



**Journey of the Universe**  
as Expounded in the Qur'an

**Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri**



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## **BOOK DESCRIPTION**

The Qur'an traces the journey of all creation explicitly and implicitly, seeing the physical, biological and geological voyage of life as paralleled by the inner spiritual evolution of man. Bringing together the meanings and derivations of individual words, the author reveals vibrant images which the language of the Qur'an so subtly projects.

## **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**

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## FOREWORD

Science and Religion appear to be far apart; spheres of learning that touch only distantly at some common boundaries. If we are scientists grounded in logic, learning to interpret the world in terms of cause and effect, then religion may appear an alien, illogical pursuit grounded in an ill-defined faith in the unseen that is rarely experienced and never measurable. Conversely, if we are firm in faith in the unseen and encompassed in dogma, then science appears to be an endless pursuit of knowledge with technology as a dubious spin-off with no place for man or human interaction. There is often fear and mistrust in both camps and recrimination on both sides for the obvious failure to provide a better life for the man in the middle.

Let us step back from both of these positions and try to take a place somewhere in the middle, for the one on the middle path has both camps clearly in view. Then we can ask ourselves why the practice of religion, as it is usually perceived, does not lead to peace on earth and goodwill among men. And on the other hand, we must ask why scientific progress has not led us to peace, prosperity, and general well-being for everyone here. Let us begin with a review of scientific knowledge that is pursued for its own sake and not for immediate gain in order to get a better perspective of the method of scientific enquiry.

The sun's diurnal motion and the multitude of stars wheeling about a fixed point suggest the Earth is at the center of the visible universe and man is the central observer. But man is born with the curiosity to question and to explore. It did not take him long to realize that five wandering stars did not conform to this simple picture. In trying to account for the peculiar motion of these five planets (wanderers) he embarked on a long voyage of discovery that is characteristic of all such quests for knowledge. After many false starts and bitter arguments he was satisfied that the sun and not the earth was the center. This view soon gave way to one far grander in scope when it was shown that the sun is one of billions of stars comprising the Milky Way Galaxy and that it is displaced from the center about two-thirds of the way out towards the edge.

Now we recognize that our neighboring galaxies form a local cluster and similar galaxies are visible in every direction, scattered throughout a cosmos so vast in scale that we cannot possibly comprehend its extent in either space or time. What we now detect at the discernible boundary of the universe is the faint, cool radiation remaining from the beginning of the creation. Cosmology has brought us face to face with Creation whichever way we turn! Furthermore, the galaxies are separating at enormous speed in an exploding universe that is centered on the observer, wherever he may be.

For another example from science let us turn to what is immediately at hand. At about the same time as the exploration of the cosmos began, the current theory of matter held that ultimately everything was composed of discrete particles that combined in different proportions to account for the great variety of minerals found on the earth. The minerals were assimilated into plants which were then assimilated into the animal kingdom. The fundamental building block of matter was called the atom. It took a very long time to discover the nature of the atom but only a relatively short time to find there are only some ninety-odd different atomic species in nature to account for everything observable. Stars, sun, earth, and ourselves are all made from these few different kinds of atoms proliferated into an almost infinite variety of forms. The carbon in the pages of this book was created in the stars at an early stage of cosmic evolution many aeons in the past.

Probing into the nature of matter did not stop there since atoms differ in their composition and must be built from yet finer particles. Always spurred on by exciting possibilities dimly perceived on the edge of awareness, we have probed further and yet further into the atom in quest of the ultimate building block. It is worth noting that this science of quantum physics has come to fruition just as the most far-reaching discoveries were made in cosmology. The fundamental forces that account for the nature of matter are few in number. Science has yet to account for the nature of these fundamental forces, or fields, and is still in pursuit of the unifying field theory. If we turn from the physical to the biological sciences we find an exactly parallel acceleration in understanding, after years of slow progress and false starts. This never-ending pursuit of knowledge goes on in each and every branch of science.

