

The background of the entire cover is a deep blue with a complex, repeating geometric pattern of interlocking lines forming various polygons, creating a textured, mosaic-like effect.

Keys to the Qur'an

Volume 3
Commentary on Surah Yasin

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Book Description	ii
About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 36: <i>Surat Ya Sin</i>	4
Summary	58
eBooks By Zahra Publications.....	69

Book Description

*Surat Ya Sin*¹ is the heart of the Qur'an (*qalb al-Qur'an*). It is the chapter (*surah*) of the Qur'an which is read over the dead; therefore it is a chapter of great importance to the living. Should one seek to know the meaning of life, one must experience death, for man has come from the non-physical realm and he is swiftly proceeding towards it again. Knowledge is based on opposites. Man's apprehension of knowledge depends upon the condition of his heart. If the condition of his heart is pure and receptive, he sees perfection in every aspect of every situation he finds himself in. The Qur'an allows one to fathom the unfathomable.

¹ The original Arabic text of the Qur'an and the diacritics characters have been removed from this eBook because they do not render accurately in some eReaders.

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.

Introduction

The prevailing disease of our present age is denial of the One Reality that underlies, permeates, encompasses and yet stands apart from existence. To awaken the heart of the seeker to this Reality, the teacher attempts to tap the remedy drawn from the unity and timelessness of the Truth, the source of which is within that very heart. The source book of Truth, the all-encompassing Book of Reality, the key to unlocking the heart of the seeker on the path to divine knowledge, is the Qur'an. The absolute Truth is reflected in the Book, is further reflected through the purified heart of the believer (*mu'min*) and reaches out to illuminate every atom in creation.

For the proper approach to the Qur'an there must be the right intention and the right outer courtesy: the ritual ablution (*wudu'*), the right courtesy in holding, opening and closing the Book, and even in where it is placed afterwards. Since it is the Book of Books, the correct approach is the vital key that allows us to profit best from its reading and recitation.

The traditionally classical approach to the Qur'an is to study it from the standpoint of linguistics, history (the specific occasions of the revelation of certain verses) and other relevant aspects. Having done that, should one seek greater insight, should one want to dive more deeply into this ocean, one must be completely empty of any notions, expectations or reactions. To obtain the greatest inward benefit the reader must be completely void. One must be totally and utterly in a state of purity. This means that the Qur'an is approached with the maximum fearful awareness (*taqwa*) and with the utmost openness from a pure heart that is open in the sense that anything may come to it or nothing at all, depending upon the extent of one's receptivity. If the approach be impure, contact with the Qur'an will be superficial. Nevertheless, this will still be a positive and beneficial experience for whosoever approaches the Qur'an with the slightest outer propriety so long as he is not doing so just to criticize or analyze it.

The true inner courtesy owed to the Qur'an is that one should be as though in the presence of the King of kings, in the presence of the Ultimate, Whose words have been sung through the heart and by the tongue of His beloved Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, his

family and his righteous Companions.² One should bring to life the realization that this divine song has come to one as a rare and precious gift; otherwise, its secrets will remain locked and inaccessible. For those who have the purest intentions the Qur'an is vast and its gifts are endless. Every time a seeker, scholar or commentator reflects on it as he progresses in his life, with an ever deeper experience of the purest mode of approach he finds a fresh spring,

Our interest is both the outward (*zahiri*) as well as the inward (*batini*) approach to the Qur'an, because we are interested in unity (*tawhid*). Islam is the most perfect way of life and path to knowledge because it is the journey of unity. If it is original Islam, it will take one to the knowledge of unity, from faith (*iman*) to absolute certainty (*yaqin*). `Ali ibn Abi Talib said: 'If every unknown thing were made known to me, I would not increase in certainty.' One should reflect upon the state of inner knowledge that `Ali speaks about, that absolute certainty about the knowledge of Reality.

The whole concern is about the full knowledge of unity, not about information. All the verses of the Qur'an must be of benefit right now. Every aspect of the Qur'an is to be taken and used by those who are desperate for the knowledge of Reality, those who aspire to know Allah. We are not only interested in the Qur'an as a historical document. Nothing ever finishes or changes. What was in man's heart millennia ago still exists in man's heart today. All the elements are the same: trust-mistrust, love-hate, peace-violence, compassion-anger, comfort-discomfort, illness-health, life-death. The self (*nafs*) is one consciousness and contains the full spectrum of these human characteristics within it, high and low. In every heart they exist in different proportions, while varying circumstances draw on one characteristic more than another, whether it be the heart of an ordinary man or of a prophet. The difference is that a characteristic such as anger in a prophet is directed against injustice and ignorance in man, whereas the anger of an ordinary man may be reactionary, emotional or unjust, because he is capable of making mistakes. A true man of Allah, and certainly a prophet or messenger of Allah, may exhibit all the lower characteristics of the ego but operate in a direction that is positive and conducive to man's ultimate awakening.

