The Fifth:* The preceding verse having alluded to eternal happiness, this one points out the previous grace and favours that necessitate it. That is,

one who has been graced with all that is on the earth must be worthy of being granted everlasting happiness.

The phrase: “**and has applied His design to the heavens** (*thumma astawā ilā al-samā*):” Its positioning has four aspects:

*The First:* The heavens are the earth’s companion. The earth cannot be conceived of as alone; mention of it always recalls the heavens.

*The Second:* The skies are ordered perfectly, [in such a way that] man may utilize what is on the earth.

*The Third:* The preceding phrase points out evidences of [divine] beneficence and grace, while this one points to evidences of [divine] grandeur and power.

*The Fourth:* This phrase indicates that man’s benefits are not confined to the earth, but that the heavens too are subjugated to his use.

The positioning of the phrase “**and has fashioned them into seven heavens** (*fa-sawwāhunna sab’a samāwāt*).” This has five aspects:

*The First:* This phrase is tied to the previous one in the way that [the *fiat*] “Be!” is tied to “and it is.”

*The Second:* [It is tied to the previous one] in the way that the functioning (*ta’lluq*) of [divine] power and that of [divine] will are tied.

*The Third:* [It is tied to the previous phrase] in the way that the conclusion [of a piece] is tied to the introduction.

The positioning of the phrase “**and of all things He has full knowledge** (*wa hū bi-kulli shay’in ‘alīm*)” has two aspects:

*One of them:* [This phrase] is an argument from cause to effect (*dalīl limmī*) proving the ordering [described in the previous phrase], just as that ordering is an argument from effect to cause (*dalīl innī*) proving this phrase. For order and harmony prove the existence of perfect knowledge, just as knowledge informs order.

*The other:* The previous phrase points to perfect power, while this one indicates all-embracing knowledge.

### **The positioning of the parts of the verse’s phrases**

[The verse contains these points:] the first phrase is not tied to the previous one; the first two parts are definite, as is the predicate; the preposition “*la-*” of “*la-kum – for you*” and the phrase’s precedence; the preposition “*in (fī)*,” and the word “*all (jamī’an)*.”

Being unconnected to what preceded it (*al-isti’nāf*) the first phrase implies the unstated questions the answers to which were noted in the ‘five aspects’ of the positioning of the first phrase above.

In the phrase “*He who (hū alladhī)*,” “*He*” is the subject and “*who*” is the predicate, and both are definite, which indicates divine unity and restriction. [That is, the creation of all in the earth is confined to Allah; Allah is the sole Creator.] And this restriction alludes to the restriction expressed by the precedence of “*to Him (ilayhi)*” in “*and again to Him will you return*” in the previous verse. [The relative pronoun “*who*” and relative clause are the predicate and of right should be indefinite.] It’s being definite here indicates that the statement is obvious. [That is, it is clear and obvious that Allah is the Creator of all on the earth.]

The [preposition] “*la-* of benefit” in “*la-kum – for you*” indicates that essentially things are permissible and become forbidden only under certain circumstances; for instance, other people’s property is proscribed since it is protected by the Shari’a; human flesh is proscribed out of respect; poison because of its harm; or carrion because it is unclean.

Furthermore, it suggests the existence of benefit for man in everything, even if he benefits from only one of the many ways a thing may be benefited from, or in only one of many ways; [there is benefit for man] even in the least of things; or at least a thing may be utilized with a view to taking lessons. Moreover, the Most Merciful has many treasures stored up in the earth, looking to the people of the future.

The precedence of “*for you (la-kum)*” indicates that man’s utilization [of the earth’s contents] is their primary purpose and main aim.

“*What (mā)*” is general in order to urge [man] to search out the benefits in everything.

The use of “*in the earth (fī’l-ard)*” rather than ‘on the earth’ for example, indicates that most of the things to be utilized are inside the earth. It also spurs [man] on to investigate what is found there. And the gradual utilization by mankind of the minerals and other substances of the earth suggests that it may contain such materials and elements as foodstuffs and other things that will lighten the burdens of life of the people of the future.

And “*all (jamī’an)*” is to rebut the false idea that some things are futile and useless.

In the second phrase, “*then (thumma)*” indicates a chain of the Most High’s actions and works after creating the earth, [His turning] to the ordering of the heavens. It is also a sign that in regard to human benefits, their ordering is of a lower degree than the earth’s creation. It also infers its occurring later than [the earth’s creation].

“*Astawā*” is a concise usage, meaning ‘*arāda an yusawwī* – (lit.) He

willed or wanted to arrange or regulate.’ It also has a metaphorical meaning, denoting someone who aims at something intently without swerving to left or right.

“*To the heavens (ilā al-samā’):*” that is, to the [physical] matter of the heavens, and towards them.

