

Keys to the Qur'an

Volume 4

Commentary on Surahs Ankabut,
Al-Rahman, Al-Waq'iah and Al-Mulk

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	i
Book Description	ii
About SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
FOREWORD	v
CHAPTER 29: SURAT AL-`ANKABUT (THE SPIDER)	1
CHAPTER 55: SURAT AL-RAHMAN (THE BENEFICENT).....	34
CHAPTER 56: SURAT AL-WAQI`AH (THE EVENT).....	58
CHAPTER 67: SURAT AL-MULK (THE KINGDOM).....	86
E-BOOKS BY ZAHRA PUBLICATIONS.....	98

BOOK DESCRIPTION

A commentary on four chapters of the Qur'an:

Chapter 29: The Spider (*Surat Al-`Ankabut*);

Chapter 55: The Beneficent (*Surat Al-Rahman*);

Chapter 56: The Great Event (*Surat Al-Waqi`ah*);

Chapter 67: The Kingdom (*Surat Al-Mulk*)

These four chapters from the Meccan period are thematically interconnected, covering the subjects of affliction, direct signs of the Creator, the Next Life and the nature of the One Supreme Deity. Through allegorical interpretation of Qur'anic language, the reader is shown the safe path of conduct in this world and the Hereafter. Its message of balance and mercy, and of Divine Unity, compels the reader to reflect on the interconnectedness of all facets of life.

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This series began in 1981 as part of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an in the United States and Europe. Numerous people had helped and worked to realize the original editions of these commentaries.

Considerable editing and modifications were carried out by Muna H. Bilgrami. Aliya Haeri's dedication and loyalty was invaluable in coordinating and supervising both the first series as well as the present series. Contributors to the present edition include Batool Ispahany, Kays Abdul Karim Mohammed, Dr. Salah al-Habib, Luqman Ali, Hasan Jobanputra, Christopher Flint and Syed Muyhi al-Khateeb. Special thanks are due to Dr. Yaqub Zaki for reading through the texts and for his helpful suggestions. Without the encouragement and enthusiasm of Dr. Omar Hamza's love of the Qur'an, this present edition would not have been possible.

FOREWORD

This volume is a commentary on four selected chapters of the Holy Qur'an, namely: Chapter 29, The Spider [*Al-`Ankabut*], Chapter 55, The Beneficent [*Al-Rahman*], Chapter 56, The Great Event [*Al-Waqi`ah*] and Chapter 67, The Kingdom [*Al-Mulk*]. These four Meccan chapters were chosen because of a strong interconnecting theme.

The Spider [*Al-`Ankabut*] is about the affliction and struggle of man in this life for the sake of his own growth and awakening to truth. The Beneficent [*Al-Rahman*] demonstrates the direct signs and marks of the Creator wherever one looks. The Great Event [*Al-Waqi`ah*] reminds one of the next life of the Hereafter so that the pursuit of knowledge and submission to the Creator in this life becomes vital and urgent. The Kingdom [*Al-Mulk*] shows that if there were such entities as other deities, they would be ultimately under the sovereignty of the One-and-Only God, in Whose hand rests total harmony and the control and destiny of creation.

The commentary lays open some of the great vistas of the inner meanings of the Qur'an. As the reader is guided to the bounties of the Qur'anic message through allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an, he or she is at once shown the path of safe conduct in this world and the Hereafter. The all-pervading message is one of balance and mercy. The key to attaining this is self-knowledge.

The commentary also explicates man's station in this life with reference to his Creator and reveals how the entire creation sings the song of *Tawhid* (Unity). It compels the reader to reflect this unity and interconnectedness of existence in all aspects of his life. These four chapters show the way to the knowledge of the One Creator and warn all humankind of the failure and injustice it inflicts on itself by not adhering to the path of faithful submission, correct action and transformation.

CHAPTER 29: SURAT AL-`ANKABUT (THE SPIDER)

Introduction

Whoever professes, confesses, or witnesses that there is One Creator of creation in all its diversity will also experience duality and the process of interplay between opposites. As with spiritual seekers of any age, some of the early Muslims in Mecca could not withstand the pressure exerted upon them to return to the convenience of their old habits and customs of pre-Islamic times. This chapter (*surah*) of the Qur'an, The Spider, refers to the flimsy, insecure structures upon which we tend to depend, comparable to a spider's web. The only structure which is everlasting and indestructible is based on the non-structural knowledge of God and His laws that govern physical existence.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

1. *Alif Lam Mim.*

2. Do men reckon that they will be left alone upon saying, We believe, and not be tested with affliction?

3. Certainly, We tried those before them, so indeed Allah will know those who are true, and those who reject.

There is a purpose in creation, a subtle and deep purpose which is to discover the meaning and essence of existence. However, man must trust in what is behind existence before he can fully commit himself to the quest. No matter how hard man may try to calculate and discern the purpose of this existence, he will never succeed without this trust (*iman*), the roots of which lie in the very essence of his being. Failure to commit oneself fully to this trust in the ultimate source can only result in discord and affliction (*fitnah*).

‘We tried those before them’ refers to a superficial kind of trial or affliction – a plot, an artifice – which can easily be uncovered. No matter how man reckons or calculates, he will be afflicted in a superficial way so that his trust or faith (*iman*) becomes increasingly more real and certain of the absolute Reality.

Trust or faith begins with a more outward and existential orientation, but it must eventually lead to the inward recognition that there is no separation between the deep inner reality and the outer realities, because they form a single continuum. Reality has neither beginning nor end; it is only for the sake of illustration that we talk about the outer and the inner.

Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, his family and his righteous Companions,¹ defined ‘trial’ (*fitnah*) as that which proves man’s reality, his divine origin, by what appears to be affliction, turmoil and trouble. Divine mercy puts man through processes that appear to be undesirable and troublesome on purpose to show him that he has no power over anything. Man has, in fact, no claim except the continual witnessing and recognition of the One-and-Only Reality: ‘There is no god but Allah’ (*La ilaha illa Allah*).

4. Or do those who perpetrate evil think that they will escape Us?

5. Whoever hopes to meet Allah, surely the appointed time of Allah has come; He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

6. And whoever strives hard, strives only for himself. Most surely Allah is self-sufficient, above [need of] [His] creatures.

7. Those who believe and perform good actions will certainly be forgiven by Us for their wrong actions, and We shall reward them for the best of what they did.

¹ 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.

Man in his arrogance and cleverness thinks that he can escape from the laws which govern existence; he thinks that he can cheat Reality, imagining himself as a separate entity. However, a person who has complete and utter trust and knowledge does not see himself as an entity separate from Reality. He sees only one higher self; he sees the self and outer actions as a manifestation of Oneness. He has security, certainty, serenity and independence through dependence on Allah. The opposite of this state of unity (*tawhid*), is man's imagining that he exists alongside Allah or that his is the sole reality.

Love of Reality guides and draws man towards unity. If one claims to love Reality, that claim will be put to the test. It is Allah's mercy by which He helps man to recognize the degree of his honesty and sincerity. The trust (*iman*) of the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad was tested. Pressure was exerted on them by the prevailing system, because his revolutionary message posed a threat to its survival. Many families urged their relatives who followed him to return to the traditional and customary tribal ways. Some experienced one or both of their parents threatening to take their lives and the lives of their offspring.