² It is customary, 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.

A prophet hates: he hates ignorance and the self-imposed blindness of men. He hates injustice and man's unwillingness to move, hanging on to the past, to some illusion he inherited from his forefathers or that was conditioned by his own previous experiences.

The watchful traveler on this short journey recognizes these lower aspects of the ego in himself through his true submission and perpetual vigilance. He has a yearning (*himmah*) for knowledge that drives him on and on in his striving against unbelief (*jihad*), against these negative elements in himself. The battle is both outward and inward, for: 'He is the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden, and He is the First and the Last.' We notice today that the collapse of the so-called Muslim world is the natural outcome of Muslims' having neglected to take on fully the path to unitary knowledge. People talk about Islam and even teach Islam, but this cannot be the same as any other type of teaching for this teaching must be embodied, otherwise it is worse than useless.

Surat Ya Sin is the heart of the Qur'an (*qalb al-Qur'an*). It is the chapter (*surah*) of the Qur'an which is read over the dead; therefore it is a chapter of great importance to the living. Should one seek to know the meaning of life, one must experience death, for man has come from the non-physical realm and he is swiftly proceeding towards it again. Knowledge is based on opposites. Man's apprehension of knowledge depends upon the condition of his heart. If the condition of his heart is pure and receptive, he sees perfection in every aspect of every situation he finds himself in. The Qur'an allows one to fathom the unfathomable.

Surat Ya Sin is also about the Prophet Muhammad and it is addressed directly to the bearers of the unitary message who continue to carry out the message. Whoever takes on fully the message of unity is considered a representative (*khalifah*) of Allah. He becomes a true slave (*`abd*) liberated from enslavement by the absence of himself and continues to exist – in the station of on-goingness – in his Lord.

Chapter 36: *Surat Ya Sin*

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

1. Ya Sin

2. By the wise Qur'an,

Ya sin is one of the names given to the Prophet Muhammad. It is also a shortened form of *Ya insan* which means 'O mankind!' or, 'O Human Being'. The *surah* (chapter) might also be addressed to the people of Antioch to whom the Prophet Jesus (*'Isa*) sent apostles. The term, the people of *Ya Sin* signifies the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). This chapter begins by calling upon those among mankind who want to know, who want to follow the Prophet and connect directly with the prophetic message.

3. Surely you are one of the messengers,

This verse is addressed to the Prophet Muhammad. The message of the messengers is the message of unity (*tawhid*). The source of the message is One, though the messengers sent from that source have been many, 'and you Muhammad are one of the messengers'. Since the Prophet Muhammad is the last of the messengers, he obviously encompasses all the previous messages. Regarding this the Qur'an says: 'We do not abrogate a sign or cause it to be forgotten without bringing one better than it or like it' (2: 106).

Even as normal, experiencing human beings, each time we have a new experience it should be better, subtler and more all-encompassing than the previous one. It is as though we are travelling in an evolutionary movement forward in time, but not in the Darwinian sense. We have not, biologically speaking, risen from the ape; rather, we have come from the lowest, the sperm cell, and have then developed into the most complex living organism. This is the inherent pattern of movement in the individual, as well as in the collective historical sense.

Historically, the Prophet Muhammad came from a line of earlier prophets who transmitted and practiced the message of Reality very simply. More than one tradition (*hadith*) tells us that there have been 124,000 prophets and messengers. Throughout different times and in many places numerous villages had a prophet in their midst. People were different then, purer and more transparent. The situations they lived in were generally more conducive to travelling the spiritual path.

The final message of the Qur'an encompasses, supersedes and abrogates all previous messages. It provides man with the complete model. Though the Prophet Muhammad rose from among the Arab peoples, he was the master and seal of all the messengers before him. Because he was the last, his message is universal, open to all and applicable by everyone wherever and whenever.

4. On a straight path.

Still addressing the Prophet, Allah says: 'You are certainly on a clear path (*sirat*), a straight and direct way.' The 'straight path' (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) is the shortest distance between two points, between subject and object, between man and Allah. That is why it is direct, for it stretches from man to what he is always seeking, which is the All-Encompassing Reality. The understanding of unity (*tawhid*) is the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*), but it cannot be the subject of mere intellectual study. One must move along the path of submission (*islam*), through belief (*iman*) to sublime excellence (*ihsan*), until one begins to have glimpses of unity, through which one can then dive into the world of meaning.