The particle “*fa- (and)*” of “*fa-sawwāhunna – and has fashioned them:*” in so far that this is the particle of divergence or branching (*tafrī’*), [the tie between this phrase and the previous one; that is, between *astawā* and *tas-wīyya*] resembles “*it is*” being the consequence of [the creative command] “*Be!*”, and an act of power being the result of an act of will, and the execution of an act (*al-qadā’*) being the result of determining (*al-qadar*). And in so far as it denotes ‘following’ (*ta’qīb*), the “*fa-*” implies some unstated words: “He made [the heavens] various and set them in order and regulated the matters between them, and then He arranged them [into the seven heavens].”

The meaning of “*fashioned (sawwā)*” is that He created them as well-ordered, regular and similar, in that He gave each what was fitting for its potentialities and equal to its capacity.

The [pronominal suffix] “*them (-hunna)*” denotes the diversity of the [physical] matter of the heavens.

As for “*seven (sab’a)*,” it comprises [meanings] of both multiplicity, and the relation with the seven [divine] attributes, and with the seven aeons in the formation of the earth.

And by “*the heavens (samāwāt)*” is meant the garden of profuse pearly flowers, the seas for the fishes of the planets, and the arable field for the seeds of the stars.

The phrase “*and of all things He has full knowledge (wa hū bi-kulli shay’in ‘alīm):*”

The conjunction “*and*” necessitates a connection [though apparently there is none], which implies [the following unstated sentence]: “He is powerful over all things so [must be] the Creator of these majestic heavenly bodies. And He is knowing of all things, for it is He who placed them in order with such precise art.”

The “*bi-*”, which expresses contiguity, in “*of all (bi-kulli)*” indicates that knowledge is not separate from what is known.

“*All (kull)*” is general and [from the point of view of divine knowledge] there is nothing outside it [for Allah knows everything without exception]. Thus, the rule “all general rules have exceptions” has an exception. Other-

wise the rule would be self-contradictory like an irrational root [not of mathematics but] of speech.

The word “*thing (shay’)*” embraces willer and willed, and such things other than these as the impossible.

“*Knowing (‘alīm):*” that is, the [divine] Essence of which knowledge is an inherent necessary [attribute].

## Verse 30

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰئِكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِي الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً قَالُوْا  
اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ  
بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ اِنِّيْ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ

*Behold, your Lord and Sustainer said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth.' They said: 'Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy [name]?' He said: 'I know what you know not.'* (Wa idh qāla rabbuka li'l-malā'ika innī jā'ilun fī'l-arḍ khalifatan qālū a taj'alu fī-hā man yufsidu fī-hā wa yasfiku al-dimā'a wa nahnu nusabbihū bi-ḥamdika wa nuqaddisu la-ka qāla innī a'lamu mā lā ta'lamūn.)

### An Introduction

Consider this: Confirmatory belief in the existence of the angels is one of the pillars of faith. We may discuss it here in several stations (*maqāmāt*):<sup>78</sup>

#### **The First Station**

Whoever observes the earth, [will see that] despite its lowliness it is filled with beings with spirits (*dhawī al-arwāḥ*), and if he studies the precise order of the world, he will surmise that the lofty constellations also have inhabitants.

A person who does not believe in the existence of the angels resembles a man who travels to a great city and there comes across a little house which is old, littered with refuse, and overflowing with people. He notices that its yard is full of beings with spirits all of which have particular vital needs: some are herbivorous and some piscivorous. Then thousands of lofty

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78. For a more detailed discussion, see, the Twenty-Ninth Word (*The Words*, 521-37).

mansions strike his eye, new and interspersed among wide squares and avenues, but due to the absence of the conditions to support life, he believes this abode to be devoid of inhabitants.

A person who does believe in the angels is like someone who when he sees the small house which is full of beings with spirits and notes the well laid-out city, is absolutely certain that the decorated mansions also have inhabitants, appropriate to them and with their own particular conditions of life. Their being invisible, due to either the distance or the loftiness of the mansions, does not prove that they do not exist. Thus, by means a primary analogy based on a ‘hidden’ syllogism and based too on the regular order, it may be concluded from the earth being full of animate beings that endless space with its constellations, stars, and heavens is full of beings with spirits. And these beings, which are of various sorts, the Shari‘a calls the angels. Now, reflect on this!

### ***The Second Station***

You know, as has been discussed, that life is the discloser of beings; indeed, it is its result. So how could endless space be devoid of inhabitants and the heavens lack their populace? All the intelligent have in effect agreed on the concept of the angels and their reality, even if their interpretations have differed. In fact, the Peripatetic philosophers called them “the disembodied spiritual essences of species;” and the Illuminists called them “the [ten] intellects and masters (*arbāb*) of the species;” and the followers of the religions have called the Mountain Angel, the Sea Angel, and the Rain Angel, for example. For the Materialists even, who believe only what they see, it has not been easy to deny the concept of the angels and they have associated them with the pervasive forces or power (*al-qūwāt al-sāriyya*) in the laws of creation.