Those who maintain their faith are promised the knowledge of Allah and the truth of the Resurrection. The more they exert themselves in this life, the closer they will come to this state of knowledge. 'Whoever strives hard, he strives only for himself.'

The believers (*mu'minun*) are given a clear code of conduct, and by sincerely doing their utmost, they will be amply rewarded.

8. We have enjoined upon man goodness to his parents. If they contend with you that you should associate [others] with Me of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. To Me is your return, and I will inform you of what you did.

9. And those who believe and do good, We shall surely make them enter among the righteous.

The first thing a child beholds is his parents. Should he not show loyalty towards them, he cannot show loyalty in a subtler way towards Allah. A child's rebellion against his parents is a

rebellion against all those who have physical power over him and sustain him. If a child is rebellious towards his parents, he is likely to rebel against all. Regardless of whether one's parents are good or bad, every being still has access to the mercy of the Creator. Thus, from a spiritual point of view, though one's parents may be misguided, one can only be qualified to reflect upon that when one's own self-guidance begins to emerge.

Under all circumstances a person is advised to be respectful to his parents. It does not mean that he is to remain under their domination, but he should ask forgiveness for them. After all, parents are the existential means by which a person comes about. Allah is the invisible origin from which man has come forth through the physical vehicle of his parents.

There are various degrees of trust or belief. A true believer (*mu'min*) regards everything that happens to him as his just destiny; nothing occurs from a whim, but from reality. A believer derives knowledge from all he experiences, whether it appears to be good or bad. If he has not identified himself with a specific, fixed viewpoint, he will derive knowledge and benefit from all affliction and change.

10. Among men are those who say: We believe in Allah; but when they are persecuted in [the way of] Allah, they deem the persecution of men to be the punishment of Allah. And if help came from your Lord, they would most certainly say: Surely we were with you. Does Allah not know best what is in the hearts of men?

11. Most certainly Allah knows those who believe and those who are hypocrites.

The concept most difficult for the lower self (*nafs*) to perceive is hypocrisy. Many actions may be justified in a hypocritical way. A person may say he is working in the way of Allah (*fi sabil illah*), but may actually want to gain an elevated reputation or become the leader of a community or country. If his actions are truly for Allah's sake, the afflictions of people will drive him more towards the innermost source, into dependence upon the ultimate Reality.

12. Those who disbelieve say to those who believe: Follow our path and we will bear your wrongs. Never shall they bear any of their wrongs. Surely they are liars.

13. They will most certainly carry their own burdens and other burdens, and they shall be questioned on the Day of Resurrection as to what they fabricated.

When the faith of early Muslims weakened in the face of human mischief and trouble, some wanted to give up their belief in the Prophet Muhammad. They claimed that Allah was sending them signs in the form of afflictions indicating that they should adopt a path of lesser resistance. However, it was the path of expediency that they wished to follow, and it would therefore become the more difficult path in time. Afflictions are the test of Allah upon man incorporated in nature. Those who turned away from the right path lacked discrimination and deep trust. They read into the signs only the most obvious outward meanings without considering the goal to which they were being led.

What occurred at the dawn of Islam is repeated at all times. Man is distressed by afflictions. Allah says, 'My mercy encompasses everything', so we must try to see this in all that comes to us. The laws which govern any creational event are prescribed. It is up to man to penetrate the subtleties of how those laws operate at all times, under all circumstances and for everyone. Allah's mercy is instantaneous. One realizes this according to the degree of one's trust (*iman*).

14. Certainly we sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them nine hundred and fifty years. The deluge overtook them while they were unjust.

15. So we delivered him and the companions of the ark, and We made the event a sign to the world.

When one seeks to imitate the conduct of the Prophet and his family and righteous Companions, one carries the passport that allows safe conveyance from one port to another. One will pass easily from the port of mortality to the port of immortality; otherwise, one will flounder in the sea of confusion and drown. Unfortunately, this is the state of the majority of people, whether they call themselves Muslims or not. They do not hold fast to the rope of Allah. The Qur'an explains very clearly that those who want to follow Allah and know Him must follow the Prophet and his way, as well as follow in the footsteps of the righteous who came after him.

A prophetic tradition says, 'Men of knowledge are the heirs of the prophets.' What is there to inherit from a prophet but his knowledge and the method of its application in one's life?

Everything we witness in existence is based on duality, such as life and death, guidance and misguidance, leading and being led. We experience opposites simultaneously. We love and hate simultaneously. If a man loves truth, justice, compassion and generosity, then he must hate injustice, tyranny and meanness. Understanding and genuinely experiencing this concept can help guide one's actions toward the higher opposites that reflect the Attributes of Reality. Traveling a great distance from the lower tendencies toward the higher tendencies, a person leaves fear and insecurity behind for tranquility and certainty, and thereby improves the quality of life around himself.

16. And [We sent] Abraham, when he said to his people: Serve Allah and keep your duty to Him. That is better for you, if you did but know.

17. You only worship idols besides Allah and you forge a lie. Surely, those whom you worship besides Allah do not control for you any sustenance, therefore, seek sustenance from Allah, worship Him, and be grateful to Him. To Him you shall return.

18. And if you reject [the truth], nations before you rejected, and nothing is incumbent upon the messenger but a clear delivery [of the message].

Follow those who have reflected the clear message, those who have knowledge of Allah. The knowledge of Allah is the recognition of truth; this is the result of abandonment and submission to the One-and-Only Reality. The command of Allah is that His highest creation, the human being, should come to know His will as it manifests itself within the parameters of His existential laws. This is the clear prophetic message. The result of its denial has been historically observed as the decay, corruption and destruction of people and nations.

In life, man stumbles on, attempting to apprehend the laws of successful action. Affliction and turmoil are the natural teachers that inform a person about the boundaries so that he does not transgress them. By this knowledge man is able to become aware of the points at which he

begins to cause himself harm. The messengers are those people who have cognizance of the order of affairs, who have wisdom and the innate, innermost knowledge that there is only Reality manifesting itself in every being and form. Absorbing their knowledge is bound to lead a person away from self-harm toward success.

Those who possess the knowledge of Allah have gained authority first and foremost over their lower tendencies and have knowledge that can lead others in this life by correct conduct: working and living in a manner that befits man, the summit of creation.

People who have strayed off the true path often resort to the device of dissimulation of one's religion (*taqiyyah*) in order to excuse themselves from struggle (*jihad*) in the cause of that which is right or from expending energy and doing their utmost as part of the will of Reality. Everything is evolving towards what is higher. Man must reflect this fact by doing his utmost to change circumstances that are wrong and that cast dark shadows of ignorance upon humanity.

Life is based upon dynamic movement, which echoes the underlying meaning of foreverness (*samadiyyah*). Perpetuity manifests itself from within us. Often man is fearful of change, but he is much better off guarding against downward movement within himself and his conscience. A man of fearful awareness (*taqwa*) fears only Allah while showing resolve and trust in his selfless actions, yet he is not disrespectful nor does he promote dissension. Every situation has its boundary and its courtesy (*adab*).