If the goal of unity (*tawhid*) is not constantly present in the minds of the Muslims, their Islam becomes diluted and falls by the wayside. Mosques become either totally empty or only superficially full, because most of the people there are attending only as a matter of form. In many parts of the Muslim world this is what one finds, because the path is no longer about remembrance of Allah (*dhikr Allah*), nor about wanting knowledge of Allah. In many places Islam itself has been put on a pedestal and is being worshipped instead of Allah. Islam, however, is a means to the knowledge of Allah, not the object itself.

We all love what is timeless. We all love what is absolute. Does anyone not want to live forever, past this life and on into the next? This means that we all love the One Who is forever living. The love of Allah, therefore, is already in our hearts, but we become diverted, we rationalize: 'Not now, tomorrow or next year, when I finish with this or that business.' We blame other people for our lack of time and all our other problems as well. The truth is that we only have ourselves to blame.

The knowledge of Allah is already written for us, either in this life or the next, so why not move for it now, while we can? We are going to be in that state later on, after tasting death, so why not try to discover what it means in this life, where it can be of use to us?

5. A revelation from the Mighty, the Merciful,

Since we are bound to the ground by the law of gravity, we naturally consider anything more exalted and divine to be 'higher', that is, it must transcend the natural barriers to which we are subject. Thus, the human view is that the message of Allah 'comes down' from on high, and this is reflected in the word translated as 'revelation', for *tanzil* (literally means a descending. It is not that Allah is high or low: there is only Allah, and He – may He be exalted – inhabits no place. Man is earth-bound, food-bound, air-bound. The word for earth in Arabic is *ard*, which also means 'something one beats upon', because we are here to beat on the earth in the right manner in order to bring out what it contains, to eke out our sustenance from it and thereby attain the right attitude of humility.

Since the word 'revelation' (*tanzil*) is 'something that is sent down', it is divine and rare, for it is from the Mighty (*`Aziz*). It also, however, has mercy (*rahmah*) in it, so it is from Him Who bestows beneficence, *al-Rahman*. The Beneficent is His Attribute of All-Encompassing Mercy, universal mercy, the same for believer and non-believer, like the rain which falls upon everyone. The Beneficent covers everything, good and bad, because this is the decree of Allah. The Merciful, *al-Rahim*, which is an intensive form of the word from the same root, is more specific, affecting particular individuals in a more intense but more limited way. Everything in existence is really under the decree of mercy of the Beneficent.

Take the poisonous snake for example. From man's point of view the creature is dreadful, a threat to life, yet it is contained within the all-encompassing domain of the Beneficent. If one is bitten by such a creature, this event is still within the domain of the Beneficent; but when one cries out 'Help!' to one's companion, the need for mercy is intensified and pin-pointed. The first aid administered for snake bite is, therefore, specific and is under the survey of the Merciful, *al-Rahim*.

When we recognize the Beneficent at work behind every event in life, we know that the enemy or difficulty was really put there for our direct benefit. From this point of view the Attribute of beneficence is higher than mercy inasmuch as it encompasses everything. Thus, when both Divine Names are mentioned, the Beneficent is always mentioned before the Merciful. There is another way to understand the Attribute of mercy, that is, *al-Rahim*. The form of this verbal noun implies an enduring quality. Thus it is distinguished from beneficence in that it applies to the believer, for Allah's mercy is not only intensified for the believer but endures into the next life as well.

6. That you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so they are heedless.

The prophetic message is revealed in order to bring about fear of what is not conducive to the purification of the heart. The word for 'warn' here is the intensified verbal form of *nadhara* which basically means 'to make a vow'. Making a vow means taking decisive action by which one may ward off any non-conducive events. The word *qawm* in this verse, translated as 'a people', means any community or group of communities linked together by a single common denominator, such as language, worship or lifestyle.

The Arabs before Muhammad had not had a messenger from among themselves. There were many Christians and Jews living in their midst who were the 'People of the Book', but they had not had a messenger directly from their own people, from their own culture, to give them the news and the warning. People who are not warned are heedless, forgetful and in a state of distraction (*ghaflah*). The person who is heedless has his attention riveted somewhere less important than where it should be, as when, for example, while waiting for a train one is suddenly attracted by a poster display and consequently misses the train. One was attentive, but

to something of no importance as compared to the original objective. The state of distraction the Qur'an speaks of is man's lack of attention towards Allah. He looks elsewhere instead, rather than single-mindedly concentrating on his Creator. Thus he becomes distracted by the creation and the creatures that inhabit it.

The people referred to in this verse heedlessly addressed themselves to the wrong direction, so were not receptive to the warning. Both the warning and the knowledge are inherent in man's own being, but their voice becomes smothered by acquired habits not in line with divine guidance. People become used to their habits and take comfort in them, for in their repetition is an aspect of perpetuity which is one of Allah's Attributes. Allah's Attributes permeate all substances and situations in creation. In the case of man, he must recognize that he has the choice of channeling the power of these Attributes towards what is conducive to his illumination or of channeling them into the illusion of the physical and material as the goal of existence.