• *If you were to ask:* Aren’t the laws and principles in force in creation sufficient to hold the universe together and [sustain] its vitality?

*You would be told:* Those laws and principles are only theoretical or subjective (*i’tibāriyya*) or imaginary even; they can be accorded specific existence and identity only through that which represents and reflects them and holds their reins. And this is nothing other than the angels.

Furthermore, the philosophers (*al-ḥukamā’*), reason, and the transmitted religious texts are united in [their belief that] existence is not restricted to the visible Manifest World, which is lifeless and unsuitable for the formation (*tashakkul*) of spirits. The World of the Unseen however comprises numerous worlds that are appropriate for spirits, like water is for fishes, and is full of them and it imparts (*muzhir*) life to the Manifest World.

Thus, since these four matters testify for you to the existence of the angels as a concept, the most satisfactory forms ascribed to them are those set out by the Shari‘a, as is agreed by all people of sound intelligence: they are honoured worshipful servants [of Allah] who never fail to do what they are commanded. They are subtle luminous bodies and are of various sorts.

### ***The Third Station***

Consider this: The angels is one of those matters in which [the existence of] the universal can be verified by establishing [the existence of] a single particular and the species can be known through the sighting of one of its members. For if one is denied, all are denied.

It would surely be impossible in your opinion – otherwise may Allah awaken you [to the truth]! – for the followers of all the religions down the ages from the time of Adam to the present to have agreed on the angels’ existence, and on the certain occurrence of conversations with them and the definite sightings of them and the narrations about them and what people have reported about their various sorts – if one single angel, or several, had not been seen and if the existence of one or more of them was not certain or if their existence had not been perceived.

Similarly, it is impossible that a such a delusion would have become established in the beliefs of mankind and persisted in this way through all the upheavals [of time] if there had been no truth that gave rise to those general beliefs or to the necessary principles on which they were based. In which case, the basis of the consensus is a conjecture born of various different signs, provided by sightings, arising from necessary principles. And the reason for the general belief is the necessary principles arising from [the angels] having been seen and observed on numerous occasions, forming what is in effect a consensus concerning them. Otherwise none of the certain, well-known beliefs of mankind [concerning other things] would be reliable.

Thus, if the existence of any one spirit being (*al-rūḥāniyya*) has been verified at any time, the existence of the species has been verified. And since the existence of the species has been verified, it will surely be as described by the Shari‘a and expounded by the Qur’an.

### **The positioning of this verse’s meaning in relation to the preceding one**

It has four aspects:

*The First:* The [earlier] verses enumerate the immense bounties [bestowed on man], and the previous one indicates the greatest of them –

man's being the fruit of creation and all on the earth being subjugated to him for him to dispose of as he wishes. Now this verse points out that man is vicegerent of the earth and is its ruler.

*The Second:* This verse expounds, explains, elucidates, verifies, proves, and corroborates what the previous verse [states], that the reins of the chains of all on the earth are in man's hands.

*The Third:* The previous verse having explained the building of the two dwellings of the earth and the heavens, this one indicates their inhabitants, mankind and the angels. And while the former alludes to the chain of creation, this one hints at the chain of beings with spirits (*dhawī al-arwāh*).

*The Fourth:* On the previous verse making it clear that humankind is the aim of creation and that man has a high place in his Creator's sight, the listener is moved to ask: "How can man be worthy when he perpetrates so much evil and corruption? Does wisdom necessitate his existence, to worship and hallow the Most High?" So this verse implies that on account of (lit. besides) the mystery [the Trust] being deposited in him, his evils and iniquities are forgiven, and that Allah stands in no need of man's worship, for some of the angels hallow Him and glorify Him with praises beyond number. [Man's creation therefore] is for some purpose known only to the One All-Knowing of the Unseen.

#### **Now the positioning of the verse's phrases**

This verse flows on smoothly [from the previous one] because of [the second, implied] "*then (idh)*" necessitated by the first, and its looking to (*ʿaf*) "*and of all things He has full knowledge*" [although it is apparently unrelated. This implies] the unstated sentence: "Then (*idh*) He created what He created in perfect systematic order '*And then your Lord said to the angels...*'" [Thus, the second *idh* looks to the first and a relationship is formed between the two sentences.] When, to get them to ask the reason for [man's creation] and to teach them consultation as a method, the Most High addresses the angels saying: "*I will create a vicegerent on earth,*" it prompts the listener's mind to ask [three things]: "What did they say?" in connection with the mystery of conversation; and to ask the reason for [man's creation] and out of surprise: "Are You going to create [such a one] on the earth?"; and to learn the wisdom in man's vicegerency rather than the mischief-making jinns and his having been entrusted with the powers of anger and animal appetites: "One who will make mischief in it?" [While this latter is] due to the excesses of the power of appetite, "and will shed blood?" is due to the aggression of the power of anger. Having completed

its questions and expressed its surprise, the listener's mind awaits the Most High's reply. And He says: "*I know what you know not.*" That is, everything is not limited to what you know, and your not knowing does not infer a thing doesn't exist. I am All-Wise, I have good reason for [their creation], and I shall forgive their corruption and bloodshed on account of the wisdom in it.

