



*Keys
to the
Qur'an*

Volume 1

Commentary on Surah Fatiha and Surah Baqarah

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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Surah Al-Fatiha

Surah Al-Baqarah

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

Surah al-Fatiha is placed at the beginning of the Qur'an because it signifies the opening of knowledge and so the victory over ignorance. If, in the direction we are taking, there is no door, then we have reached our target – we have won. *Fatiha* means to open, reveal, imbue, and conquer. This surah (chapter) is so named because if you follow it in your heart, you will be victorious. You will conquer and an opening will come to you.

Surah al-Baqarah scans the history of humankind from Adam to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. It contains a blueprint of how a community can live, how its members should behave as individuals, within their families, and in economic and social terms. It also gives guidance and prescriptions regarding inner and outer struggle and development.

ABOUT SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

CHAPTER 1: SURAH AL-FATIHA: INTRODUCTION

This *surah*¹ (chapter) is placed at the beginning of the Qur'an because it signifies the opening of knowledge and so the victory over ignorance. If, in the direction we are taking, there is no door, then we have reached our target – we have won.

Fatiha means to open, reveal, imbue, and conquer. This *surah* is so named because if you follow it in your heart, you will be victorious. You will conquer and an opening will come to you.

¹ In this eBook, we provide English translation of the Qur'anic *ayāt* (verses; signs).

CHAPTER 1: SURAH AL-FATIHA

1. In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

2. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,

Hamd is praise. Praise comes if there is knowledge. You can only praise something if you have knowledge of it. Knowledge of something is an aspect of experience. You praise the *rabb*, the lord-sustainer. *Rabba* means to be master of, to have command over. It also means to raise and bring up. *Rabb* is the attribute of that entity which brings what is under its domain up to its full potential, towards the ultimate end which is *huwa*, He, because it has come from Him, from Allah.

We said that when you praise the Ultimate, you must have some knowledge of it. That knowledge could be that of avoiding the non-Ultimate, which is what we are trying to do now. The way to that knowledge is by avoiding that which is unreal, uncondusive, unfulfilling; that which does not permanently rehabilitate our hearts.

Up to a certain point, it is alright to praise an aspect of it since we do not have complete cognizance of *rabb*. If we are true to ourselves, we aim for the ultimate in everything. We only want to praise the Ultimate.

Real praise belongs only to the Lord-sustainer, and that which sustains the foundation of *Tawhīd* (Unity). When you say, *Al hamdu lilla*, you are only stating the fact that praise is indeed for Allah. Furthermore, you are only able to praise in the first place because you mirror Allah and His Attributes, since you are the created being, having been created by the Creator, Allah. When you abuse the use of *hamd*, instead of *shukr*, you reveal your own shatteredness, for if you have truly witnessed that, *La ilaha il Allah*, you will understand that Allah's mercy comes not only in *bast*, expansion, but also in *qabd*, constriction, and you will recognize that above all else Allah is truly *ar Rahman ar Rahim*, so that every state reflects the mercy of Allah. This explains why it says: *Al hamdu lillahi rabb il 'alamin*. *'Alamin* encompasses all states, all worlds, in the seen and the unseen, in sleep and in wakefulness, here and in the hereafter.

The man of greater perception sees the *rabb*, Sustainer, even in times of constriction. To use *hamd* as an expression of a mood or feeling is *shirk*. Praise is for Allah at all times and under all circumstances. *Hamd* does not allow for the separation between you as a praise giver and the object of praise: you merely echo *hamd*.

3. The Beneficent, the Merciful.

The characteristics of the Lord whom we love and adore are *ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*, the all-beneficent, the all-compassionate. There is only mercy, but we do not see it because of our ignorance, expectations, and desires which only arise from the use of our intellect. Was the mercy not there when you were in your mother's womb? You stayed there for nine months and yet you were unequivocally content. It is the mercy of Creation that we are able to die, so that there may be breathing and standing space for others to come. It is only we who interfere. It is the ego, the *nafs*, the vanity of expectation which frustrates and sabotages our recognition of Allah's mercy. It is the evil "I" which we hear whispering in our ear. Shaytan is only a name. He too is from the Creator. If you know how to tackle Shaytan, then you would see nothing other than *ar-Rahman*. There is a cult in the Middle East of some two to three million people that worship Shaytan. They say that we know the Lord through Shaytan, and that at the *Yowm al Qiyama*, Shaytan will be forgiven because he has been testing all the good ones and the bad ones. They say he will be the first to be forgiven. If you see anything other than mercy, it is your own doing. It is your own expectations, desires and illusions. You yourself are the author.

4. Master of the Day of Judgment,

Malik means owner, master. We come from the Owner. We own nothing, but are all owned. *Yowm ad Deen*: the day of the *Deen*. *Yowm* is not only a day, but also a span of time. *Deen*, life-transaction, finds its root in *dana*, to owe, be indebted to. It is the debt of man to want to recognize reality. It is incumbent upon every one of us to know how to pay the debt upon us.

The *deen* with Allah is Islam. It is a life-transaction. Our way of behaving towards ourselves and towards others is *deen*. It is the way of correct transaction. But if you cannot discipline yourself, you cannot be of any use to anybody else. If interaction is not at least two-dimensional, nothing will work. You will only accumulate more wealth and cultivate more attachment. Eventually, you will be toppled over. Therefore, you have to exercise yourself in order to discipline yourself. The inner discipline begins with the outer discipline. This is the meaning of *deen*. The outer is easier because if you yourself do not stop from overshooting the limits, someone else will. It is the inner that is more difficult, so we start with the outer in order to gain the inner meaning. We go from the gross to the subtle.

5. You (alone) we worship; You (alone) we ask for help.

Once you recognize that you are in love and you are worshipping the *rabb*, you admit it openly, we worship You and we depend upon You. If you are worshipping and you are in love, then you are in adoration. *Abada* is to worship, adore, serve, and in its second form, it means to make accessible. You depend upon the Merciful. This is only meaningful if there is knowledge, for otherwise it can be considered a tyranny.

6. Show us the straight path,

Show us the direct way. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. A straight line is also one point traveling in only one direction. Therefore, you ask to be shown the most direct route towards this knowledge.

7. The path of those whom You have favored; Not the (path) of those who earn Your anger nor of those who go astray.

Sirat al ladhina an'amta 'aleyhim, is the way of those upon whom delight has been bestowed, not those upon whom anger burns. *Na'ma* is delight, happiness. There is no anger in this life. If you do not see mercy, then you have brought darkness upon yourself. Your ignorance is not the fault of someone else. If you do something inane and as a consequence harm comes to you, then Reality is angry with you, angry in the sense that you are not in unification with it. Anger implies a high degree of discontent on the part of one entity with another, which leads to severing of the relationship between the two.

There is only Allah. There is only Reality. Consequently, there is no place for superstition. It is you who decide whether Allah is angry with you. *Rahma* must encompass everything. Your loss is, in fact, within that *rahma*. The condition you are in is appropriate because you have brought it about by your heart. This is cosmos, not chaos. It is total ecology. As human beings, we are all occasionally at a loss and often unsure. It is for this reason that we have to keep healthy and correct companionship. Existentially, we need guidance.