Among man's worst enemies in life are his habits, even his good ones. The final stage of the seeker on the path of illumination and divine knowledge comes when he has to break all habits, even his expectation of direct knowledge. By the mercy of Allah, the right moment may come for him when the heart has retreated from the outer project for the final victory of abandonment. This stage is only for the person who is made ready by having no further expectations in this life. He is no longer expecting to 'see' Allah or 'meet' Allah – there is only Allah, so thinking that one is getting closer to Allah is a subtle form of association with Allah.

Breaking habits is necessary until one is in a state of perpetual awareness, accepting any situation as it comes, trusting that one will deal with it correctly, confident that Allah will guide one safely to its resolution. The one who has attained to this state, which is the state of witnessing (*shahadah*), will no longer spend an inordinate amount of time trying to out-guess and overcome any situation.

The purpose of the Qur'anic message, like the purpose of creation itself, is to enable man to travel from darkness into light. Physically the infant remains in the obscurity of the womb for nine months until it is forcefully expelled into the light. The habit of being in darkness is such that at birth it invariably cries. Similarly, man does not like change, because the never-changing

is the basic substratum upon which all change in existence occurs. The people referred to in this verse were stubbornly holding on to the habits of their forefathers. The tribal and cultural habits in Arabia had remained stable and fixed for a very long time, if one can call the existence they had culture. There was amongst them much debauchery and little humanity. The miracle was that from amongst them came this immense light and peace, from the midst of that intense darkness, came the Perfect Man.

7. Certainly the word has proven true for most of them, for they do not believe.

The truth is that Allah's decree affects all. They are in agony, the agony, affliction and turmoil of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*). All man's troubles arise because of ignorance. Should a person become ill or be beset by an affliction and someone else explains how the affliction came about, then the person is somewhat relieved. Much of the trouble is reduced once one knows why it occurred in the first place. Knowledge brings certainty and security and therefore makes the heart tranquil.

Man's purpose is to dispel ignorance. Knowledge already exists within. Knowledge is from Allah's Attribute of *al-'Alim*, the Knower. This Attribute is never absent, so one's task is simply to strip away ignorance. Divine knowledge (*al-'ilm al-laduni*) is already with us, and to arrive at it we must learn prescriptive outer knowledge and proper courtesy, which are all based on the prophetic practices of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Prophet's outer practices of worship, such as prostration, proceeded from his original nature (*fitrah*). Following in his footsteps, we want to focus on the perfection of his original nature in order to gain knowledge; therefore we imitate his outer practices as completely as we can. The outer form is not the goal; the outer form is only important in order to obtain the inner, so that one may be reunified. Then while inwardly one has the life, light and love of the Prophet Muhammad, one outwardly follows his practice (*Sunnah*).

The people described in this verse lack faith and they will fail to find relief because of their distraction. Because of their own often inadvertent choice the people of heedlessness are veiled by their own habits; consequently, they are dulled and doomed. Faith and belief, however, provide a positive trust which enables one to realize that although one may be in ignorance now,

Summary

Surat Ya Sin – The Safe Abode of Protection for the Day of Resurrection

We find that the Qur'an is the supreme manual for living in this world, thereby preparing us for the next world, a world beyond time and measure. He who has been blind in this world, who has not been able to discern the laws that govern existence in this realm, will never be able to gain insight into the subtler realms, which, though less tangible, are instrumental in governing this world.

Surat Ya Sin gives us vivid teaching of the ways of Allah. It contains a full description of unity (*tawhid*), the nature of Reality, the laws that govern existence and the extent of man's freedom as a being which can encompass the Seen and the Unseen Worlds.

The chapter begins by addressing the Prophet, symbolically using letters from which language is constructed making human communication possible. Language differentiates human consciousness from creative consciousness and letters serve as the building blocks of language, in the same way that atoms serve as the building material of the molecular substructure of physical existence. Letters and atoms both form interconnected patterns adhering to particular laws of 'spelling' and 'grammar', by which all creation has unfolded, in the sense of meaning and in form. The literal components parallel and symbolize the chemical alphabet present and active in genetic material that gives matter a meaningful form.

The formulation of man's destiny is made clear to us by the meaning of bad or good omens, as the messenger who was sent to Antioch said: 'Your doom is brought down upon you by your own actions!' Wittingly or unwittingly, man dictates his own destiny. We are the microcosm and we are the doers. Everyone of us is the center of his or her own universe, for everything in the world of experience connects to us. Our world is what we deserve it to be. Not everyone is able to hear this, not everyone can get the message or, having received it, dive into its depths. The barriers against full perception are of one's own construction and are as thick, as strong and as

deep as one's expectations, desires, fears and anxieties. In other words, they are in inverse proportion to the purity of our submission to the Lord of Reality.