19. Do they not see how Allah originates the creation then reproduces it? Surely that is easy for Allah.

Creation follows the cycle of beginning, maturing, ending, and then recreating. Recreating is the reflection of creation in the timeless zone. The brief flicker of creation reflects the absolute non-temporal, non-spatial, state-free dimension of the next life.

Man loves the 'beyond time'. We cannot do without sleep which is the nearest we can taste of timelessness in the normal experience of life. Some people have experienced an aspect of death from a near fatal accident. Also, in the state of remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah, there is an

experience referred to by the Sufis as (*fana'*), or obliteration of the self. This is a death of the senses and feelings. Life is a cycle of creation and recreation. As this creation comes and goes, so another creation will begin with a resurrection (*ba`th*). As man came forth into creation, so will another form of rising occur, a purer energy without the physical matter that belongs to this little speck of cosmic dust called earth.

20. Say: Travel in the earth, and see how He makes the first creation; then Allah creates the latter creation. Surely Allah has power over all things.

21. He punishes whom He wills and has mercy upon whom He wills, and to Him you shall be returned.

22. And you shall not escape in the earth nor in the heavens, and you have neither a protector nor a helper besides Allah.

The nature of physical existence is that of a journey. Everything is based on movement. The electrons journey around the nucleus, the earth journeys around the sun, and the sun journeys with its galaxy through space; nothing is fixed. Cellular movement occurs continuously in living things. The first thing a newborn child does is to move. The entire creation is a journey from Allah to Allah by Allah, and the highest benefit for man is attained if he emulates the journey by traveling in the land.

In every way there is blessing in travel, for it breaks habits and norms. Man must change; he must move on so that he does not become a slave of habit and thus become fixed. Man is a habit forming creature because he clings to the permanent, the ever fixed within him. Whenever he tries to control events, he finds it beyond his power to do so.

Man wants to know the permanent, but he mistakenly tries to bring it about in his environment by establishing rigid habits. At the lowest, most superficial level travel disturbs this tendency. The earth would be sterile if it were not disturbed, if it were not ploughed. The same thing applies to man's heart. If it is not disturbed, if it is not cut off from its desires and attachments, how can it resonate? At first one resents being cut off, but the purpose of one's life is to move

forward both outwardly and inwardly; outwardly, by having correct attitudes toward the world and the earth, and inwardly, by a willingness to turn away from what the self desires.

Previously, traveling from one culture to another promoted inner growth and fulfillment. A man traveling in the way of Allah called people to Islam. He was a deliverer of good tidings, following the prophetic way of those who give the good news. Now 'traveling' means tourism. It is synonymous with irresponsibility, as it enhances frivolousness and idle curiosity.

23. Those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah and the meeting with Him, they despair of My mercy, and they shall have a painful punishment.

24. The answer of his [Abraham's] people was: Slay him or burn him! Then Allah delivered him from the fire. Surely there are signs in this for a people who believe.

25. And he said: You have only taken idols in place of Allah by way of friendship between yourselves in the life of this world. Then on the Resurrection Day some of you shall curse others, and your abode is the Fire, and you will not have any helpers.

The creation of Allah, having come from Allah, must already intrinsically know the Creator. However, hidden by the visible and solid, He is veiled to man. The outer path of existence overwhelms the inner truth. The testimonial witnessing of Islam, 'There is no god except Allah', is said aloud in the belief that its reality will ultimately be experienced. Everything one sees is from Allah. If it can be named, its essence is derived from the mercy of the Subtle (*al-Latif*); likewise, its thickness (*kathafah*) is derived from subtlety.

The seeker is one who follows the path of abandonment and submission. Giving in unconditionally, one finds that there is no way other than submission to Allah. One gets to the root of one's affairs by recognition that all has emanated from the one source; then one's transaction in life becomes correct. One is then on a straight path, acting and not reacting – not reacting to some aspect of the ego-self within, such as insecurity.

Yet insecurity forces one to seek the ultimate security in Allah. The seeker finds the love of Allah when he moves from one fancied object of security to another. He thinks it resides in the mother, father, wife, children or material possessions, but it is in none of these. This is the final true witnessing (*shahadah*) of Reality.

Awakening begins with the rejection of what is not: there is no god (*la ilah*)! When the seeker, the witnesser, has excluded everything, then he says: 'except Allah' (*illa Allah*). After negation comes affirmation. This is 'the path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not those upon whom Your wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray' (1:7).

The meeting with Allah, as promised by Him, will be witnessed by all in the next phase of life, after death, in the Hereafter. Everyone will then know that there was only Reality acting throughout one's previous life. That knowledge will be untarnished and uncolored by contamination with the physical world and attachment. If knowledge of Allah is attained before death, the soul will embark on the journey of the next life in that state of knowledge. If not, the soul will continue to be entrapped by what it has done in the present life.

The answer of Abraham's people was, 'Slay him or burn him!' Abraham was put through the fire in this life. Because he destroyed their idols, his people were angry, demanding an explanation of his conduct. He said, 'If they are gods, ask the big one, which I have spared, to remake the small ones I have broken.' Furious, they kindled a fire and cast him into it. Abraham already knew the meaning of the fire in its absolute form. As he had saved himself from his inner fire, he had no reason to fear the outer fire. It has been similarly documented in our time that people in a state of complete fearlessness can walk on hot coals.

What we may consider as supernatural, such as walking on fire, is natural in a certain context; it is exceptional but it does occur. But man is so distracted and thus insensitive, he considers certain events to be unnatural. How often do events unfold in which someone is miraculously saved? Man is saved every instant, every second. By breathing in and out we are hanging on air, but we do not pause to reflect.

‘And he said: You have only taken idols in place of Allah.’ People who have denied themselves access to the path of mercy, who have denied themselves movement or direction towards that for which man has been created in this life, will be in denial in the next life as well. If one continually denies, one will eventually be cut off and disconnected. Whenever one fails to see the mercy of Allah in a situation, one has fallen. One has been defeated by the fire of anger and disturbance. The fire is agitation, and it does not allow anything to hold or grow.

Everyone has tasted some joy and some contentment in this life. But those who wish to have constant access to joy must find access to the inner garden of the heart. We have to find the key to this door. We lose joy because of expectation and attachment. This is the key to the door of Hell. Since life is dynamic, one prepares either of the two keys. Man either progresses or regresses, deriving spiritual nourishment or suffering.

26. Lot believed in Him, and he said: I move towards my Lord. Surely He is the Mighty, the Wise.

27. And We granted him (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and We placed among his descendants the prophethood and the scripture; We gave him his reward in this world, and in the Hereafter he will most surely be among the righteous.

28. And Lot said to his people: Most surely you are guilty of an indecency which no nation before you has ever done.

29. Do you approach males, commit robbery on the highway, and commit evil deeds in your gatherings? His people answered: Bring Allah's punishment if you are truthful.

30. He said: My Lord, help me against the corrupt people.

The Prophet Lot, Abraham's maternal cousin, did his best for his community. His people had transgressed in their actions, which included homosexuality and other aberrant behavior, and were therefore ultimately cut off from the way of nature. Lot had tried his best while among them, but he failed and could do no more. There is a limit to what any man can do.