Surat al Fatiha can be divided into three sections. The first section includes the opening line up to *Maliki yowm ad Deen*. It is an exposition of reality. You find yourself awakened suddenly and you say: I am in gratitude, praise to Allah, Who has these attributes. You are inspired after having been in wilderness and bewilderment, so you say, *Al hamdu lillahi rabb al 'alamin*, out of contentment and sanity. In the next section, (from *Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nastain* to *Ihdina as-Sirat al-Mustaqim*), you are the adorer, the *'abd*. This now is transaction and demand. It is a request, it is action. In this section the heart cries out. The third part is like the echo of reality in order to confirm what you are saying and to answer your question.

Surat al Fatiha is the most important *Sura* in the Qur'an. If it is completely absorbed, and if every word comes from a pure heart, you will cease to talk about opening and you will recognize that the vastness of Allah's mercy is never-ending, so you can only strive to increase, for after the constriction of ignorance, there can only come the expansion of knowledge.

CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: FOREWORD

Say: Were the sea to be ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord are exhausted, even if We brought the like of it to add [thereto]. (Qur'an 18:109)

The Qur'an is the transcendent Word of the Transcendent Lord, Creator and Sustainer of all things. With it, creation began when Allah took our covenant with the question: 'Am I not your Lord?'. With it, history began, when He announced to the angels: 'Behold, I am about to set a representative (*khalifah*) on earth!' In it, history will continue its cosmic journey from the multiplicity of things and names to the One, when 'the earth shall shine forth with the Light of its Lord', and the eternal voice of the Ever-Living and All-Sovereign Lord shall challenge all creation: 'To whom shall all dominion today belong?' The resounding answer will then echo: 'To Allah², the One, the All-Conquering!' Yet, Allah in His infinite mercy willed that His timeless Word, the Qur'an, should enter into our finite history to shape and guide it to its fulfillment on a day when He alone shall be King and Master.

The Qur'an, which we write in our books (*masahif*), preserve in our hearts and recite with our tongues, was sent down onto the heart of Allah's beloved servant and Messenger, Muhammad, may Allah's blessing and mercy rest forever on him, his family and his righteous Companions.

The science of writing, understanding and interpreting the Qur'an has occupied the best minds of the Muslim *ummah* (community) throughout its long history. The fruits of these labors are contained in the vast literature of *tafsir* (interpretation). The Qur'an, in its inner and infinite dimensions, is known only to Allah. Yet, to the Prophet and the chosen few of his followers, the veils were removed, and they were able to touch the inner mysteries of the Qur'an with their purified hearts and minds, 'for none but the pure shall touch it.' The righteous friends of Allah

² Allah in Arabic means Allah.

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CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: FOREWORD

(*awliya' Allah al-salihin*), who purified their hearts in this ocean of knowledge, left for us allusions and glimpses to guide us in our journey (*suluk*) to Allah.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's commentaries are dedicated to the task of making the Qur'an available to the men and women of the present age, that they may contemplate, understand and be guided by it in their daily lives, and in their spiritual quest. He has undertaken to present the Qur'an in Arabic, its original language, and to study its inner and outer meanings. The present work, in addition, presents the Qur'an in both its exoteric and historical dimension and its inner dimension to the Western reader. In the task of *tafsir* (interpretation), standard works in this field will be used, but in ways that are relevant to the present age and its needs.

The Qur'an must speak to the condition of every age – this it can most effectively do through an inner and primary exposition of its revelations. Thus, through the reflection of Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, as Allah shall illuminate his heart, the inner dimension of the Qur'an will be touched.

Say: Work! For Allah shall see your work, His Messenger, and the people of faith. In Him alone do we trust, for with Him is right guidance, and to Him shall be our return. (Qur'an 9:105)

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CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: INTRODUCTION

Surat al-Baqarah contains a great deal of the original primal blueprint of how a community can live – how its members should behave among themselves as individuals, as families, and as social entities. It contains the laws that govern *jihad*, the struggle against inner and outer evil – when, where and against what.

Surat al-Baqarah begins with the devastatingly deep simplicity of the letters *Alif Lam Mim*. From Unity, everything in the cosmos descends to you as a wave of mercy in tiny portions, and each portion contains the meaning of that Oneness. One drop of the ocean contains the secret of the entire ocean.

This *surah* (chapter) contains the history of humankind from the creation of Adam to the time of Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, his family and his righteous Companions.³ A great portion deals specifically with *Bani Isra'il* (the Tribe of Israel). It illustrates how they were given the message of Unity (*Tawhīd*), of the One-and-Only Reality, and how they rejected it time after time. In spite of their rejection, Allah, in His infinite mercy, repeatedly gave them repentance.

Although this chapter deals historically with the Tribe of Israel, it also describes the state of rebelliousness in all peoples and individuals who attempt to assert themselves over the will of Allah. On the level of *haqiqah* (essential Truth and Reality), the *Bani Isra'il* represent the ever-present, ongoing struggle of the *nafs* (ego-self), to establish itself in authority and power, which in turn brings to it misery, sadness and disappointment. The way to inner joy and bliss is through the submission of the *nafs* and the will of the individual, which has no existence on its own, for there is no power and no might except from Allah. This chapter gives us a road map of the course to follow to reach that stage of abandonment and knowledge of Allah.

³ It is customary invocation, whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, to invoke the peace and blessings of Allah upon him, his family and his righteous Companions.

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CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: INTRODUCTION

Every chapter is a complete and contained unit, even though it may have been revealed in different places at different times. *Surat al-Baqarah*, except for the last few *ayāt* (communications; verses), was revealed during the early years after the Hijrah (the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD). Historically, the 281st *ayah* is considered to be the last verse of the Qur'an to be revealed.

This commentary on *Surat al-Baqarah*, is the part of a series of commentaries on the Qur'an which are intended specifically for serious students and seekers of Qur'anic knowledge. Since the richness of meaning is contained in the Arabic words themselves which Allah has employed in His Book to transmit and confirm the absolute certainty of the clear revelation, much of our concern here is in elucidating the words and their roots. The commentary was made with special emphasis for its day-to-day use by the student of self-knowledge. Classical and traditional interpretations, which are readily available in English, have not been included here.

In this series of commentaries, the roots of the key Arabic words are examined and discussed, thus enabling the student to derive the full benefit of the original language of the Qur'an and its unparalleled ability to communicate what is most difficult to transmit by words. At their root level, Arabic words have many different meanings, and these meanings are sometimes the opposite of each other. This aspect of the Arabic language reflects a very important dimension of the ancient Arab culture, a dimension which enabled its people to be extremely sensitive to their fragile life and environment, and, therefore, susceptible to the message of *tawhīd* (Divine Unity, or Unity). Although its people were worldly, the language and ecology were well suited to describing and communicating the subtle world of divine realities.

The source Book, the Qur'an, contains within it many levels of meanings, uses and remedies. We have taken an etymological route through this Garden, catching a glimpse of how the roots and sounds of words interconnect, pointing towards the Source of all letters, Allah. The fountainhead of many Arabic words spring from *tawhīd*; therefore the primary aim has been to follow the vein of *tawhīd* when exploring the root form of the words and their derivatives. Certain points have been repeated and often over-emphasized to encourage the beginner on this most blessed path which is surrounded by pitfalls and dangers. The single-minded, determined and disciplined student no doubt will succeed, discovering that the thorns on the path are only

stimuli delineating the boundary of the narrow passage. These afflictions only enhance his balance and sharpen his *`aql* (reasoning ability) and awareness.