We have also seen in this chapter that the qualification for a person to impart true knowledge is that he should expect no reward from anyone. He must also have already come to know the basic, underlying factors of reality in this existence. He is enlightened and self-realized.

As we progress, we find that fear (*khashyah*) is actually the result of uncertainty, of not knowing where the boundaries of behavior lie. By the practice of Islam, fear can be transformed into incremental degrees of faith (*iman*), until certainty (*yaqin*) about the essential nature of Reality emerges. From this certainty develops a cautious or fearful awareness (*taqwa*), for once one has tasted certainty one would never wish to step outside its bounds. The person who has followed the path of the prophetic message and has fully awakened to the meaning of Reality completely believes and trusts that all is well. Soon he begins to witness and experience that, in fact, all is well. Subjectively he may continue to have likes and dislikes, but the truth of every matter is that whatever has happened has happened, therefore it was correct, for it faithfully followed the laws governing the occurrence of that event. If we examine the steps leading up to any event, its outcome would be comprehensible, whether we like it or not.

There are no exceptions to these laws. When the first Muslims were in battle, the arrows found the Prophet Muhammad just as they found others. The arrow struck his teeth and broke them, making his mouth bleed. The arrows did not suddenly stop in mid-air just because he was a great prophet of Allah. Natural laws in this existence are such that the physical prevails over the subtle. One's basic needs must first be met before one can turn to one's higher, subtler needs. Everything has its proper natural flow (*adab*). We move from the gross to the subtle; first comes the health of the body, then the mind, and then the intellect and the spirit.

In *Surat Ya Sin* we also find a reinforcement of the view that we dictate our own destiny. The voice of Reality says: 'And We do not send down unseen powers or angels from the heavens nor do We ever do so.' This implies that by our own intentions and actions we bring about final results. If our actions are incorrect, in the sense that they do not follow the flow of intended natural laws, we are bound to bring doom down upon ourselves.

Nature is effulgent and expansive. We all echo the Big Bang. The whole cosmos is exploding in expansion, so if we do not grow within ourselves in inner joy we shall end up sick, for we shall not have followed the creational decree. If we do not explode our illusion, we shall not dissolve into the magnificent, unending, expansive bliss.

‘A fountain from which the slaves of Allah drink, making it gush forth abundantly’ (76: 6): this is what true nourishment for the heart is all about. If we do not echo the cosmic expansion within our own being, we shall end up suppressed and self-oppressed, and we will implode and collapse upon ourselves in a perverted way. A vivid example was the destruction of the people in the city of the Prophet Lot. They were homosexuals, decadent, abandoned to wanton lust and perversion. Since nature’s way is expansive, that is to say, the natural order is that of increase, the constricted and dissipated energy of this people created a situation around them that ultimately caused their destruction. Their chosen mode of behavior was contrary to nature, and that energy itself caused the natural catastrophe that brought about their end. Nature only affirmed their injustice to themselves with an outer parallel of their inner disconnection. This is not superstition, it is unity (*tawhid*). We are not separate from the cosmos; our actions affect the entire cosmos as we interact with it, and the secret of all our actions resides in our intentions.

In the Qur'an we find that good actions done with pure intentions, without expectation of reward, result in an unquantifiable reward. Wrong actions, on the other hand, result in a requital of equivalent value. The river of movement which we experience in time flows in a certain direction. Anything dropped into that stream flows in harmony with that direction and becomes magnified. Speaking in the direction of the wind, for example, the voice is magnified. Speaking against the wind simply obliterates any sound. The wind of destiny carries Allah’s manifold blessings. Anything moving with this breeze is at one with the decree and will grow and endure.

The laws which govern existence will sooner or later overwhelm us if we transgress them either inadvertently or ignorantly, whether aware or unconcerned; our task is to know the laws, where to draw the line and how to get back on to the straight path. It is said that the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) is sharper than the blade of a Damascus sword. The sharpness implied here is in awareness, constant, perpetual, self-effulgent awareness for its own sake, not an awareness of any particular created being. To begin with, one may be aware of one thing or another but

awareness of some things is, in fact, distraction (*ghaflah*), for one may then miss other things. If, however, one is spontaneously aware of the self, one is open and available. In this state, the knowledge one needs in any circumstance will automatically be manifest.