### Now the positioning of the parts of the phrases

As shown above, by reason of the necessary relationship between two sentences joined by a conjunction, the [conjunction] "*And*" [at the beginning of] "*Behold (lit. And then), your Lord and Sustainer said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth'* (*wa idh qāla rabbuka li'l-malā'ika innī jā'ilun fi'l-arḍ khalīfatan*)" implies an unstated sentence. An implied sentence is similarly required before the verse "*Behold! Your Lord said to the angels: I am about to create man from sounding clay... (Wa idh qāla Rabbuka...)*"(15:28)

Also, since [by its very nature] Revelation summons attention and calls to mind, the conjunction "*And*" implies "And recall to them that when your Lord..."

The [particle] "*then (idh)*" denotes past time, and so sends the minds [of listeners] down the rungs of the past, there raises [the veil] and attracts to the present its events so they may behold them and gather them up.

The [words] "*Your Lord and Sustainer (Rabbuka)*" is a proof for the angels; that is, the One who has raised and perfected you [Muhammad], and made you the guide of humankind that you might put a stop to their corruption. That is, you are the supreme good deed [of mankind] that preponderates over all its iniquities and covers its faults.

"*To the angels (li'l-malā'ika):*" Through their conversation in the form of consultation this indicates that the dwellers of the heavens, that is, the angels, have very many relations and connections with the dwellers of the earth, that is, humankind. For some of them are charged with overseeing [human beings] (*muwakkal*), some are guardian angels, some are recording angels, so they have to concern themselves with their affairs.

Since it is the nature of the [intensifying particle] "*inna*" to repulse doubts, here expressed [by the angels' question] "*will You place...? (a taj'alu)*," it indicates the immense importance of the question.

The use of the first person pronominal suffix "*-ī of innī,*" although the first person plural is used in "*We said (qulnā)*" in the following verses, indicates that there are no intermediaries in His creation and giving of exis-

tence as there are in His speech and address. These fine points are illustrated also in the verse “*We have sent down to you the Book in truth. That you might judge between men in accordance with what Allah has taught you.*” (4:105) Here, the first person plural in “*We have sent down*” indicates the existence of an intermediary in [the sending down of] Revelation and infers its splendour. [That is, it indicates the angel(s) of Revelation, who manifest the splendour of the One who sends them.] While the third person singular in “*in accordance with what Allah has taught you*” indicates that there are no intermediaries in the inspiration of meanings.

The choice of “*place (jā’il)*” rather than ‘create’ indicates that what causes the doubts and questioning is mankind being ‘placed’ on the earth and appointed to cultivate it, not [man’s] creation and being given existence. For existence is pure good and creation is an essential act (*fī’l dhātī*) [of Allah] and [as such] cannot be questioned.

And the choice of “*in (fī)*” in the phrase “*in the earth*” rather than ‘on,’ despite mankind being on the earth, intimates that humankind resembles the spirit breathed into the earth, and if it ever quits the earth, the earth will fall apart and expire.

“*Vicegerent (khalīfatan)*” suggests that before conditions on the earth were readied for human life, there were intelligent creatures for whose lives, conditions during the earth’s early epochs were suitable. This [view] is in conformity with the questions of science (*qadīyya al-ḥikma*). The most widely held [view] is that these creatures were a species of jinn, but they spread corruption [on the earth] so were succeeded by mankind.

The parts of the sentence: “***They said: Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?*** (*qālū a taj’alu fī-hā man yufsidu fī-hā wa yafiku al-dimā’a?*)”

Consider this: “*They said*” being apparently unconnected to what precedes it (*isti’nāf*) suggests that the Most High’s turning to and addressing the angels drives the listener to ask: “What will [the angels’] attitude be towards their neighbours, seeing that their houses are side by side? Will they be happy to have them as fellows? What is their opinion of them?” So the Qur’an says: “*They said: Will You place therein...?*”

This last phrase, “*They said: Will You place (qālū a taj’alu)*” is the consequence of the conditional particle “*idh*” [in the phrase “*Behold* (lit. and then) (*your Lord*) *said (Wa idh qāla)*”] [but the necessary consequence (*luzūm*) is unstated, implying the words:] “Allah the Most High ruled that man should be made vicegerent of the earth, which was under the supervi-

sion of the angels, although He was in no need of officers or ministers. This meant that the angels had to declare how they would meet [human beings].”

The speech [in these two phrases] is a conversation in the form of consultation, [and its purpose is] to teach [these to] the people, for the Most High is far above [any need of] them.