Our present age is such that denial of the One Reality is the prevailing disease. To awaken the heart of the seeker, the teacher attempts to tap the remedy drawn from the unity and timelessness of the Truth in the all-encompassing Book of Reality, the Qur'an. The absolute Truth appears in the form of the Book, reflected through the purified heart of the *mu'min* (believer) and sparkles with every visible atom in creation.

The Qur'anic revelations offer support and help for the true seeker in his or her passage through life. To remember these chapters and verses in times of difficulty, uncertainty, weakness, or doubt, is to gain spiritual as well as temporal strength, because one is reminded of the Ever-Witnessing, the All-Seeing, the Ever-Present – the Creator, Allah.

From Allah we have all come by the grace and mercy and love of the One Creator and, by the eternal mercy, we are sustained and supported on a short lifeline through a flimsy and insecure existence, so that we seek refuge in the Ever-Sustaining, Ever-Living Reality Whose subtle Attributes and absolute Essence we shall come to know, *insha'allah* (if Allah wills).

CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: COMMENTARY

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

1. *Alif Lam Mim*

2. This Book, there is no doubt in it – a guide to those who safeguard themselves with fearful awareness.

The first 5 verses (*ayāt*) describe and define the believer (*mu'min*) who trusts in the mercy and justice of Allah and who carefully channels and guards his awareness in order to apprehend Reality and its governing boundaries. The next 2 verses are about those who cover up reality (*kafirun*, from *kafara*, to cover, hide), and the following 13 verses deal with hypocrisy.

There are numerous interpretations of *Alif*, *Lam*, *Mim*, the three Arabic letters that open this chapter. One interpretation is that they symbolize the fundamental modules which are basic to understanding and communicating the meaning of creation. Letters are the building blocks of language, which, when strung together intelligently, are means of communicating information to all humankind. Another example of fundamental modules is the genetic alphabet which contains and explains the entire biological story of each creature.

‘This book’; Allah says: there is only the Book. Whenever one looks it is unfolding. The Book in its most expanded meaning is the decree of Allah, the full creational reality. There is ‘no doubt in it’. It is absolute and all-encompassing, for it covers the physical material world as well as the world of the Unseen.

The one who safeguards himself with watchful awareness (*muttaqi*) – for the way of Allah is uncompromising and decisive – avoids whatever is not conducive to positive development. He has been warned against it by experience. In a state of real awareness (*taqwa*), of Allah, one becomes aware of the presence of the One overall Reality beyond time and space.

3. Those who believe in the Unseen and establish the prayer, and spend from what We have provided them.

The mercy of Allah encompasses the entire creation, both the Seen and Unseen (*Ghayb*). The meaning of the book is rooted in the Unseen (what is not felt or measured by human senses), and its unfoldment is in the Seen. For example, within each individual is the hidden Book, the genetic imprint of the chromosomes that will unfold as the body grows, exploding from one cell by the guidance and direction of that genetically coded message. Every cell in that body contains the entire code of the body. The hidden, biological book will manifest itself in the physical body.

This verse describes the seekers of reality, the believers who unfold and awaken through self-knowledge. They trust in the Unseen, which exists but not perceptible within the limited range of human senses. These sensory limitations allow man to know the meaning of Unlimited, for nothing can be known without its opposite. Life is meaningless unless there is death. Each attribute is balanced by its opposite, and contains the doorway to the knowledge of its opposite. Another name for the Qur'an is *al-Mizan* 'the Balance'. This name reflects the understanding of opposites in creation. Islam is the middle path.

Those who believe in the Unseen establish prayer (*salat*), because *salat* is the spiritual action that brings about transformation. It is an act which enables the believer to move along the path of knowledge of the laws that govern existence and go beyond. *Ṣalat* represents the submission of all creation of Allah. It connects the seeker to the Truth (*haqq*). That connection brings about a certainty which dispels anxiety about future provision.

All that is needed by and beneficial to humankind, whether material or abstract, such as knowledge, is provision. When the spiritual seeker is fulfilled inwardly, and external worries are minimized, then both his gross and subtle provision flow easily to him. By spontaneous awareness, faith, prayer and correct action, the unfolding of self-knowledge will take place.

Essentially man is born without any outer wealth and leaves this world without taking anything with him. The Qur'anic teaching centers around giving: if one gives, one will also be replenished. So tap the reservoir of the Unseen and become an open conduit!

4. And those who believe in that which has been revealed to you, and that which was revealed before you, and they are sure of the Hereafter.

This refers to those who trust and follow what has come through the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the preceding messengers. They believe that they will be guided. They are certain of the Hereafter (*Akhira*), and that this physical realm of experience will come to an end, and that beyond death lies another realm of experience and consciousness. This certainty (*yaqin*) is a deep, unconscious and 'unprovable' (empirically) knowledge which is a higher aspect of belief (*iman*). It is innate and not connected to logic and deduction.

5. They are on a right course of guidance from their Lord, and they shall be successful.

With this we are cast back to the opening chapter, *Surat al-Fatiha*: 'Guide us to the straight path.' By avoiding what is harmful, one is able to follow the true life-transaction (*din*). Success (*falah*) comes as a result. The failures and pitfalls are numerous. The unleashed self-ego (lower *nafs*), arrogance (*kibriya'*), and self-elevation are amongst the veils which enable our *shaytan* or lower negative tendencies to act. *Shaytan* is translated into English as 'satan', but the meaning is different and so too, therefore, is the image conjured up by it. We will use the term *shaytan* rather than replace it with the English term because *shaytan* comes from the verbal root which means to be cast off the path, to be far away. This *shaytan* energy begets covetousness, jealousy, lust, love of power and other twisted traits. The way can be made straight only by removing these obstacles.

6. Surely those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe.

7. Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes there is a covering. For them is a great punishment.

These verses concern the disbelievers (*kafirun*). Their hearts are hardened, set and sealed by covering up the truth and denying reality, which is inherent within them. Their denial of the One, the All-Encompassing and All-Merciful Reality, condemns them to flounder in isolation. This

condition is one of torment, agony, and great punishment. Our spirit emanates from an Essence which is limitless and most sublime; limitation is therefore a 'punishment'. Limitation is the result of man's perceived separation and isolation which arises out of a lack of true submission.

8. And among people are those who say: We believe in Allah and the Last Day while they are not believers.

Hypocrisy thrives on elusiveness. The Arabic word for hypocrisy, (*nifaaq*) is related to the word which means a tunnel or underground passageway (*nafaq*). If the lower aspect of the self is not contained and displaced by the higher aspect it will lurk in one tunnel after another in a desperate attempt to avoid purification. The lower self tries to preserve itself by avoiding being checked and uprooted by spontaneous awareness. The hypocrite (*munafiq*) always finds excuses and will never confront his vices and self-imposed shackles squarely. The main characteristic of the hypocrite is that he avoids facing the central issue of submission to Allah through faith and trust. To avoid this confrontation, he claims to believe in Allah and the Hereafter, but in truth does not, and mistakenly thinks that he has safely escaped the real confrontation.