As creatures of action in this world, we seek to unify inwardly in order to have access to knowledge that is useful, knowledge that springs from spontaneous awareness, knowledge that helps us in the arena of action, so that we move more and more towards liberation. Although we are born free, without asking for life, and we die without knowing beforehand where, when, or in what circumstances, yet, in between these two major events, we find ourselves shackled by chains of expectation and desire. The more we shackle ourselves inwardly the more we exhibit an outward arrogance to defend the flimsy edifice we have built. Yet the whole object of life's exercise is to abandon oneself and dissolve into the one-and-only sublime consciousness. When one lets go of lower consciousness, movement and passage toward higher consciousness instantaneously take place.

In the same way that we move on in age we can also move on in meaning, moving from one state of meaning to higher ones, in an ever-ascending, self-perpetuating continuum. If sensitive enough, we shall find meaning in every breath and in every occurrence that takes place in front of us. But, generally, we are insensitive. If we do not seize it as it passes, it may have gone forever and we have missed it. With every split second, with every breath, Allah is bestowing meaning upon us in order to show the total ecological balance in the oneness of this existence.

Ecology does not end at the border of our property, the national border of a country, or the border of the body's skin. Ecology is multidimensional and universal. We each affect the entire global ecology and the world, in turn, affects us. There is no separation. Separation exists only in the individualized biological sense, since these particular cells are encased in the sheath of this particular skin. The skin, however, is breathing and alive. It is being influenced by the surrounding atmosphere, just as what surrounds it is being influenced by the being that occupies it. Creation is a total, ecological transaction in which the creational system of boundaries is based upon the boundless reality. Limitation is only meaningful because of the limitless. The abundance of nature can only be enjoyed if we set limits to how we abuse it.

The way to unveil or unfold the meaning of this life in order to grasp the essence is like peeling an onion. The meaning of existence is encoded in our genes, but in order to read the genetic code we must look at successive layers of existence. Each layer is a world of its own. These worlds of states and stations are what we have given meaning and objective reality to. When we peel the first layer of the onion, there is another layer, then another layer, and then yet another until, when we arrive at the heart of the onion and unfold the last layer, there is only pure space. Space is also what existed outside the onion, and at the same time the onion is permeated by space, exactly as we are permeated by Reality. There exists only that one Reality.

Things only have the appearance of materiality because of the mind's faculty of the imagination (*khayal*) which allows us to solidify objects. In reality, creation is essentially space, much more fluid, more dynamic. Of course, our everyday world of solid objects does exist. This existence, however, is only a secondary existence. It is only a shadow or hologram of its essence.

We contain within ourselves the meaning of non-existence and limitlessness as well as the meaning of existence and limitation. Normally we exhibit more limitation and dependency, which is what causes us such difficulty. This is the sickness of mankind in this realm. Our purpose for coming into this existence is to evolve out of it, by recognizing the One Reality. This existence is not an end in itself. All the prophets tried to impart to mankind that God is, has been, will be, and that as we come from the Divine Being, we contain within ourselves the potential to awaken to the meaning of Allah's limitless, unfathomable glory. If we address ourselves to the lower end of the scale of existence, we shall experience only the lower end of creation. If we address ourselves to the higher end, we shall see ourselves in relation to the unity from which we sprang and unify the outer with the inner consciously. We are the interspace (*barzakh*) between the high and the low, between this world of limitation and the limitless hereafter. By turning towards the high, the low is purified and transformed.

By turning towards the low, it is magnified and the high obscured: 'Those who do not witness falsehood and when they pass by what is vain they do so nobly' (25: 72).

Man is the only creature whose consciousness spans both dimensions. Confusion arises in this life out of the apparent paradox that while we are limited and coming closer to the grave with

every breath, at the same time we want the eternal. In all our pursuits of wealth, love, knowledge or happiness we are seeking that quality of everlastingness because we echo the eternal within us.

The Qur'an says that Allah encompasses everything. This means that everything is absorbed in godliness. Because existence is based and balanced on opposites in existence, we cannot gain consciousness of the boundaries of transgression, and understand the all-pervading godliness, without the presence of evil and wrong action. Man brings about results in any particular situation according to his actions taken within the context of that situation. Man's actions provide the pegs which nail the entire affair together.

If we have no expectations and no desires, we are freer than a bird. Most people, however, usually react. Since we each have a certain set of wants, we each react according to the impinging forces and stimuli that come from outside and which, by interacting with our own particular profile, produce results. If there is no personal, individuated profile, as symbolized by the position of prostration (*sajdah*) in the ritual prayer, which when performed with pure and sincere concentration means the complete obliteration of the ego-self, one is on the path of freedom. This does not mean, of course, that we do not differentiate in the outward world between what is good and bad.