[The angels] ask: “*Will You place therein...?*” in order to learn the reason, for the Most High had informed [them] about it but had withheld the reason. This was the cause of their surprise and it led to their question. That is, their asking: “What is the wisdom in [men] being placed [on the earth]?” Thus, they wanted to learn the result or effect rather than the cause, not to deny or object to it, for they are without sin.

And “the placing” [of mankind on the earth] hints that man’s characteristics, and theoretical origins and descent, and circumstances are not the imperatives of nature, but have all been ‘placed’ by One who places.

The repetition of “*in it (fī-hā)*” despite their proximity is for clarity and implies: What is the reason for placing mankind [on the earth] as a spirit breathed into the earth’s body to quicken it, when on the other hand men will be the cause of its corruption and death?

The use of the [relative pronoun] “*one who (man)*” indicates that rather than the human character, it is the rebellion of creatures against the Most High that troubles [the angels].

And the use of “*cause corruption (yafsuḍu)*” rather than ‘rebel’ indicates that rebellion eventually spoils the order of the world. And the use of the imperfect tense indicates that what is detestable about it is its constant repetition. [The angels] had knowledge of this either through the Most High informing [them], or through studying the Preserved Tablet, or because they had knowledge of human nature and the unrestricted powers lodged in it. Corruption is caused through the unrestrained use of the power of animal appetites, while bloodshed and tyranny result from the aggression of the power of anger.

“*Therein (fī-hā):*” that is, [they cause corruption in the earth] despite it being a mosque founded on consciousness of Allah and fear of Him (*taqwā*).

The [conjunction] “*and*” joins two despicable acts [causing corruption and shedding blood], for corruption leads to the spilling of blood.

And the choice of “*shed blood (yasfikū)*” rather than ‘kill’ is because to shed blood is to kill unjustly. And murder is not *jihād* in Allah’s way. Also, the [just] killing of one person for the good of the community is like killing a wolf to save the flock.

The [use of] the word “*blood (al-dimā)*” with “*shed blood*” is to emphasize the repugnance of murder.

The positioning of the parts of the phrase: “***Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy [name]? (wa nahnu nusabbiḥu bi-ḥamdika wa nuqaddisu la-ka)***”

The [circumstantial conjunction] “*and*” (*wāw al-ḥāl*) indicates that [the angels] were aware that they would meet with [such] a counter-objection as: “Aren’t mankind’s worship and hallowing of the Most High sufficient wisdom in your view [for human beings being placed on the earth]?”

“*We (nahnu)*,” that is, the whole host of angels untainted by sin. And this being a nominal sentence infers that glorification of Allah is a part of their very natures and intrinsic to them and necessitated by their natures.

“*We do celebrate Your praises (nusabbiḥu bi-ḥamdika)*” is a very comprehensive phrase: “We proclaim You in the universe through all the varieties of worship. We believe that with Your glorious attributes You are far above anything unworthy [of Your Godhead] – [Your glorious attributes] that are [the source] of Your praiseworthy bounties. We declare: “*Subḥān Allāh wa bi-ḥamdihi!*”, that is, we laud and extol You with Your attributes of glory and beauty (*al-jalāl wa’l-jamāl*)!”

And “*Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy [name] (wa nuqaddisu la-ka)*,” that is, “we hallow You;” or, “we purify ourselves and our action from sins and our hearts of desire for anything other than You.”

And contrarily to the previous conjunction [joining the two vices of corruption and spilling blood], the [conjunction] “*and*” here joins the two virtues of compliance with the divine commands and avoidance of things proscribed.

Now the parts of the phrase: “***He said: ‘I know what you know not.’ (Qāla innī a’lamu mā lā ta’lamūn)***” The apparent unconnectedness of this phrase (*al-isti’nāf*) implies the [unstated] questions: “What did Allah the Most High say in reply to their questioning? How did His explanation of the reason [for mankind’s creation] dispel their astonishment? What is the wisdom in human beings’ preference to them?” So it says: “*He said (qāla)*,” alluding to its brief reply and to the detailed explanation in the following verse.

The “*inna*” of “*innī a’lamu – I know*” is confirmative (*li’l-taḥqīq*) and rebuts doubts and hesitation. It is used only in speculative matters not incontestable ones, whereas the Most High self-evidently and indisputably

knows what creatures do not know, and God forbid, the angels have no doubts concerning this. In which case, the “*inna*” throws light on a sequence of [unstated] phrases which, conformably with the well-trodden path of rhetoric (*ṭarīq al-bayānī*), the Qur’an summarizes succinctly. That is, there is much good and many advantages in mankind, and there is sinfulness but this is minor. It would be opposed to wisdom to abandon the former due to the latter. Humanity also holds a mystery, and this qualifies man for the vicegerency. The angels were heedless of it, but man’s Creator had knowledge of it. There is also an instance of wisdom in the [creation] of human beings that renders them superior to [the angels]; the angels did not know this, but the One who created it did.