9. They desire to deceive Allah and those who believe, and they deceive only themselves while they do not perceive.

They try – or think they are able – to deceive Allah, but are unaware that they deceive only themselves. They cannot perceive the reality of their situation, for their knowledge is based upon the premise of separation and not of unity (*tawhīd*). They do not perceive that they are engulfed by the One Reality Whose laws govern every aspect of life, including self-deceit. Thus they conclude that they are safely hidden within themselves.

10. There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease, and they shall have a painful punishment by their lying and deceit.

The hypocrite is sick, and the sickness is of the heart, (*qalb*; from *qalaba*, to turn, return, free). A healthy heart is one which is unattached and free of desires, expectations and disappointments. The desire of the hypocrite's sick heart is based on self-deception. Allah's generosity, which is

vast and promises experiential increase, will only serve to increase this desire. The outcome, therefore, of this situation is nothing but confusion and suffering.

11. And when it is said to them: Do not act corruptly in the land, they say: Most surely we are only those who put things in order and conciliate.

12. Surely, they are those who act corruptly, but they do not perceive.

13. And when it is said to them: Believe as the people believe, they say: Shall we believe as the foolish believe? Surely, they themselves are the fools, but they do not know.

All created beings reflect the Creator's Attribute of eternity and ongoingness and therefore always resist accepting any discontinuity in life, and any separation or duality. Even the sick at heart, when shown their denial of unity, react by denying the information in order to perpetuate their confused system of belief and resultant habits. Another symptom of this disease is self-elevation and arrogance, for it serves to perpetuate their false concepts and beliefs by making them elevate themselves above others. The would-be deceiver looks down upon other systems and denounces their adherents as foolish, insolent and impudent (*sufaha*). In reality, however, the hypocrites are the foolish ones, because if they allowed themselves access to their innate, natural disposition (*fitrah*), they would know better. They have, however, lost the way to that basic (*fitri*, inborn) primal self-knowledge.

Fitrah is the 'natural and basic disposition' of humankind and is derived from *fatara*, to split or take apart. *Fatara* also means to create. Non-existence cracked and split open to reveal its opposite, creation. True knowledge – transformational knowledge – is accessed through the pre-creational crack by dividing deep into the well to reach the timeless source of the spring. The foolish, ignorant one clutters his life and fills his heart with the debris of illusions, desires, attachments and covetousness, blocking the access to that original crack, that inherent disposition of spontaneous beingness.

14. And when they meet those who believe, they say: We believe! And when they are alone with their *shaytans*, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking!

Shaytan is from the Arabic verbal root *shatana*, which means to rebel, to be distant or cast off the path of light and mercy. *Shaytan* opposes *Rahman*, the Merciful. Mockery is ultimately harmful only to the self, because it is a negative attitude. Man always seeks security, and therefore one who has not gained the security of belief (*iman*) is bound to exhibit his illusions and false concepts when he is back in his familiar environment and up to his old habits.

15. Allah mocks them and they are prolonged and reinforced in their inordinacy so that they blindly wander on.

Reality reflects the intentions and actions of man. Thus those who wish to mock are allowed to, through the mercy of Allah. Every creational system perpetuates and feeds upon itself. The path of belief, if it is truly followed, will only bring increase, and the path of hypocrisy will likewise bring about increase so that those within it fall deeper into the abyss of its dark tunnels.

Life is dynamism and growth. Creation began from infinite non-existence and is expanding. Eventually, the entire cosmos and all the expanding sub-systems within it will contract back to the spaceless, timeless zone at the end of the creational cycle back to the eternal void within the divine grip.

16. These are the ones who purchase error for guidance. Their exchange will bring no profit, and they are not among those who are on a right course.

Guidance to the Truth (*huda*) is man's birthright, the capital with which he sets out for the next realm of consciousness. Like an inheritance, however, it must be reclaimed here and now. Some people ignorantly exchange it for misguidance, encouraged by the dominant characteristics of the lower self (*nafs*), its habits, insecurities, and fears of the unknown.

17. Their parable is exemplified by one who kindles a fire, and when it had illuminated all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them in utter darkness – they do not see.

The confused hypocrite occasionally catches a glimpse of real light, but if he does not follow and kindle that spark then he has denied light and higher guidance. The hypocrite will inevitably end up more confused in the darkness of doubt and disconnection.

18. Deaf, dumb, blind – so they will not return.

Often in the Qur'an, return (*raj'*) denotes repentance, that is, a return from what is not real, from the veil back to the Real, which was always there but had been forgotten or neglected. The veil includes the heart's attachments, fears and insecurities.

19. Or like the dark rain cloud from the sky in which there is thunder and lightning. They put their fingers into their ears from thunderclap for fear of death. And Allah encompasses the unbelievers.

Part of the beauty of a storm is thunder and lightning, but if one is afraid to come close to that system and examine it, then one remains in ignorance. Ignorance is the barrier to experiencing unity (*tawhīd*). One cannot help being awestruck by the majesty and beauty of Allah's manifestations. One can choose either to be in understanding of the glorification of the Creator or in ignorant fearfulness. Another meaning that may be derived from this verse is that promises, warnings and light of knowledge in the Qur'an illuminate like lightning and cause one to react with awesome awareness in the same way as one does to terrestrial thunder and lightning.

20. The lightning almost takes away their sight – whenever it shines on them they walk in it, and when it becomes dark to them they stand still. And if Allah had pleased, He would certainly have taken away their hearing and their sight. Surely, Allah has power over all things.

Deaf, dumb and blind. If one does not hear, speak or see, there is no interaction with natural creation or the living world. The light of truth is so devastating that it not only overwhelms the sight but brings one to the realization of the ego-self's shadowy existence.

This verse implies that the denier, the non-believer (*kafir*), cannot experience unity in the creational diversity, for he has not surrendered to the blessedness of the All-Encompassing Merciful One. He moves only when the signs seem conducive to him, and stops in the darkness, repelled, whenever the signs go against his ego-self.

21. O mankind, serve your Lord Who created you and those before you, so that you may safeguard yourselves with fearful awareness.

All created beings are in adoration and worship (*'ibadah*) of something or other, whether they are conscious of their acts or not. Everyone has a goal towards which his heart is pointing and his actions are directed. The only real and worthwhile focal point is that which encompasses and sustains creation; the Lord and Sustainer (*Rabb*; from *rabba*, to raise, bring up and nourish). If we are not in worship of the ultimate reality, then we cannot know the full meaning of safeguarding with caution (*taqwa*), and therefore we cannot know where the boundaries lie – where safety ends and harm begins.

When worship (*'ibadah*) is at its ultimate point, then there is no friction between the worshipper or the worshipped. When the road is smooth (*mu`abbad*; the root of this word is the same as that of *'ibadah*), the drive is smooth. If worship is not performed in total harmony and with natural ease, then it is perverted, superstitious, or merely ritualistic.

22. Who made the earth a resting-place for you, and the heaven a canopy, and Who sends down water from the heavens, then brings forth fruits for you as subsistence? So do not set up rivals with Allah while you know.