'And surely you will have a reward without end' (68: 3): if our hearts are throbbing and pure, and we genuinely take life on as a journey and an adventure in the path of Allah, all of it is a delight. We shall be surrounded by like-minded people who echo that outlook. But if we are self-centered and fearful, we shall attract people of the same resonance. Birds of a feather flock together; this is the law of nature, this is Allah's unchanging way (*sunnah*) in the creation, and we cannot escape it.

Freedom cannot exist in this life without constraints. Health cannot be understood without illness. Freedom in the abstract cannot exist. The meaning of the proverb, 'Trust is the bondage of free men' (*al-thiqah withaq al-ahrar*), is that outer courtesy and limitations ensure inner freedom and salvation.

If we seek freedom, we must find its roots which lie in its opposite, in enslavement. The laws of opposites constantly apply. We must trust that although we may not comprehend them now, we shall come to know these laws more and more. This is one aspect of *iman* (trust, faith).

Allah manifests Himself in the laws which govern existence, since they are unifying laws which apply to all. If someone claims to be a gnostic (*`arif*), or enlightened, we assume that he knows the laws that govern existence, but the laws governing existence are from beyond existence and greater than existence itself, otherwise existence could not be encapsulated in them. The real meaning of gnosis is total abandonment and submission. The gnostic, by his abandonment, comes to know what is necessary for him to know at the time he needs to know it. The gnostic's ego-self or *nafs* does not alter his capacity to receive guidance. He is abandoned. He has given up. Thus he is automatically and perfectly tuned.

In this chapter, the meaning of the Garden (*al-Jannah*) is made clear. It is that hidden, secret state where the heart can be tranquil as a result of pure abandonment. This does not mean physical abandonment, leaving one's family destitute or not caring about how one dresses or behaves. Even if one goes to a cave in the mountains one will find that the mind is still agitated. True abandonment comes about gradually, by standing up to responsibilities, by doing one's best and not being inwardly attached and by not yearning for the results of one's actions. All is done in the way of Allah (*fi sabil Allah*). From this perspective an action such as marriage is only useful in the passage of this wonderful journey of life if each person writes upon his or her heart that he or she will help their partner to be content and to realize inner freedom. It is almost a state of worship, as indeed every action should be. There is nothing wrong with agitation and passion *per se*. Without passion in this life, there would be no yearning. But one's passion should be for knowledge, for Allah, because the existence of all human beings is conditional upon the Independent One, Transfer love for the creature to love for the Creator.

True compatibility comes about when a man and woman genuinely want to collaborate and serve each other, freely, for the sake of truth, knowledge and inner freedom. Inner freedom cannot be obtained without outward courtesy and respect. Unless we constrain ourselves outwardly, we cannot grow inwardly. Should one want inner freedom, one must expect outer limitation. False, outward freedom is capricious. It can only cause chaos, both outward and inward. Thus, as the

seeker approaches knowledge of Allah his actions become more restricted. His wish is to act within the correct boundaries. His heart takes him to the goal, but to get the heart into the proper state requires being linked with what is harmonious.

Everything in creation is governed according to the laws of nature, and the name given to the Giver of the law is Allah. Access to Allah is by understanding and following His laws inwardly as well as outwardly. An outward orientation is not enough. The external pattern only provides indicators or information, not self-knowledge. A real spiritual teacher's job is to crack the shell of ignorance that envelops the seeker. He merely removes some of the rust that has been veiling the heart from the source of light within. The spiritual guide does not give anything; he only removes something: Allah said: 'The heavens and earth do not contain Me, but the heart of the believer (*mu'min*) contains Me.'

This, then, is the remedy we obtain from *Surat Ya Sin*. Those who do not get the point of this life will eventually get it when they die. This is why this chapter is read when a Muslim dies, in the hope that his spirit (*ruh*) is sufficiently tuned to remember or resonate with its original reality, the remembrance of which is ingrained within it.

This short life is only a link in the chain of being. Before this life there was a mode of existence, and after this life there is another mode of existence. The nine-month period in the womb connected us to this realm; the sleep after death, expressed by the verse 'Who has raised us from our place of rest' (36: 52), connects us to the next. Does anyone clearly remember the experience of the womb? In the same way, we cannot remember the non-experiential state to which we are returning.

This inability to remember what came before or to know the reality of life after death leaves the person of reflection bewildered since every human being with intelligence questions what this experience of life and death is all about. 'Why am I unhappy? Why am I not self-fulfilled? Why am I not inwardly free?' Causing us agitation is part of Allah's mercy. It is Allah's will that we should come to know Him Who disturbs us and thereby brings us out of our physical and animalistic lethargy. Every problem we have is really a gift to us from Allah's love.