Lot said: 'I move towards my Lord.' His Lord was everywhere; his Lord is the Lord of Creation, and Lord of destruction, the Lord of all. The Prophets, their followers, and the seekers of their way must always migrate to what is better: from bad to good, from good to better, from old habits to new habits. Migration (*Hijrah*) is, in meaning and form, the heritage of seekers of truth. A tradition from the Prophet Muhammad relates that if one has migrated in the way of Allah (*fi sabil illah*), even if but a foot, one is on the way to Garden.

When a people's transgression has gone beyond the limits of acceptability, no one can be helped, no healing is possible and the only thing left to do is to opt out. Allah says as Abraham did: 'Migrate.' All the great Prophets followed this example. If the migration undertaken is truly in the way of Allah, Allah will unveil for the traveler His mercy, facilitating the move.

Allah bestowed upon Abraham the gift of Isaac and from Isaac, Jacob. Both Abraham and Sarah were old, she having been barren. Isaac and Jacob were gifts to the Prophet Abraham when he began his migration in the way of Allah, and they were a provision for future generations.

Migration is both inward and outward. On a journey, the intelligent person will leave behind excess baggage and items of low value. Inwardly, a man recognizes (and denies) what he knows will cause him trouble. Outwardly, he leaves any situation not beneficial to him, until he has enough knowledge to confront it without being harmed. By then, his 'tree of knowledge' has put forth such an extensive root system that winds only cause it to shed dead leaves.

Movement and struggle must be based on spiritual capacity. At first one should go towards what is familiar, avoiding shocking or harsh change. One must acclimatize to succeeding difficult levels, struggling slowly, naturally, a step at a time. The process is dynamic, cybernetic, and self-feeding. Biologically, man moves and grows continuously, so if he fails to grow inwardly, he will end up with a white beard and the mentality of an unfulfilled child.

Man creates difficulties for himself by his own actions. There is no separation between one's outwardness and one's inwardness. The outer gloom or collapse is a reflection of an inner collapse. A derelict house reflects the state of its dweller; it is an outer symptom of an inner condition. If one is not inwardly willing to uphold what is proper in regard to human values, this

fact is exhibited outwardly. One can prop up the outer facade only temporarily; before long it will collapse.

31. And when Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, they said: Surely we are going to destroy the people of this town, for they are unjust.

32. He said: Lot is in it. They said: We know well who is in it. We shall deliver him and his followers, except his wife. She will remain behind.

The Prophet Abraham was a being who demonstrated the highest intellect (*`aql*) and trust (*tawakkul*). He was visited by angels and recognized their station and their mission. His trust in Allah assured him that Lot was blessed and that no harm would come to him, but his love and concern for his cousin took an outer expression. However great a man of unity (*tawhid*) may be, his human love must be expressed so that others may receive the solace of his deep humanity. His concern is to connect himself with other beings, because he is a man living in connection with Reality.

There are many examples in which the Prophet Muhammad behaved in a particular way only for the sake of other people. It was real behavior, not acting, but it was not a reflection of his inward state, rather an outward expression for those around him. When one has attained a spiritual station of unity one does not act for oneself but for others, without awareness of the 'otherness'. The man of unity simultaneously shows concern and yet remains certain that all is well. Those who know his inward state, know that he possesses absolute certainty; those who do not, benefit none the less from his concern and charity. This is the life of *tawhid* (unity).

A man's love for his wife assumes a formal outer expression in gifts or kindness. A worshipper's love for Allah takes on an outer expression in prayer. There cannot be an inner without an outer; there can be no inward attainment without an outward path to follow. One tethers one's camel whilst one's trust remains in Allah. Allah has given man life, a tongue and limbs so that he may act for and by Him.

As an entity not separate from the One-and-Only Reality, man must exercise his responsibilities in the all-encompassing, intrinsically connected situation. Man must shake the tree of mercy. A prophetic tradition says that the supplication of those who call out for provision yet remain in their homes will not be heard. Man is part of the totality of existence. Should he intend to do something, he must be prepared to lend himself as the instrument of execution. He cannot be separate from it; otherwise it is fantasy and not the way of reality.

33. When Our messengers came to Lot, he was grieved on account of them, and he felt powerless to protect them. They said: Fear not, neither grieve, for surely we will deliver you and your followers, except your wife. She will be among those who remain behind.

34. We will cause a punishment from the sky to overcome the people of this town, forasmuch as they transgressed.

35. And certainly We have left a clear sign of it for a people who understand.

The angelic messengers completed their mission by visiting Lot. He is concerned with their safety, for they are surrounded by the disgraceful nation of Sodom. They reassure him that they are safe and inform him of the imminent, natural affliction that is going to befall the people who have transgressed nature's way. The sign of that destruction can be visibly seen today. The city of Sodom is one of the major archaeological sites in the southeastern part of the Dead Sea.

36. And to Madyan came their brother, Shu`ayb. He said: O my people, worship Allah, anticipate the last day, and do not act corruptly in the land.

37. But they rejected him, so a severe earthquake befell them, and they lay prostrate in their dwellings.

38. And [We destroyed] `Ad and Thamud, as is apparent to you from their dwellings. The Shaytan made their deeds fair seeming to them, so he turned them away from the path though they were endowed with intelligence.

39. And [We destroyed] Qarun, and Pharaoh, and Haman. Moses came to them with clear arguments, but they behaved arrogantly in the land. They could not outstrip [Us].

Lot migrates, and the destruction occurs. These verses describe people who are warned, remain heedless, are afflicted, annihilated and destroyed. It is a warning for this life and the next. By Allah's love and mercy for His creation all that does not observe the bounds of His laws is destroyed and recycled.

Other prophets have gone through the same general experiences in different degrees of intensity and forms of affliction. The recurring pattern is that of a man of knowledge warning his people, trying to deflect them from misguidance. His success lies in performing his duty towards himself and his Creator. The ultimate reward is his contentment with himself for having fulfilled his duty according to his conscience. If there results an outer fruition of his efforts, he is grateful. Even if he cannot see it in his lifetime, he is still grateful, for his gratitude comes from the fact that he has followed the natural path of his heart.

There is but one set of laws that governs all, and it does not change for anyone. The Qur'an says that the *sunnah* (the way) of Allah never changes. The laws of gravity do not change even for a prophet. The laws of mechanics did not change for Muhammad. In the battle of Uhud the arrows flew at him, and he was bleeding. The Prophet saw his people's disobedience. It was, in a sense, for their sake that he outwardly acknowledged his affliction, so as to make them rally around him and follow his knowledge, but the laws did not change for this great and highly tuned being. The physical laws continued as did his slavehood to Reality, which inspired his followers to return to the path of correct behavior, the *din* (life-transaction) of Islam.

Man cannot claim to be above the laws of nature, for they operate at every level. He cannot overcome the laws that govern existence. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. When someone commits an act, it has its effect. Allah's laws are reliable and unchanging. When man seeks that which is not subject to change, he should look only at the essence.

40. So each We punished for his sin. Among them was he upon whom We sent down a violent storm, and among them was he whom the rumbling overtook, and among them was

he whom We caused to be swallowed up by the earth, and among them was he whom We drowned. Allah did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.

Nature overturns civilization once its culture has degenerated and decayed. Some were flooded and drowned, others were swallowed up by great earthquakes, and still others were afflicted by epidemic diseases and pestilence. Humankind contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

41. The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is like the parable of the spider that spins for itself a house. Most surely the frailest of houses is the spider's web if only they understood.