The mercy of creational love is described here, both physically and allegorically. As the means of worship, the first stage is ease (a resting place, *firash*: bed, blanket, cushion), then stability (a canopy; *bina'*, building, structure), then continuous adoration (water from the heavens; *ma'an*), then means of sustenance (*thamarat*, fruit). All this is from One Creator, and if this effulgent love is recognized and known, then there is no room for idolatry (self-images, love of wealth or objects, and the like) or for setting up rivals (*andad*) with Allah.

CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: SUMMARY

The Arabic word *surah*, translated as chapter, is derived from the verbal root which means to enclose or surround. It also means a stage in the construction of a building. This implies that the Qur'an is based on stages which have come one after the other, separate from each other in form but related by a unified theme. The essence of the Qur'an is unity (*tawhīd*), for it is revealed from Allah, the One.

The first twenty verses (*ayāt*) of this chapter are general and profound. They describe, define and differentiate those who submit to Reality and Truth and those who cover up Reality. Those who submit with faith and sincerity are known as Muslims and those who cover up the spiritual essence of existence are referred to as non-believers (*kuffar*).

The next thirteen verses describe the nature of the diseased heart which is not unified. That disease, which may be described as unbelief, denial, rejection or, in a more complex sense, as hypocrisy (*nifaq*), is a sickness which is not cured unless it is treated. Allah does not tyrannize His creation, but one of His unchangeable laws is that if one does not overcome a chronic disease by eliminating its causes, the disease will, by its nature, infect and beset one with more and more affliction.

The heart (*qalb*), as spoken of in the Qur'an, is that entity whose nature is to turn. *Qalb* is not a physical organ but an inner faculty. It is derived from the verbal root *qalaba*, which means to turn. It also means 'to change, transform and transmute'. In a spiritual sense the heart is the pivotal point for inspiration and deeper perception. Like the physical organ, it must allow an uninterrupted flow, purity and openness, or it will become blocked and damaged. If it becomes attached to anything, it will be fixed and its efficiency reduced, no matter what it is set on, no matter how good the cause. Even those working sincerely for charity will come to experience disappointment and dislocation if their original intention contained any kind of attachment. Once the heart is attached, agitation and friction set in, and it loses its freedom and readiness for inspiration. The test of a healthy heart is that it is able to reflect truth from beyond reasoning and

rationality. The extent of the reduction in the efficiency of the heart's higher function is directly proportionate to the extent of one's lower attachments and expectations.

The first part of Surat al-Baqarah describes Allah's creation of man as His representative (*khalifah*), and the meaning of *Shaytan*. Man naturally desires knowledge of his origin. He wants to know why he is destined to be born in this world only to die later.

We are told about Adam, the first of humankind, put together from the elements of the earth. All is part of the perfect oneness, a chain reaction with a beginning and an end. Described within this chapter is the deception of Adam, which is essentially man's veiling from his sublime origins. Man is distinguished from all creation, because all the unseen angelic entities were made submissive to him. All the angels prostrated themselves to him, except one: *Shaytan*. The verbal root of *shaytan* is *shatana*, which means 'to be cast out of the mainstream'. As soon as man came into existence as part of this stream of creational expansion, another element raised itself from within the creational stream and said: 'I am better!' This aspect of arrogant self-assertion is from an expansive attribute which has necessarily gone out of the mainstream. Its creation by Allah was necessary for the full development of human awareness. As long as man continues to say 'I' without the recognition that he has only come to journey back to his essence, trouble is the inevitable result.

Man functions well only if he remains unattached. The moment the lower self, with its qualities of separation and rebellion, comes to dominate, man is doomed. All of his individual and social problems stem from the dominance of this ego. Thus, the seeker of true knowledge continually renews his actions 'in the name of Allah' (*bismillah*), the Unifier, the One to Whom submission and obedience are due. From this remembrance eventually arises a total, absolute, uncontradicted awareness that everything emanates from the One and is sustained by the One.

The seeker who wishes to awaken to this knowledge must be aware and alert all the time, physically and mentally. Any state other than a fully conscious presence must be instantly rectified. Delay results in stagnation, and this renders change more difficult to achieve. One must be available for any situation as a fully developed human being, with faith, good opinion, optimism and the inner realization that one has come from Allah and to Him one will return. In

between the womb and the tomb, existence is but a tiny flicker, combining matter and meaning, the seen and the unseen.

The ongoing domination of man by his ego is echoed by *Shaytan* in the Qur'an when he promises to assail man from every direction and divert him from the true nature of Reality. Allah allows him this derived power, but He makes an exception: those who are righteous and are constantly in remembrance (*dhikr*) of Him. Over these *Shaytan* has no hold, because they have knowledge of his ways and are constantly aware of him in order not to be ensnared by his artifices. At least five times a day they anchor their continual remembrance with standing, bowing and prostrating themselves before their Creator in prayer. In this way *Shaytan* is kept at bay.

In the creation of Adam, we find an allegory of those who befriend *Shaytan*, that is, those who fall into the trap of the self and its domination. Nothing has changed in principle since the time of Adam. Adam was given inspiration, spontaneous guidance and freedom through submission. Originally, he had no mental anxieties, concepts or desires. He was in that unseen Garden beyond the realm of ordinary comprehension. The Garden, described in the Qur'an as being fed and sustained by underground, unseen rivers (*jannat tajri min tahtiha al-anhar*), is the realm of spirits (*arwah*) and pure energies. In this non-physical realm where time and space have no permanency, no creational growth or destruction exists. Adam and his feminine counterpart, Eve, were in that infinite Garden 'state'. They were warned of *shaytanic* deception and a certain tree – a creation inappropriate to the eternal Garden. They had to leave the Garden to enter a different realm, one which contains the experience of time and change, mental disturbances and attachment. That tree must relate to desire and discontentment, for it is there that *Shaytan* lurks.

Adam's heart, focused as it was on the outer curiosity of the tree, became distracted. Realizing the gravity of his error, he turned to his Lord in an attempt to reclaim his heritage as a free being with a 'centered' heart. The story of Adam is a parable for our own affliction and testing in life, so that we can reclaim our original condition through direct effort and proper direction. We must, therefore, move from being afflicted by mental desires and attachment to freedom by submission to the will of Allah. This is the deep meaning of Islam.

The story of the 'fall' of Adam is then repeated in terms of communities and nations. The tribe of Israel experienced great turmoil because of their disobedience and insensitivity. They brought about tyranny and trouble upon themselves, thereby creating a demand (again in their hearts) to be saved. That demand was at the root of the creation of Moses. He came to them from among them; one opposite brings about another. But soon they were in doubt and confusion again, for they saw Moses as an ordinary being like themselves. They wanted to be convinced by more miracles, although the whole event of Moses was a miracle. The entire creation is a miracle, but humankind cannot see this!

The tribe of Israel evolved by following the guidance of Moses, until he left them (in the charge of his trusted and divinely guided brother), to answer the call of Allah. He was gone for forty days. Upon his return he found his people worshipping a golden calf. To overcome their deviation and wrong actions, they were later required to sacrifice a cow. One symbolic meaning of sacrificing a cow was to destroy the foundation of worshipping the calf or a desired possession. The tribe of Israel, however, lapsed into arrogance and began to argue in order to avoid carrying out the simple outward act of sacrificing a cow, because, in fact, their intentions had not changed. They asked, 'What sort of cow? What color is it? Where can we find it? There are too many cows, we are confused!' This is their ongoing state of bickering, vanity and disobedience. This is the condition of deception and disbelief.