The “*inna*”s [confirmatory] meaning may also refer to a statement implied by any one of the sentence’s words rather than to one specific word. Here it looks to a phrase implied by “*you know not*,” that is, ‘you have no certain knowledge of it.’

Also, “*I know what you know not (innī a’lamu mā lā ta’lamūn)*” is by way of mentioning something necessary and willing its natural consequence. That is, something exists that you have no knowledge of. For the Most High’s knowledge is necessary for everything. The absence of [His] knowledge indicates the non-existence of the thing known. As the Most High says: “*Is it that you will inform Him of something He knows not on the earth?*”(13:33) That is, it is not possible [for something unknown by Allah] to exist. And the existence of knowledge is evidence for the existence of the thing known.

[In another place the Qur’an] verifies and confirms this succinct reply, saying: “Allah is indeed all-knowing, all-wise.” His actions lack nothing as regards wisdom and benefit. Hence, beings are not restricted to the knowledge of creatures, and the absence of knowledge does not indicate their non-existence.

When Allah the Most High created pure good, that is, the angels, and pure evil, that is, the devils, and that which was neither good nor evil, that is, the animals, being the Munificent Bestower of Bounties, His wisdom necessitated the existence of a fourth category that embraced both good and evil. [That is, human beings.] Thus, if the [human] powers of anger and animal appetites submit to the power of intellect, through effort and striving man rises higher than the angels. But if the reverse is the case, he falls lower than the beasts, for he has no excuse.

## Verses 31-33

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ \* قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ \* قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ أَنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

*And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He presented them to the angels and said: 'Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true.' \* They replied: 'Limitless You are in Your glory! No knowledge have we save that which You have taught us. Verily, You alone are all-knowing, truly wise.' \* Said He: 'O Adam, convey unto them the names of these [things].' And as soon as [Adam] had conveyed unto them their names, [Allah] said: 'Did I not say unto you: Verily, I alone know the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth, and know all that you bring into the open and all that you would conceal?' (Wa 'allama Ādam al-asmā' kullahā thumma 'aradāhum 'alā al-malā'ika fa-qāla anbi'unī bi-asmā'i hā'ulā'i in kuntum ṣādiqīn. \* Qālū subhānaka lā 'ilma la-nā illā mā 'allamtanā innaka anta al-'alīm al-ḥakīm. \* Qāla yā Ādam anbi'hum bi-asmā'ihim fa-lammā anba'ahum bi-asmā'ihim qāla a lam aqul la-kum innī a'lamu ghayb al-samāwāt wa'l-arḍ wa a'lamu mā tubdūna wa mā kuntum taktumūn?)*

### An Introduction

Consider this: This miracle of Adam [the teaching of the names] challenged the angels [and their doubts]; indeed, it was a miracle of mankind

related to the question of the vicegerency. There are many lessons to be learnt from the story.

Bearing in mind the verse: “*Nor anything fresh or dry but is [inscribed] in a Record Clear,*”(6:59) and supported by the facts that the Qur’an both offers you clear statements and evidences, and teaches you through signs and indications, I understand from the masterly signs and indications<sup>79</sup> of the Qur’an’s miraculousness in the stories of the prophets and their miracles, that it is encouraging mankind to attain similar achievements. It is as though with these stories, the Qur’an is pointing the finger at the main lines and final results in the future of mankind’s efforts to progress, for the future is built on the foundations of the past, while the past is the mirror of the future. And it is as though the Qur’an is slapping humanity on the back urging and encouraging men, saying: “Exert yourselves to the utmost [and discover] the means to achieve some of these wonders!” You surely know that it was the hand of miracles that first gave mankind the clock and the ship.

If you wish, consider now the verses:

“*And He taught Adam all of the names.*”(2:31)

“*We bestowed grace aforesaid on David from Ourselves: ‘O you mountains! Sing back the praises of Allah with him, and you birds [also]!’*” (34:10)

“*And unto Solomon [We made subservient] the wind; its morning course [covered the distance of] a month’s journey, and its evening course, a month’s journey. And We caused a fountain of molten copper to flow at his behest.*”(34:12)

“*‘Strike the rock with thy staff!’ – whereupon twelve springs gushed forth.*”(2:60)

“*And you heal those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave.*”(5:110)

Now dwell on what combined human thought has produced and the thousands of rational sciences it has deduced: each of them [is related to] one of the species [realms of being] in the universe, so that mankind has come to manifest “*And He taught Adam all of the names.*”(2:31)

Now ponder over the railway and telegraph and other wonders of art deduced by human thought and by means of smelting iron and forging