42. Allah knows whatever they call upon besides Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise.

The spider's web is exposed to the elements of nature: heat, cold, wind and rain. In fact, the web does not protect the spider from anything, as its main function is to provide the spider with insects for food. It is the least secure, and the least stable, of structures. Any human being who believes he or she is stable, or secure materially or socially in terms of habits or habitat, is dwelling on as flimsy a premise as the spider's web.

One's attachments, phobias and habits are as secure as the wisp of thought that repeatedly brings them about. The ultimate refuge is with Allah. Man takes refuge in Allah when he pursues the knowledge of Reality by realizing that everything other than Allah is relative and unsatisfactory, like the house of the spider. When the wind or rain comes, the web often breaks apart. By taking refuge in Allah, man leaves what is relative and insecure and orientates himself towards what he knows to be reliable and permanent. He migrates from ignorance to knowledge. The closer he comes to knowledge of Allah the more he discovers the relativity of everything else. Discrimination and wisdom enable him to interact correctly with the laws governing existence. He finds them simple to deal with and therefore has little trouble with what is existentially necessary.

The natural way to familiarize oneself with the laws of existence is to step out of one's self-made spider's web, the barriers and veils that a person has woven around his heart, considering them to be important. If one leaves all of that, the heart has no connection to illusions and its functioning becomes natural. One who finds that he has become too attached to a place or situation will feel as though his heart has been stripped from him when that place or situation disappears. It is usually false imagination and habits.

The spider leaves the torn web behind and spins another one with little trouble. Man, however, will weep and blame bad luck. With consciousness one can become aware of this affliction; one becomes conscious of being conscious.

From Prophetic traditions we know that one hour's reflection is better than the ritual and formal worship of seventy years. Reflecting upon creation is one of the highest actions one can perform in this existence. Prayer, fasting, and all the other pillars of the life-transaction (*din*) are helpful in the same way as the structure and foundation of a house are helpful to its occupant. Living in the house joyfully is the ultimate purpose, and this is attained by deep reflection. The best time for reflection is when one has been jolted, when one's web has been torn away from its support, which is itself flimsy and transient.

Observing the lives of the prophets and the great ones, one finds that they were afflicted to the limit of endurance; but because of their proximity to Allah, outer events did not affect their inner blessing and joy.

43. We set these parables forth for mankind, but none understands them except those of knowledge.

The further one progresses along the path, the subtler are the afflictions that come from outside. This is the way (*sunnah*) of Allah. The purpose of outer disturbance or affliction is to draw one closer to and make one more dependent on Allah alone, and thereby to increase one's knowledge. In a sense, Allah is most exclusive. He does not want man, even occasionally, to think that he is depending upon anybody else. Yet it is courteous to thank the person who is the

vehicle or means of help. This is the true inner meaning of the *din* (the life-transaction) as it is called in the Qur'an.

All the outer practices of Islam are a preparation for inner awakening and insight. When inner sight is sharpened, the outer practices become sublime and transformative. If the inner is right, the outer is seen to be right. If the outer is right, the inner will be right. They are two sides of the same coin.

None but those who have knowledge can understand these parables. They seek to see Allah behind everything. Whenever anything manifests itself they want to know its root, they want to see its cause and not to be overcome by its effect. For example, should a close friend turn out to be an enemy, could one still be in a state of gratitude instead of anger? Think of how merciful Allah has been in that He has caused the discovery now rather than years later. If one has considered the friendship as an abode of safety and security, such discovery can be traumatic. As a positive human being, one admits one's error; otherwise the spider is better off, for it goes on without looking back and builds another web, whereas people continue to develop friendships, wounds and negative memories.

The laws of Reality are to be lived within a life pattern, not simply to be talked or written about. Submission is only meaningful for the people of submission, not for those who talk about it. Islam is for those who are in the House (*Dar*) of Islam, not for those who only study it.

44. Allah created the heavens and the earth with truth. Therein is a sign in this world for those who believe.

There is a reality and truth in every creational entity. Every breath is a stepping-stone along the path of knowledge towards the source; everywhere one looks there is a sign from which to learn.

45. Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book and keep up prayer. Surely prayer restrains one from indecency and disagreeable actions. And certainly, the remembrance of Allah is the greatest. Allah knows what you do.

‘Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book.’ The command applies to all who follow in the Prophet’s footsteps. Take what comes of knowledge and apply it so that it becomes internalized, then move towards Allah. Should one attempt to take more than one step at a time, one is likely to fall. Missing a step on the path always results in weakness. The seeker should move forward confronting what is in front of him in the belief that it is the best for him at the time. This way he will benefit from the step or the state, and his movement will be as fast as his sureness and absorption of its knowledge. Prayers are a proof and an acknowledgement of glorification; they demonstrate gratitude for this magnificent gift of the Creator.

‘And certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest.’ Whatever state man is in, he punctuates it with ‘Allah is most great’. He may be in absolute exaltation of Reality when he is bowing and prostrating during prayers as he sees the magnificence of the Creator beyond his frailty and forgetfulness, but when he stands he says: ‘Allah is most great (*Allahu akbar*)’. This is the case in every affair. No matter how many openings one has, Allah is greater than one can imagine. No matter what knowledge comes to one Allah is greater; that knowledge is merely a drop within Allah’s ocean of knowledge. Allah’s remembrance of man is greater than man’s remembrance of Him; Allah’s remembrance of the believer is greater than the believer’s remembrance of Allah.

46. And do not dispute with the people of the Book unless it be by what is best, except those of them who act unjustly. And say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.

It is enjoined upon the Muslims not to argue with the people who have had a divine book revealed to them, such as the Christians or the Jews. The Prophet recommended that his followers neither confirm nor deny what they said, because his message, the Qur’an, would eventually become evident and would supersede the practices of the Christians and the Jews.

An example of this is the simple case of stoning as a punishment for adultery which was enjoined by the Prophet Abraham, reconfirmed by the Prophet Moses, and then upheld by the Prophet Jesus. But in traditions of questionable authenticity that have been handed down to the Christians, the Prophet Jesus dismissed the adulteress brought to him by witnesses. He asked

them, 'Which one of you is righteous and without sin?' Virtuous witnesses were missing. Therefore Jesus could not judge against the woman. The Prophet Muhammad clarified the law and established the necessity for four righteous men to observe the act of fornication. This is recognized as the perfect law and there is no question of discussion or argument about a revealed law.

The Muslim, following what he regards to be the ultimate and perfect Law, can only say that his God and the God of the Christians and Jews are one. Diving into the ocean of unity, he hopes that all will recognize the perfection of the path of submission.

A book does not necessarily mean what is inscribed upon the pages. A book means a way of conduct substantiated by a doctrine of unity. A book reveals the nature of reality and indicates the way towards higher understanding. Throughout the ages, many cultures, peoples and communities, both East and West, may have had divinely inspired books.

The Qur'an explains to people who follow the previous religions that all the paths are but one path. There has been only one *din* (life-transaction) and that is the path of submission to Reality, which is termed '*Islam*' in Arabic. By questioning one cannot get to the source of the question. One remains merely at the level of hearing the question and decoding its outer meaning. True submission goes beyond reasoning and surpasses information, passing into the zone of transformation.