Humankind always seeks the Garden (*jannah*). The verbal root for Garden is *janna*, which means 'hidden', in reference to the grounds of the garden hidden by lush foliage. One must qualify for the hidden or inner Garden. We were dropped into this worldly condition in order to be proven, to evolve through faith (*iman*), trust and correct action stemming from pure intentions. The result is that one experiences a freedom and inner joy and certainty, whilst still experiencing a worldly condition contaminated with change, anxieties and confusion. This is why Allah commanded Adam, 'Get down from it, some of you enemies to others!', implying that enmity and disagreement are veils over the pure, original state of tranquility and peace.

Even after man's repeated disobedience Allah is Ever-Forgiving. The Children of Israel were forgiven on numerous occasions. Whenever a messenger was sent to them, they rebelled; but they would be forgiven again and again. The deeper meaning of forgiveness is spontaneous

knowledge, which brings about protection from wrong actions. The sincere person will learn what is going to cause him harm from his mistakes. Thus, he will avoid committing the same errors in the future. This avoidance of error by knowledge is called 'safeguarding oneself with fearful awareness', known in the Quran as *taqwa*.

The situation of the tribe of Israel is common to other communities. Their constant doubt, bickering and love of the world can be seen also in the later disobedience of the Muslims during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and throughout the following centuries. The chapters that follow *Surat al-Baqarah* describe the hypocrisy of some of the Muslims who were with the Prophet as his companions.

Most people want to secure and render permanent the situation and habits which they are used to. The majority of the world is caught in repetition and dogma; and prejudice and dogma are due to insecurity, and the human search for permanency. Yet creation is in constant flux, moving at high speed, like a film which moves quickly through the camera and produces much slower images. Nothing can be fixed. The contemplative person wishes it all would stop so that he could get a really good look at it, but there is no stopping the living continuum of change. In fact, his very existence is based on motion. The desire for the permanent is in its essence based upon love for the Creator's attribute of eternity. Outwardly, we experience age, decay and change, and inwardly we can be certain of a non-changing reality connecting the soul to its next experience beyond time and space.

The reason that people of *kufr* are against Islam is because the real Muslim cannot be enslaved to the material world. However, the Muslim does have respect for matter, because matter is Allah's creation. He has respect for existence, for relationships and for the law of the land in which he lives. The Muslim is in outer revolution and in inner evolution. What is the point of changing the government, or the head of the government, when the people persist in ignorance and do not want to awaken? Materialist non-believers are much more afraid of reality, because they know that with its establishment a transformation will occur that favors social equity over selfish acquisitiveness and power.

There are no fast cures. There are limitations in every system, although our 'fast' jet-age has over-stretched many systems beyond their limits. Fast food, fast travel, fast marriage and fast divorce, and fast wealth (with its inevitable fast poverty) exemplify this. The cure for this over-indulgence can only be found in restraint, and this is the meaning of the fast in Islam. The word 'fast' has totally opposite meanings. Where there is sickness, there is also the cure. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said, 'Your cure is in you, but you do not discern it.' He also said, 'You are the clear Book. By its signs the obscure becomes clear.'

In *Surat al-Baqarah* the plea is repeated: 'Do you not use your reasoning?' (*afala ta'iqulun*). 'Can you not see? Can you not hear? Do you not use your intellect?' The sound of the name 'Allah' was already heard in the womb. The fetus hears the pulsating sound of the name 'Allah,' exactly as it is pronounced in spiritual invocation and *dhikr*. The mother's heart has already sung it for the unborn baby.

Surat al-Baqarah constantly reminds us of our state before consciousness and after. 'Do you not remember? Do you not recall? Do you not reflect?' (*afala tadhakkarun*). The basis of spontaneous and genuine remembrance is faith (*iman*): faith that life is not without purpose. We have not come into this world just to run about like fools in order to compete and survive, and then end up being devoured by worms, decaying in dust. Faith is the good news, which leads to the knowledge that we are from Allah, and to Allah we are journeying by Allah's grace.

Faith will initiate one into the way of inner joy, but faith without knowledge and awakening is meaningless and barren, like a seed without soil, light and water. The seed of faith must interact with virtuous actions. By so doing it rubs off the sheath of the ego (*nafs*), pushes down roots into the heart, sends forth the stem of knowledge, and in the spring produces the fruit of intimacy and knowledge of the Real. Faith (*iman*) can only take root and manifest its meaning by virtuous, 'free' deeds. In the Qur'an, the term for faith (*iman*) is invariably coupled with good deeds (*salihat*).

The responsibility lies squarely on our own shoulders. If one moves towards knowledge, it is for oneself; and if one does not move, then one remains in darkness and ignorance. No one is accountable for anyone else. We have obligations to one another, but no control or accountability

over others' misdeeds. A man's accountability is to his own sincerity of intention – from which his actions cannot be separated.

One cannot understand one's true state or situation without sincere questioning, and time to reflect and contemplate higher things. It is not sufficient to become occupied with self-knowledge merely in occasional spiritual gatherings or meditation. Maximum learning occurs when one is in the most difficult times, because it is precisely at these times that what is concealed becomes manifest. This manifestation allows for recognition and change.

The prophets were the greatest spiritual teachers, and the cause of transformation and enlightenment, for man cannot learn how to free himself without a teacher who fully knows the 'spiritual' ropes. This knowledge has always been passed on to the most capable men, who fulfilled the prophetic legacy in the absence of the prophet himself. There is nothing higher or purer than the relationship between the master and the seeker, especially in spiritual teaching.

The condition placed upon spiritual teaching from time immemorial is that it must be given free. Many teachers have even cared for the needs of their students. Those who teach the path of unity (*tawhīd*) cannot but care for every aspect of their students' lives, because the path is holistic. The student, however, must reciprocate with respect and sincere application of the teaching; otherwise there will be no benefit. The closest people to the teacher have always been those who need him most and have recognized their need. The seeker will, on occasion, find himself resentful of his teacher and his dependency on him. This 'vice' is natural, for within the student is the inherent tendency to depend only on Allah and not on creation. The enlightened teacher is not surprised by such rebellion and ingratitude.

As we found in *Surat al-Baqarah* that man's nature is rebellious, so we find that spiritual seekers often tend to be rebellious, and in fact, the difficult ones are often kept close to the teacher. It takes a teacher who is patient and wise, and who acts in the way of Allah carefully to channel doubt and rebellious energy towards higher things. The teacher may in fact be more cautious and concerned about the student who is always obedient, well-behaved and never causes a ripple; somebody who thinks he really is 'spiritual'.

When Adam experienced disgrace, Allah prescribed the option of repentance by which His forgiveness and 'return' could be obtained. The people of Mecca could not have been more belligerent than they were to the Prophet during the early years of his mission. His forgiveness and compassion were immense, for he was a perfect man whose action reflected the perfect Creator.

Look at Allah's love for his creation. He gives humankind the option to rebel and disobey, yet His own response is none other than generosity and clemency. Man has the option of being foolish, selfish, and greedy, but Allah will never reject him the moment he truly beseeches His forgiveness. The whole affair hinges on approaching one's Lord with a wholesome heart.