79. If you are in doubt concerning what the author discovered about the subtleties of the Qur’an’s composition, I can tell you that we consulted Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s book of poetry, opening it at random, and these lines came up: “*Ka-anna al-kirām al-kātibīna tanazzalū \* ‘Alā qalbihi waḥyan bi-mā fī ṣaḥīfatin – As though the Recording Angels had alighted \* On his heart, inspiring it with what is on the page.*” Signed, [His student and scribe] *Habib*

copper, so that man came to manifest “*and We softened iron for him,*” (34:10) and this became the basis of his industries

Think also about the aeroplanes that human minds incubated and hatched, which travel a month’s journey in a day, so that humankind would come to manifest: “*its morning course [covered the distance of] a month’s journey, and its evening course, a month’s journey.*”(34:12)

And reflect on the progress achieved in tools invented through human enterprise, staffs to strike arid deserts, causing copious springs to gush forth and transforming the sandy wastes into gardens, so that man is on the point of manifesting “*Strike the rock with thy staff!*” (2:60)

Now ponder over the wonders of medicine yielded by man’s experiments that are beginning to heal those born blind and the lepers and the chronically sick, by Allah’s leave – you will see that [between the above verses and the future scientific discoveries] is a full correspondence and you will be right to say that [those miracles] are the criteria and measure [of those future discoveries], and that the miracles point to them and urge [mankind to work to achieve] them.

Similarly, consider such verses as: “*We said: ‘O fire! Be cool, and [a means of] safety for Abraham.*”(21:69)

“*Had he not seen an evidence of His Lord.*”(12:24) That is, according to one narration, had he not had a vision of Jacob biting his finger.

“*I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph.*”(12:94)

“*O you mountains! Sing ye back the praises of Allah with him.*”(34:10)

“*O you people! We have been taught the speech of birds.*”(27:16)

“*I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye.*”(27:40)

Now consider mankind’s discovery of the degree of heat that does not burn and non-inflammable materials; and the invention of means of attracting images and sounds from far off and bringing them to you before you can blink your eye; and ‘speaking’ machines [such as the radio]; and the employment of some species of birds like the pigeon and so on. You may see the agreement and congruity between these two sorts [of wonders], and may rightly say that [the verses] signify and allude to [the future discoveries].

Similarly, reflect on the particular attribute of the Supreme Miracle [the Qur’an], articulate speech and thought, the peculiarity of humanity, and literature and eloquence. Now think about the highest means of training the human spirit, and the subtlest means of purifying the conscience, and the finest way of adorning human thought, and the best at expanding the heart:

this is none other than a sort of literature. For some unknown reason, this literature is the most extensive of sciences, it has the widest scope, is the most penetrating and effective, and the closest to the human heart. Indeed, it is the sultan of the sciences. Think over this carefully!

**[Like the previous verses] these verses have three aspects related to their positioning and composition**

The positioning of the [first] verse in relation to the preceding one has four aspects:

*The First:* When the Qur'an explains the wisdom in man's vicegerency in the previous verse it is the first part of the answer, and is more general [addressing] everyone, and the easiest and most convincing, and the most brief and concise. Then with this verse it gives an explanatory, detailed answer satisfying to both ordinary people and the elite.

*The Second:* Having made an explicit statement about man's vicegerency in the previous verse, with this one it proves the question with the miracle of mankind in the face of the angels.

*The Third:* The previous verse having indicated mankind's superiority over the angels, this verse alludes to the cause of its superiority.

*The Fourth:* Having hinted with the previous verse at humankind's receiving the supreme vicegerency of the earth, with this one it allusively advances arguments to support it. For by virtue of the diversity of man's abilities and the multiplicity of ways in which he can utilize things and the many sides to his knowledge, and his encompassing the universe with his five senses, external and inner, and especially with his boundless conscience, he is a comprehensive copy [of the world] and locus of all the manifestations [of the divine names]. You can see that contrary to the angels, he can relish the taste of things like honey in two ways or even more! So ponder over this!

**The positioning of the verses' phrases is naturally smooth and fluent to the utmost degree**

The first [phrase "And He taught Adam the names of all things;"] verifies (*tahqīq*) the meaning of [the last phrase of the previous verse]: "I know what you know not," and elaborates what it states summarily and expounds its obscurities. Moreover, [the function of] the Most High's vicegerent on the earth is to execute His ordinances and apply His laws, and this is dependent on full knowledge. So too, the thread and drift of the previous verse implies these [unstated words]: "So He created him and ordered his being,

and breathed His spirit into him and raised him, then He taught him the names and prepared him for the vicegerency.”