The man of Allah prays to his Lord, 'Please give me responsibilities so that I can progress and mature in life,' When problems are taken on outwardly with a positive attitude, spiritual movement occurs. This entire existence is but a single drama, and all beings are the actors in it. The way to transcend the drama is to stop acting out whatever role a person thinks is his and to take appropriate action and assume responsibility for Allah's sake (*fi sabil Allah*), without any personal motives. In this way one avoids adding layer upon layer of illusion. The best way to overcome illusions and assumptions and other similar veils is to confront situations in the way of Allah without expecting any reward. Events in life act as chisels to open up the layers of the self. Eventually, one finds that what there was at the center of it had been there all the time.

In reality we only have duties in this life, we have no rights. We only have obligations. We are squandering oxygen at an enormous rate. Every few years we each consume several tons of it. The question is, have we consumed it in order to burn out our expectations and desires and find our way to inner freedom? If we have not, then we have squandered the natural gift of creation. The same is true for the tons of food we consume. Are we nourishing ourselves in order to obtain strength to know the Divine Reality in every state and manifestation?

The removal of ignorance is a prerequisite for enlightenment. If this veil is not discarded in this life, it will be eliminated at the time of death. On the Day of Resurrection 'no self will be wronged' because action is no longer possible and we each shall be accountable for our own actions. Time and motion will be frozen, and the self will reflect what it has earned. At that moment, the soul will sing out what has been engraved on it through the person's actions and intentions while alive in the world. Nothing can be added and nothing can be subtracted. If one has echoed the pure song, in the next life this song will simply be heard forever in Allah's Garden. But if the soul is a marred disc, full of arrogance, ignorance and confusion, the song will reproduce this quality of use. The soul in the Hereafter sings the level of its attainment in the life of the world.

The key to purifying the heart from ignorance is spontaneous awareness of intention. That way one's intentions unify with one's actions. This represents the station of freedom through submission and presence. This is unity (*tawhid*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*).

Be willing to die now, and you will live! Be willing to give up everything, and you will find that everything is already available. Behind all multiplicity there is only oneness. Each person contains the chromosomic imprint that has within it the laws governing the entire cosmos. This is the real 'I'. The Qur'an is within us, but one must plunge into and dissolve in it and discover that everything is resolved, not solved, for there really is no problem. There is no god but Allah! Know the essence of beingness and you will find only freedom. It is we who construct our cages, so only we can dismantle them completely and we do so by transferring our actions to the realm of free and pure undertaking, fearlessly and courageously.

When one fully understands one verse of the Qur'an, one has understood the whole Qur'an. All the analogies and metaphors (*amthal*) in the Qur'an echo the Truth, so why not plunge into the Truth? We and what we have plunged into are not separate. *Surat Ya Sin* stresses that those who have earned the Garden were engaged in a pure affair. They had no business other than being self-fulfilled. In the Qur'an, metaphors are used to describe the indescribable, for language operates in the realm of duality, of cause and effect, of content and container. Metaphors gracefully take one aboard the ark of meaning to the edge of reflection, where one must throw off all restraint and make the quantum leap into the shore-less sea.

Some of the repeatedly used metaphors of the ultimate Garden are mates, fruits, couches and shade. Everything in existence occurs in pairs. Unification can only take place where there is a pair, which is the symbolic reason for marriage. Shade is regarded as a very desirable aspect of nature, particularly in desert environments, for it offers respite from heat and a place of restful retreat. Whenever we encounter verses about reclining on couches or cushions, the meaning of such sitting can be inferred. The cushion has no value in itself, but sitting on a cushion or reclining on a couch in the shade means one is in a relaxed state. The body is forgotten to some extent, and one's consciousness has the opportunity of being less physically orientated, so that one can go into the realm of meaning. We neutralize the material and physical in order to reach the meaning within.

Whatever we desire is a figment of our imagination (*wahm*). Having spun our own web, we have invested our time and energy in that web: 'And surely the frailest of houses is the spider's web if they but knew!' (29: 41). If a sincere seeker were able to achieve everything he wanted in this

existence, whatever it might be, he would eventually reach a point where he would not want anything, because everything he wanted would be already here. After true reflection he would come to the point of desirelessness. He would know that everything was available to him, that all the fruits he could possibly hunger for were already there, and that consequently he would desire no more. This is the meaning of the description of the contentment in the Garden of Paradise.

The message is very simple. Just be (*kun*), and the whole world will come to one (*fa yakun*). Knowledge and contentment is within. Outwardly and inwardly there is only mercy and blessedness. Should one see other than perfect harmony and blessedness, it is one's own distorted view, one's own web which has separated one from its perception. The state of the higher Garden is peace, tranquility, bliss and eternal contentment, peace that has been promised from a Merciful Lord.

And Allah knows best!

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