Attributes such as selfishness, foolishness, jealousy, meanness, greed and lust find their origin in fear of poverty and ignorance of the way of Allah. This is clearly indicated in the Qur'an, Allah says that it is *Shaytan* who causes fear and anxiety for a possible lack of provision; thus, if one is generous to others, one opposes this restrictive tendency of the ego and will find as a result that everything one needs is already there. Even if one is only interested in being generous to one's own family and does so genuinely, a greater energy somehow comes forth, and the possibility of giving on a larger scale occurs. The process must begin somewhere; the tap must be turned. To begin with, it merely drips; eventually it flows in a steady stream.

One's inwardness will eventually become manifest outwardly. Inward abandonment leads to appropriate outer action. The Prophet of Islam was the true model of inward abandonment and outer perfect action. He married, cared for his family, and for all those around him.

The test of the Garden (*jannah*) is clearly described in this chapter: it is based on willingness to abandon and die. The Jewish rabbis said, 'Nobody will enter the Garden of Paradise except those who are Jews', so Allah answered them: 'Tell them then to wish for death!' The Qur'an is talking to men of understanding, sensitive beings who can read the signs in themselves and on the horizon. If one is not willing to die, then one is not qualified for the Garden of freedom, because the qualification for this state is non-attachment.

Keys to the Qur'an by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri
CHAPTER 2: SURAH AL-BAQARAH: SUMMARY

One may have a family and all the things that go with a conventional life, and yet one must be willing, at a moment's notice, to drop whatever one is concerned with and leave it. One should bear outer responsibilities without their becoming a burden to one's heart. Strive diligently outwardly, and keep one's heart in the cave of divine presence. Thus the heart is to be kept empty and pure.

Although we often find that people's hearts yearn for a palace, yet most people, even the wealthy ones, live in confusion and moral squalor. Allah says, 'We have sent you to give them the good news and the warning.' The good news is that the heart is like an eternal bird which must learn how to fly. The cage door will open once the heart is free from attachment. Otherwise, one will remain incarcerated by the lower self.

The Qur'an says in *Surat al-Baqarah*: 'And you will not be asked about the inhabitants of the Fire.' One comes alone to this world and will depart alone; be wary of the day when nobody can help anybody else. One must live in this body fully, connected outwardly to creation, yet disconnected inwardly from creation and in submission to the Creator. One will then find the Garden of permanent beauty, and everything is according to the laws of Allah.

Some of the laws of the Creator are explained in this chapter. One is told how to behave in a community, the meaning of marriage, the meaning of caring for the weak and orphans. One is told how to conduct business transactions and loans, and the unjust nature of usury is explained. The boundaries of the outer, divine law are made comprehensible.

Women's rights and obligations are carefully emphasized. Prior to Islam, women were regarded as sex objects, and were accorded no respect. This was put right by the laws of Islam. As an equal (in the way of Allah), women should be looked after, respected and protected, not treated or abused as a play-object or body toy, to be replaced when worn out. The husband's responsibility is to provide for the woman in order to help her attain a state of tranquility so that she may evolve spiritually. If he cannot do this, he should admit his limitations to her and be prepared to release her so she can perhaps marry someone who can fulfill her needs. Men, who are generally speaking physically, biologically and emotionally slightly steadier than women, are

given a greater responsibility and therefore greater power. In his last public discourse, the Prophet stressed the rights of women as the most important aspect of behavior.

In the phrase, 'We made you a middle community', the Qur'an gives a description of the true Muslim community which must always remain in the middle, steering a course of moderation away from all extremes. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said: 'The best of affairs is the middle course.' This is the balance between opposites in the creational realm of duality within which lies all that is conducive to humankind. Opposites must exist, or there would be no creation. The prime example of duality is the creation of the heavens and earth: they are opposites, but one cannot exist without the other. Unity manifests itself in diversity. The Qur'an says that these are the signs for people who have intellect, who reflect. The real Muslim is in the middle. At all times, he has access to inner joy but is also willing to shoulder his outer responsibilities.

There are several verses which are concerned with what to avoid, for example intoxicants and gambling, and also with what is considered appropriate food to eat. We learn that the divinely revealed natural laws are for our benefit, not for our repression and restriction. Therefore, if we are truly in trouble, not wanting to harm ourselves by going against the law, but having no other choice, we can, as an exception, eat what is necessary to stay alive.

We are told in this chapter that the self 'will receive that which it has earned'. We get what we deserve, not what we desire. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. Life is founded upon mercy, and the laws of creation apply to all of creation at all times. By going against them, one creates havoc with oneself, one's family and community.

We are informed about the month of Ramadan, the door to expansion. If we wish to expand, then according to the law of opposites, we must restrict, limit and contract. The door to increase is through decrease. By finding out what one's outer limitations are, one will discover one's license for limitless inner expansion.

We are ordered to observe the fast of Ramadan, and we must pay the *zakat*, a tax of about 2.5% on income. Also, we must attempt the arduous journey to Mecca (*Hajj*), if we are financially and physically able.

It is necessary to experience difficulty in order that we may appreciate ease, as Allah says: 'Indeed, with difficulty comes ease, indeed, with difficulty comes ease' (94: 5). We must always keep up our prayers and be on time for them. If one does not perform these duties, the rest is useless. The true essence, or reality (*haqiqah*), without adherence to the laws pertaining to the outer aspects of life (*Shari`ah*), is not attainable. Likewise, the outer law without the inner reality is worthless; it is like a body without a soul. The two are branches of the same tree. *Surat al-Baqarah* is completely balanced between the two. These are the boundaries of Allah.

'And fight in the way of Allah' (2:190): the meaning of Islam is peace. The main door to the mosque of the Ka`bah in Mecca is called the Door of Peace; but inner peace can only occur if one struggles and fights outwardly. The outer and inner battles are against both injustice and tyranny. Outwardly, the struggle is against social injustice and oppression, while inwardly it is against the tyranny of the lower self.

The Prophet Muhammad described the fight against the self as being the greater struggle of the two. Upon doing battle with the self, one will end with the victory of a heart at peace. Fighting ignorance within the self will give one strength to fight ignorance outside, until mercy and knowledge prevail throughout the world. Life is a struggle. With outer struggle, there is inner contentment. Outwardly, one is in perpetual toil and turmoil, while inwardly, one is calm and contented. That is the way of Allah.

'The life of this world is made to appear beautiful for those who disbelieve and deny [the existence of Allah]' (2:212). This world is superficially decorative: its attractiveness is a bait through which people are hooked – and then suffer affliction because of their attachment to it. Desiring permanency in an impermanent world, people become attached to all manner of things. They start collecting but do not know where to put all this intrinsically useless stuff or how to insure its safety. One works for one's entire life towards things which are essentially of no value or even burdensome.

Breaking from one's attachment is an important aspect of flight or migration (*hijrah*). Historically, this is exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad's departure from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. This date marks the beginning of the Islamic lunar calendar. Migration in the way of

Allah is the highest act, because a person leaves behind all that he loves. Those who have faith and have travelled in the way of Allah are seeking mercy, by avoiding that which is not conducive to spiritual growth. One tries to change a situation and to improve it: when one cannot, then one must leave it behind.