47. Thus have We revealed the Book to you. And those whom We have given the Book believe in it, and of these are those who believe in it. None denies Our signs except those who cover up the truth.

The first stage of the book is receiving the message through the senses. If the ability to comprehend the book inwardly is not there, no matter what information is presented from the outside it will have no impact on us. If the essence does not lie within the conscious faculties, the Book – any book for that matter – will not make sense. We must unify or connect with the message.

Those who have received the Book are those who have understood the message and acted upon it. They have unified the outer message or teaching with their inner reflection and awakening. Their belief and experience cannot be taken away from them. The outer sound of the words and phrases has connected to an inner resonance. An outer message has connected with an inner call that had lain dormant. The outer message activated the inner light of innate nature (*fitrah*) which was already there.

Once man comprehends the message of unity, he sees an essential and unique connecting factor in everything which he experiences. He will always connect the cause and effect of events. He will be content, because he perceives meaning in events. The seeker has had a taste or glimpse of the fact that what he sees outside himself is in essence also inside the self. As this process of awareness receives progressive confirmation, he moves along the path of unity and thereby moves closer to the real awakening of his heart.

The majority of people who say that they believe in Allah and the Prophet Muhammad are hopeful believers. They have consciously put themselves in a situation where living belief is likely to occur. They say: 'I witness there is no god but Allah, and I witness that Muhammad is his messenger' (*Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah wa ashhadu anna Muhammad rasul Allah*). They have accepted in good faith the hypothesis which will be proved when belief is actually experienced. The path is about Allah, and the purpose of creation is to enter into it with faith and belief. Interaction with the world along the path provided leads to higher knowledge.

Once one comes to know the laws that govern creation, nothing comes as a surprise. No event is bewildering anymore because the essence of peace, that is already ingrained in man, has been brought to consciousness. Man does not like to be disturbed or shocked. The natural laws themselves are, in fact, a continuum of action and reaction; they are one ripple after another, one cause leading to another effect.

The nature of this world is to be in change. The nature of man's inner reality is to make him desire stability and a reliable and unchanging foundation. The nature of the physical world (*dunya*) is to turn, change and repeatedly be torn and recycled like the house of the spider. There is no end to the dynamic rise and fall of the movement of events.

No bird has ever gone up but has also come down. No one feels affection without experiencing conflict. No one builds a house and family without eventually losing them. If a person does not lose them during this life, he will lose them at his death. This is the inexorable cycle. Man has come to die. Experiencing the meaning of death before physical death is the fruit of the path and message of submission. When man submits to it totally, he finds nothing wrong with the physical reality of the world, for it is only a prelude to a higher all-encompassing reality.

When man does not submit, he finds anger, guilt and disappointment within himself as constant stumbling blocks.

48. And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your hand, for then could the liars have doubted.

The Prophet was unlettered in the sense that he was not formally tutored or taught the books which were revealed to earlier prophets. He was orphaned as a boy and had begun to care for his own existential needs early on in his life. But he was endowed with discrimination and soon realized that the customs that existed around him were actually ways of transgression and loss, so he avoided them. Then, through the purest of hearts, the tree of knowledge bore fruit within him and gave provision to everyone around. Outwardly, he did not have access to historical information and knowledge, but he had the inward capacity to contain the final glorious message to humankind through Divine revelation.

To follow the Prophet is to live the path of Islam. It is a pure, easy and direct path, provided one does not complicate it by excess questioning and intellectualization. When a person claims to follow the Prophet, he must cleanse his breast of debris and make it available to recognize the message that is already dormant there. Guidance does not come from outside. Allah permeates everything: He is *al-Muhit*, the All Encompassing. Anything in man's heart to which he is attached or considers important, is an idol, and clearing it from the heart facilitates the recognition of original, innate knowledge.

49. These are clear signs contained in the hearts of those who are granted knowledge; and none deny Our communications except the unjust.

50. And they say: Why are not signs sent down to him from his Lord? Say: The signs are with Allah, and I am only a clear Warner.

The message of Reality is clearly visible in the heart of those who are granted knowledge. Everyone has the potential of being granted this knowledge, but the potential must be cultivated like a seed. The seed of ignorance is easily nourished, because the lower nature of man is that of confusion and loss: 'Surely man is at a loss' (*Inna al-insan lafi khusr*, 103:3). The seed of knowledge grows spontaneously by one's willingness to dissociate from other-than-Allah.

51. Is it not enough for them that We have revealed the Book to you which is recited to them? Most surely in that there is mercy and a reminder for people who believe.

It is as though man has evolved to such a degree that he does not need miraculous outer events to shake him out of his lethargy, to prompt him to listen to the one and only message. The Prophet had one book, one miracle. Other prophets came with miraculous visible phenomena to jolt men out of their customary doubts, suspicions and cynicism.

The miracle of Islam was that the Prophet could talk about the nature of Reality in all its aspects through his own voice, which was like that of other men, and thus bring a measure of familiarity and contentment to those around him. Then he would live the message. Seeing somebody like themselves living according to the revelation gave them encouragement. This was the supreme miracle of Islam.

The one who possesses knowledge of the Qur'anic message uses it the way a doctor uses his medical knowledge. He gives it to everyone who needs a cure or is able to use it to cure other people. There is also specialized knowledge for individual treatment. When the doctor sees that a patient's heart is locked, hardened and unable to move, he must, by the grace of Allah, produce a miracle. The miracle of miracles is to demonstrate to the patient the nature of unity, the oneness behind multiplicity. The followers in the footsteps of the Prophet may have performed miracles, but these were for the benefit of their patients and seekers of Allah. These miracles were exceptional phenomena manifested by the power and grace of Allah and are not to be dwelt upon; otherwise they lead to magic or superstitious practices.

52. Say: Allah is sufficient as a witness between you and me. He knows what is in the heavens and the earth. Those who believe in falsehood and disbelieve in Allah are the losers.

The Prophet and those who follow his message believe with heartfelt certainty in the all-encompassing mercy of Allah, and they have cast themselves into its ever-flowing river of light and delight. That certainty brings about enough joy and contentment to suffice them. They cease to care about the doubts or the denials of others. Those who are at a loss, who have not found the subtle way of tuning themselves into the harmonious path of unity, are following a way that leads to a dead end. The believer looks with faith and confidence to the final departure from this world (*dunya*) and its limitations through death. The person who has not developed enough certainty in his heart clings on to what he has invested in this world. People without faith fear death and are attached to this world.

53. They ask you to hasten on the punishment. Had a term not been appointed, the chastisement would certainly have come to them. It will come to them suddenly while they are unaware.

54. They ask you to hasten on the punishment. Surely Hell encompasses the unbelievers.

55. On the day when the chastisement shall cover them from above and from below, and He will say: Taste what you did!

The ignorant ones, whose hearts are hardened and dead, ask: 'Where are the miracles? If bad deeds call for punishment, then where is the chastisement? Why does it not happen now?' Reward and punishment are not necessarily noticed immediately. There could be a subtle time delay. One who is given to a great deal of anger and agitation may not feel the reaction of his behavior for a few days, but eventually it will manifest itself in one form or another. The reaction often takes time and may manifest itself in another form.