Then, since [the Most High] had chosen [Adam] over and above the angels and distinguished him [by conferring on him] knowledge of the names, [and had made clear] in this question of his superiority his worthiness of the vicegerency, the context being one of challenge, He presented the things to [the angels] seeking their objections. So perceiving their impotence, they affirmed the Most High’s wisdom and were assured. For this reason the Qur’an says: “*Then He presented them to the angels and said: ‘Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true.’*”

“*They said (Qālū):*” that is, they declared themselves innocent of what in his egotism Iblis had insinuated into their questioning, saying: “*Limitless are You in Your glory! No knowledge have we save that which You have taught us. Verily, You alone are all-knowing, truly wise.*”

Then, once their impotence, arising from their lack of comprehensive abilities, had become clear, the context necessitated a statement of Adam’s competence, in order to complete the challenge. So it says: “*O Adam, convey unto them the names of these [things].*”

Then, when the underlying reason and wisdom had become exemplified and apparent in Adam, the context (*al-maqām*) necessitated the former concise reply, making it a sort of consequence of the detailed explanation here. So [the Qur’an] says: “*Did I not say unto you: Verily, I alone know the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth, and know all that you bring into the open and all that you would conceal?*”

This use of conversation divulges and intimates that Iblis’ egotism had spread among the angels, and that the objections of one group [of devils] intervened in their questioning.

### **The positioning of the parts of the phrases**

The phrase “*And He taught Adam the names of all things* (*Wa ‘allama Ādam al-asmā’ kullahā*):” That is, [the Most High] fashioned [Adam] with a nature in which were contained the fundamental principles of all types of attainment and perfection, and He created him with a disposition in which were planted the seeds of all elevated qualities, and He decked him out with ten senses, and a conscience that would hold the similitudes of all beings. He prepared him [by giving him] these three faculties that He might teach him the realities of things in all their variety. Then He taught him all the names.

The [conjunction] “*And*” implies the above phrases, ‘rolled up’ beneath the conciseness (*ījāz*).

“*He taught* (*Allama*)” allusively praises knowledge and indicates its high degree and that it is the pivot of the vicegerency. It is a sign too that the names [of things] are made known by Allah. This is corroborated by the relationships mostly obtaining between names and the things they signify. It suggests too that miracles are an act of Allah without intermediary, contrarily to [the claim] of the philosophers that wonders are the acts of wondrous spirits.

“*Adam*,” that is, the earthling whose vicegerency was willed by Allah the Most High and who was given the name of Adam by Him. The specific mention of the name is to applaud and proclaim it and to associate it with him.

“*The names* (*al-asmā*):” The attributes, characteristics, and appellations that signify things, or the [myriad] languages [or words and terms – *al-lughāt*] that the sons of Adam use (lit. have divided among themselves). Also, as indicated by “*presented them* (*araḍahum*),” it suggests that the names are identical to what they signify, as is claimed by the Sunnis.

“*All of them* (*kullahā*)” is a clear statement of the source of [Adam’s] distinction [*vis-à-vis* the angels] and of the miracle [of the names]. [That is, while man may acquire complete knowledge of the names, the angels’ knowledge is partial.]

The phrases: “***Then He presented them to the angels and said: ‘Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true.’*** (*Thumma ‘araḍahum ‘alā al-malā’ika fa-qāla anbi’unī bi-asmā’i hā’ulā’i in kuntum ṣādiqīn.*)”

“*Then* (*thumma*):” By reason of the interval (*al-tarākhī*) indicated here, and as necessitated by the context (*al-maqām*), this implies [the unstated words]: “And [Allah] said: He is nobler than you and more worthy of the vicegerency.”

“*He presented them* (*araḍahum*):” That is, as though offered for sale. He set out for their inspection things of all sorts, as though presenting wares to customers or parading the ranks before the commander. In this is an indication that for intelligent beings things are goods they may buy through knowledge, and take possession of through naming them (lit. their names), and appropriate through representing their forms.

The [pronominal suffix] “*-hum – them*” is used for masculine rational beings so expounds the two things that render beings superior to others

(*taghlīb*) [that is, masculinity and reason] and the trope (*majāz*) hinted at by the word “*He presented* (*‘araḍa*).” For one imagines from [Allah] despatching the varieties of beings which parade rank upon rank for inspection, that they are regiments (lit. tribes) of [masculine] intelligent beings advancing towards [the angels].

“*To* (*‘alā*)” hints that what is presented to [the angels] are the forms [of things] inscribed on the Sublime Tablet.

*Glory be unto to You, we have no knowledge save that which  
You have taught us; indeed You are All-Knowing, All-Wise.  
(2:32)*

*And the close of their cry will be: All praise be to Allah, the  
Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds!(10:10)*

[In a manner entirely outside my will, this verse occurred to me when I came to the end of most of the *Words* (*Sözler*) and *Letters* (*Mektûbat*). Now I realize that this commentary was concluded with the same verse, and that all the *Words* are a sort of true commentary on it and a sparkling stream issuing from its ocean, and at their conclusions pour [back] into it. It is as though all the *Words* gush forth [and begin] from the verse here at the end of this commentary. Hence, ever since that time [when the commentary was written] I have been unable to finish expounding the verse that I might begin its second volume. *Said Nursi*]



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