Allah relates to us the story of David and Saul so that we may understand how a small band of good and firmly committed people can triumph over a larger group. From this we see that one must not judge quantitatively matters which have to do with Allah. The qualities of David embraced both kingdoms: he was the king of the outward and the king of the inward. This is how we, as followers of the Prophet Muhammad, expect a leader to be. The perfect ruling and representation of Allah occurs when a leader combines sovereignty over both the outer and the inner kingdoms.

Man is naturally confused and in doubt, and doubt is a stimulus which can bring about knowledge. We are given the example of Abraham when he asked Allah how the dead are brought to life. He wanted to know, just as some of us rationally ask how certain things happen. Abraham asked only to confirm it in his heart, for he was a human being and human nature seeks knowledge and confirmation. It is important to understand the humanity of the prophets and 'those established in knowledge', their inheritors. Because of our culturization we often visualize them as rabbis or in a theatrical sense; they were in fact the most human of men, and that deep humanity was a sign of their great illumination.

Surat al-Baqarah ends with the profound call that the Lord has granted His slave. 'Our Lord, do not punish us for our forgetfulness and mistakes. Do not overburden us with what we have not the strength to bear. Pardon us, protect us and have mercy upon us, inwardly and outwardly. Unify us and grant us strength against the denial and rejection of Your One true Reality.'

There is no god but Allah, the Master, the Clear Truth. May the tongue of Reality bless the seal of Prophecy, the first light of creation, the beloved of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and his purified family, companions and devoted followers, according to the number of all created things.

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Islamic teachings of *Tawhīd* (Unity) with insights into the human self: understanding the inner landscape is essential foundation for progress on the path of knowledge.

Decree and Destiny (Original and a Revised Version)

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A lucid exposition of the extensive body of Islamic thought on the issue of free will and determinism.

Happiness in Life and After Death – An Islamic Sufi View

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This book offers revelations and spiritual teachings that map a basic path towards wholesome living without forgetting death: cultivating a constant awareness of one's dual nature.

Leaves from a Sufi Journal

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A unique collection of articles presenting an outstanding introduction to the areas of Sufism and original Islamic teachings.

The Elements of Sufism

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Sufism is the heart of Islam. This introduction describes its origins, practices, historical background and its spread throughout the world.

The Garden of Meaning

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This book is about two gardens, one visible and fragrant, the other less visible but eternal. The beauty and harmony of both gardens are explicated in this magisterial volume, linking outer to inner, physics to metaphysics, self to cosmos.

The Journey of the Self

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

After introducing the basic model of the self, there follows a simple yet complete outline of the self's emergence, development, sustenance, and growth toward its highest potential.

The Sufi Way to Self-Unfoldment

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Unfolding inner meanings of the Islamic ritual practices towards the intended ultimate purpose to live a fearless and honorable life, with no darkness, ignorance or abuse.

Witnessing Perfection

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Delves into the universal question of Deity and the purpose of life. Durable contentment is a result of 'perfected vision'.

Practices & Teachings of Islam

Calling Allah by His Most Beautiful Names

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Attributes or Qualities resonate from their Majestic and Beautiful Higher Realm into the heart of the active seeker, and through it back into the world.

Fasting in Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a comprehensive guide to fasting in all its aspects, with a description of fasting in different faith traditions, its spiritual benefits, rules and regulations.

Prophetic Traditions in Islam: On the Authority of the Family of the Prophet

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Offers a comprehensive selection of Islamic teachings arranged according to topics dealing with belief and worship, moral, social and spiritual values.

The Wisdom (Hikam) of Ibn `Ata'allah: Translation and Commentary

Translation & Commentary by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

These aphorisms of Ibn `Ata'Allah, a Shadhili Shaykh, reveal the breadth and depth of an enlightened being who reflects divine unity and inner transformation through worship.

The Inner Meanings of Worship in Islam: A Personal Selection of Guidance for the Wayfarer

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Guidance for those who journey along this path, from the Qur'an, the Prophet's traditions, narrations from the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and seminal works from among the *Ahl al-Tasawwuf* of all schools of thought.

The Lantern of The Path

Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq

Each one of the ninety-nine chapter of this book is a threshold to the next, guiding the reader through the broad spectrum of ageless wisdom, like a lantern along the path of reality.

The Pilgrimage of Islam

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a specialized book on spiritual journeying, offering the sincere seeker keys to inner transformation.

The Sayings & Wisdom of Imam `Ali

Compiled By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Translated By: Asadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate

Carefully translated into modern English, a selection of this great man's sayings gathered together from authentic and reliable sources.

Transformative Worship in Islam: Experiencing Perfection

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri with Muna H. Bilgrami

This book uniquely bridges the traditional practices and beliefs, culture and language of Islam with the transformative spiritual states described by the Sufis and Gnostics.

Talks, Interviews & Courses

Ask Course ONE: The Sufi Map of the Self

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This workbook explores the entire cosmology of the self through time, and maps the evolution of the self from before birth through life, death and beyond.

Ask Course TWO: The Prophetic Way of Life

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This workbook explores how the code of ethics that govern religious practice and the Prophetic ways are in fact transformational tools to enlightened awakening.

Friday Discourses: Volume 1

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The Shaykh addresses many topics that influence Muslims at the core of what it means to be a Muslim in today's global village.

Songs of Iman on the Roads of Pakistan

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A series of talks given on the divergence between 'faith' and 'unbelief' during a tour of the country in 1982 which becomes a reflection of the condition occurring in the rest of the world today.

The Connection Between the Absolute and the Relative

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

This is a 1990 conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, in which he talks about wide-ranging topics on Islam and presents it as the archetypal, universal, Adamic path that began when humanity rose in consciousness to recognize duality and began its journey from the relative back to Absolute Unity.

The Spiritual Path: A Conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri On His Life, Thought and Work

Professor Ali A. Allawi

In this wide-ranging conversation with Professor Ali Allawi, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri talks about his life story and the spiritual journey that he embarked on and the path he has been on ever since.

Poetry, Aphorisms & Inspirational

101 Helpful Illusions

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Everything in creation has a purpose relevant to ultimate spiritual Truth. This book highlights natural veils to be transcended by disciplined courage, wisdom and insight.

Beyond Windows

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Offering moving and profound insights of compassion and spirituality through these anthologies of connections between slave self and Eternal Lord.

Bursts of Silence

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Inspired aphorisms provide keys to doors of inner knowledge, as well as antidotes to distraction and confusion.

Pointers to Presence

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A collection of aphorisms providing insights into consciousness and are pointers to spiritual awakening.

Ripples of Light

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Inspired aphorisms which become remedies for hearts that seek the truth.

Sound Waves

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

A collection of aphorisms that help us reflect and discover the intricate connection between self and soul.

Sublime Gems: Selected Teachings of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani

Spiritual nourishment extracted from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's existing works.

Autobiography

Son of Karbala

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

Health Sciences and Islamic History

Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2

Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh

Edited By: Munawar A. Anees

Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Health Sciences in Early Islam is a pioneering study of Islamic medicine that opens up new chapters of knowledge in the history of the healing sciences. This two volume work covers the development of Islamic medicine between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.