Jahannam, the great Fire, the eternal state of constant agitation, is already afflicting those who have not tuned themselves to the state of inner contentment and submission. One does not readily

notice the fire one kindles by incorrect actions because of one's limited perception and understanding; on the Day of Resurrection and Reckoning, however, there is no possibility of personal intercession or excuse. The fire that one has kindled during one's life is so all-encompassing that the person of denial sees nothing other than the fire surrounding him on every side. In this life man thinks he can escape through one channel or another. In the next realm of consciousness, there is no escape from one's actions in the previous worldly state.

56. O My servants who believe! Surely My earth is vast, therefore you should serve Me alone.

Existentially, the believer in Allah is afflicted, tested and often opposed by his own people, as were the early adherents to the Muhammadan message. If effectively overcoming this opposition in one's homeland is not possible, then migration could be the answer. A point may be reached in one's life where one can no longer bear the extent and depth of harassment and opposition.

If there is tyranny in a situation where one is not given the opportunity to live according to the path of truth and of submission to it, one should search for another place to live. This applies to one's family as well as one's community or nation. The practice of all the prophets and those who follow them has been to strengthen understanding and knowledge of reality and then discover how and where one can benefit others who are striving towards the same goal.

57. Every soul must taste death; then to Us you will return.

The essence or meaning of death is already in every heart. If man were truly and fearlessly to submit, then it would be very easy to taste or experience death. In this creation man experiences the good and the bad, the sour and the sweet, health and illness – all the opposites – and in the same way he will experience the opposite of life. He will experience death, which, to begin with, is merely a concept during his life.

An aspect of death may be experienced in deep sleep. Final and total separation of the spirit (*ruh*) from the body will take place, and there will be no possibility of return to the body. At the point of death man will know that he is returning to the ultimate source. In other words, he will

know the meaning of 'then to Us you will return'. He is already with Allah but he may not recognize it fully; he may not always be spontaneously aware of it. Everyone will come to know that he is returning to Allah and that he was never separate from Allah. This is the law governing all humankind. At the point of death, one suddenly realizes that one has fallen exclusively into Allah's web which encompasses all other webs of existence and experience.

For the believer (*mu'min*), his return or death is a continuation and refinement of his life. He has already recognized during his life the meaning and journey of the self. The return (*raj'a*) that Allah refers to is an absolute and final one. The person of belief uses his knowledge as inner reliance and security when afflicted by the winds of opposition and doubt. The believer's death is the beginning of the next awakening. His capital and strength at the point of death are proportionate to his actions, which were based on his intentions. The believer aspires to knowledge of Allah before his death. His attainment of this goal is achieved to the extent that he has abandoned actions emanating from the lower aspect of himself.

When abandonment and submission transform the person and bring him to the point where he experiences life and death as a continuum and simultaneous process, from that point on physical death for him is only a deferred natural phenomenon which is of hardly any consequence. This point is what the Sufis call *fana' fi 'llah*, or obliteration of the self in Allah. It is a state of awareness that keeps one constantly in remembrance of the fact that at any moment one may physically die.

Both life and death become familiar to the person who has experienced annihilation in Allah. He recognizes that they emanate from the same source: Allah. The one who has experienced self-obliteration goes beyond the opposites and his return is to Allah: 'We are from Allah and to Allah we return' (*inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*). Man is supported by Allah, sustained by the one-and-only Reality which manifests mercy in the form of outward support and sustenance.

In oneness there is no discrimination. In the Garden, Adam did not know the meaning of falsehood so he did not discern who the *Shaytan* (Satan) was. He had not experienced a lie, and when the *Shaytan* spoke to him he believed that what he heard was the truth. He did not know the opposite of truth, just as we do not know death.

The taste of annihilation (*fana'*) is ingrained in man's genes. It is not something that he will attain other than by ridding himself of everything other than Allah, by dislodging himself from what he considers to be real or solid. One will discover the nature of reality by extracting oneself from the spider's web of one's habits and patterns: the way one reacts, the way one sits, the way one eats. To taste annihilation, the seeker must be willing to let go of what he thinks he is.

58. We will certainly give those who believe and do good an abode in the Garden beneath which rivers flow, and they shall abide therein forever: an excellent reward.

The more one acts in the way of Allah (*fi sabil illah*) the less one acts for oneself. Thus, one is freer of the fire and agitation of disappointment and more apt to be in the garden of tranquility. Man is in either one of two opposite states at all times: happiness or sadness, contentment or discontentment, relaxation or tension, security or insecurity, love or hate. As an active being, he has to be in one or more of these states according to varying degrees. The less there is of hate in his heart, the more there can be love; the more he is fulfilled, the less empty or dissatisfied he is.

One physically limits oneself with the purpose of achieving inner freedom. Outer purification can lead to inner purification. For the average Muslim the month of fasting (*Ramadan*) is limiting the intake of food and drink.

For the discriminating Muslim the Fast of Ramadan is also denying the senses anything that is undesirable. For the sensitive believer and sincere seeker of Allah it is focusing the heart upon Allah and nothing else but Him. Acting in goodness for the purpose of purification will give the believer a foretaste of the Garden. The extent of that taste will be according to the purity of his intention.

The rivers that nourish the trees of the Garden are not visible. They are subtle and unseen. The state of the garden within man's heart receives nourishment invisibly from the rivers of the Unseen. The outer rivers of mercy are clear. Knowing how to make an earthly garden blossom in all its aspects, in all its dynamic interconnectedness, can be applied to the inward self. There is a gardener in everyone. When a man knows how the ecology of the inner garden works, it is more

likely that he will see the overall ecology and how its intricate balance and equilibrium sustain him.

59. Those who are patient, and rely on their Lord.

60. And how many a living creature does not carry its sustenance; Allah sustains it and yourselves; and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

61. And if you ask them Who created the heavens and the earth and made the sun and the moon subservient, they will certainly say: Allah. How is it then that they are turned away?

When one does not perceive the benefit of one's spiritual discipline, one must conclude that the time needed for inner growth has not been sufficient. One may not recognize any inner openings for a long time and then suddenly perceive a breakthrough. Patience and trust are necessary conditions. They are the foundation upon which the knowledge of unity is built.

One cannot accurately judge inner progress in relation to physical time. The effects of previous wrong actions need to be neutralized. It is like a well that is dug; no sign of water appears, and there is no sign that there might be a real source beneath the ground until perhaps the last few inches when wetness and water seep through. That is the meaning of patience: perseverance until the spring gushes forth.

Through the intensity of one's devotion and abandonment, under the guidance of a true teacher one may be able to overcome one's past more quickly. Success in such a venture will be tailored to the degree of one's genuine submission and love of truth.

'And how many a living creature does not carry its sustenance!' Man, the summit of creation, need have no anxiety about his provision. Animals do not, nor do they carry their provisions on their backs. They move from one pasture to another, roam and are nourished and sustained as they grow. They move, act and do their best, and the generous Reality provides. But creation is of a dual nature: an effort must be made; the palm tree must be shaken. For man, however, the more he accumulates, and the more he uses a back-up system of wealth and possessions, the

greater the possibility that he will forget his true security, his dependence upon Allah. Dependence on material and physical belongings renders him arrogant.

All creation emanates from Allah. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with worldly goods or gold, but accumulating them requires an investment of time and energy, which often results in attachment. Investing in them makes man dependent on them. The fault is not in gold itself but in the attachment to it.

The promise of the Creator regarding spiritual evolution is based on faith and trust and real dependence on Allah; everyone can achieve complete efficiency of functioning in this life. That dependence, expressed by the phrases 'Allah is sufficient for us and how excellent a guardian' (*hasbuna Allah wa ni`m alwakil*), and 'There is no power and no strength except by Allah' (*la hawla wa la quwwata illa billah*), will bring about a situation in which one spontaneously knows how to obtain whatever one needs. Then one is free to perceive meaning.

The strong believer (*mu'min*) is better than the weak believer. The believer who has access to wealth is more useful to his neighbors and society than the one who does not and only sits with prayer beads in the corner of a mosque. That person may have saved himself but he has done nothing for others.

Conceptually, man can understand that there is one source from which everything emanates, one cause from which all effects arise. The fear of lack of provision, the fear of not living well, the fear of not having a good environment, are very critical in man's progress toward submission and his spiritual evolution. Man generally has fear of lack of provision. What matters is the degree to which that fear enslaves him. If he allows it to rule over his actions, it may bring him ruin. The fact that it can be discussed means at least that the fear is capable of being understood and redirected positively.

Seeking provision may be positive, for it tests man, spurring him on to harmonious and productive action. He obtains the true means of sustenance once he has turned away from the world, genuinely, in his heart, not simply by his actions.

Man is accountable for whatever comes into his hands. He should neither waste nor collect. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said, 'You are accountable for what is permissible, or lawful (*halal*), and you are punished for what is forbidden, or unlawful (*haram*)'.

62. Allah extends provision to whom He wills of His servants, and decrees for them. Surely, Allah knows all things.

63. And if you ask them Who sends down water from the clouds, and gives life to the earth with it after the earth's death, they will certainly say: Allah. Say: All praise is due to Allah; though most of them do not understand.

Sometimes provision comes from where it is least expected. This is as true of material as spiritual treasures. It proves how clumsy man is and how subtle Reality is. Opening up one's heart to the wonderment of this existence, wandering in the garden of this creation in complete trust, utter submission and humility produce inestimable joy and freedom.

There are many traditions describing how Allah's love for His creation manifests itself through constriction as well as expansion. Allah gives and then withholds in order to see whether the slave is steadfast in praise and belief. Allah says, 'You plot, and I plot, and I am the best of plotters.' Allah's plot is to enable man to break through the existential plot that he has woven around himself, thinking that he has created a safe haven for himself. Allah's plot seeks to purify man's belief and trust. The farther one moves on the path the subtler the tests are so that the individual may see the real extent of his belief and trust.

When man thinks that he is safe, Allah will shatter that sense of safety. Trust in Allah can develop and grow after being on the path. Nothing other than the sincere love of Allah withholds His provision from us so that we can witness ourselves jolted, frightened and disturbed. It is then that we must be steadfast, doing the utmost at all times. If we were always right, we would learn nothing. It is at the moment when one realizes one is wrong that fresh learning occurs. Abundance and paucity of provision are both aspects of Allah's love for creation. Allah's perfect love manifests constantly through His unchanging laws that govern existence.

64. The life of this world is but a sport and a play. And as for the next abode, that surely is the life, did they but know!

65. So when they ride in ships, they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him; but when He brings them safe to the land, lo! they associate others [with Him].

66. Thus they become ungrateful for what We have given them, so that they may enjoy; but they shall soon know.

67. Do they not see that We have made a sacred territory secure while men are carried off by force from around them? Will they still believe in falsehood and cover up the favor of Allah?

68. And who is more unjust than the one who forges a lie against Allah or denies the truth when it has come to him? Will not Hell be the abode of those who deny reality?

Life on earth is like a mirage or a play that does not last; it is not dependable, nor is it built upon a lasting foundation; life is flimsy like the house of the spider, perishing and then being recreated. Man's abode of worth is that state or situation which allows him to sit quietly in full possession of his mental faculties (*`aql*), with his thoughts subdued, reflecting on the fact that what is beyond time is within him. Once a momentary glimpse of this is captured through the experience of death of the ego-self, his ship may begin to sail on the ocean of inner knowledge.

Whenever man is disturbed, he must yield himself to disturbance before he can be relieved. When he is in a hurricane, when everything is shattered, when all his relationships have been sundered, when he has no home or country, when nobody wants him, he will quite naturally call upon the power of the invisible. But once some sort of tangible help appears, once an anchor has been dropped, the self re-arises and man forgets the source and essence of creation: Allah.

When he has nothing or is in deep trouble, it is much easier for man to depend upon Allah. Even if he has only a few possessions he may find himself clinging on to them, and remembrance of

Allah may be difficult. For that reason the Sufi says that the path is much easier for those who have access to everything and yet do not find it interesting or satisfactory.

The path of truth is very difficult for those who have little and desire more. These people invest most of their time and energy in satisfying their immediate existential need.

The Prophet Muhammad was promised all manner of material rewards by his tribe if, in return, he would abandon the Message. The social structure of Mecca was threatened, because it was based on superstition, tribal power and wealth, like the global fiscal and banking system of today, which is the real sovereign power behind all governments. If one turns away from it, one is challenging it.

The way to be free of any system is to take it out of one's heart. In recognizing its evil a person can turn away in a positive manner towards a path and goal that shall enable him, his offspring, and his friends, to taste freedom and harmony. If one first collapses the tent of materialism in one's heart, one will find that the prevalent system of denial (*kufur*) will also have collapsed. Energy will be conserved, and one's actions will bring about a positive and transformative effect.

69. And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide them in Our ways. And Allah is surely with the doers of good.

The way to refine the self, and to shed the ego's layers of arrogance and self-importance, is through *jihad*, striving at all times. When the self is first revealed to the seeker, the struggle is very tiring because the self is rebellious. Later, one finds that real life depends on exposing the lower self in order to purify the heart or the inner mirror. At first, the mirror has many layers of accumulated dust on its surface. Scraping it is hard work. Later on, polishing it is as easy as lightly passing a cloth over it. The seeker desires the light because it is the reflector of Reality. The heart reflects the truth.

Striving at all times is unavoidable. No one is spared struggle, because life is based upon dynamic movement and change. This is how time is experienced. The harder one strives, the more one finds that the afflictions become subtler and subtler. Everyone is caught in a web

which manifests itself in time because man is a creature suspended in space-time, yet his essence is beyond time. That is the reality which encompasses here and beyond, beginning and end, manifestation and non manifestation, life and death.

To reflect that reality and that knowledge in one's own inner mirror-reflector one must yield oneself fully and utterly to it. One then moves by the mercy and grace of Allah. One has directly, experientially abandoned oneself into the ocean of unity (*tawhid*).

The path is submissive abandonment with the use of intellect (*`aql*), that is, the use of one's faculties as invigorated and sharpened by the grace of life. There is no separation, there is only oneness. Once one has begun to act with nothing of oneself interfering in the action, one is nourished by the stream of bliss, which is the same stream as that which waters the pure Garden. All the potential impurities that exist in this life are shed, and one enters a new phase of experienced awakening.

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Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh

Edited By: Munawar A. Anees

Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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