Between the infinitesimally small scale of the baryons in matter and the vast scale of outer space, Man stands exactly in the center. But we see ourselves separate from what we observe like someone before a mirror. Cosmology, quantum physics, and genetics are visible and invisible worlds several times removed from the dimension of Man. We have not yet faced this question in science but it is fundamental to any unifying theory.

If we pursue science with an open mind we must surely realize that inevitably we are brought to face ourselves. The pioneers in science were humble men who gazed into vistas far beyond their field of knowledge. The great beauty and order in the Universe moved Kepler to view God as the great Geometer. Newton, who built on Kepler's work, first formulated the universal law of gravity and created an elegant language of mathematics in its formulation. He said, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." This is an eloquent, humble testimony from one of the greatest men of science who was also, in the latter part of his life, a Christian theologian.

Today we are buried in an avalanche of scientific papers that threaten to proliferate at an exponential rate and no one can review even a small fraction of this information and relate to it. It was not always thus. The philosopher and scientist Immanuel Kant, in reviewing the knowledge of his day, has commented on the seeming perfection of the universe thus, "The Universe, by its immeasurable greatness and the infinite variety and beauty that shines from it on all sides, fills us with silent wonder. If the presentation of all this perfection move the imagination, the understanding is seized by another kind of rapture when, from another point of view, it considers how such magnificence and such greatness can flow from a single law, with an eternal and perfect order."

We live in a time when almost all we know concerns the physical world. Scientific investigation moves fitfully by flashes of insight, like lightning that illuminates everything for a short distance and then leaves us in darkness with more questions unanswered than before. Pursued in isolation, science cannot possibly lead to the unifying goal of all knowledge but to endless proliferation.

The ultimate questions of the origin and destiny of the universe lie always just outside our reach. The way forward from here is to turn back to revelation; this is knowledge that comes to us from the other side of time. It requires that for the moment we leave aside the scientific pursuit and suspend judgment. Now is exactly the right time to redress the balance and turn to insight, to review what has come to us that speaks of inward values, right action and ultimate reward. This is in the purview of Religion which we first posited in opposition to Science. But now we have to see religion as a unifying way of life that links the outward and inward dimensions in man, not as an imposed ritual. It must encompass everything or it will not be effective.

Man contains within himself something of his Creator. He was born to worship his Creator in order for him to return from this outward-bound journey of separation in a state of conscious awareness. The gate to worship is through submission to the unseen and the reward for complete abandonment is perfect freedom. Viewed from this standpoint, all knowledge that moves man to unity with the Creator is useful and what separates him from his goal is to be avoided as evil and of the well-defined path. There is no way in which he can find this royal road by his own efforts, try as he may. The way is in the message of those guides who were sent in times past and who have left a record and an example for us to follow. The last of the Messengers was the prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, and the last revelation to Man is the Holy Qur'an.

“Journey of the Universe” is the story of Man's journey through creation. It is the story of an unfolding, evolutionary, inward path Man was created to follow in order to know his Lord. It is played out against the vast Cosmic background that surrounds him and reveals the subtle interplay of forces within him. It places Man squarely in the center, from which he constantly strays, and sets up the balance of right action (*shari`ah*) and right knowledge (*haqiqah*). The sole basis for this exposition is the Qur'an which is itself the master-copy of creation with nothing left out. Science, seen in the light of the Qur'an, is the revelation of Creation to Man by Man. He does nothing but read what is already written within him, for he is the central actor in this Cosmic drama. His actions can only manifest that knowledge.

The Qur'an, approached correctly, teaches by itself, for everything in the Book is supported and reaffirmed by everything else. To paraphrase the first *ayah*, after the opening *surah*,

Those who believe in the unseen and are in fearful awareness of Allah (God in English) and establish connection with Him and who give to others from the bounty they have themselves received know for certain this is the Book in which there is no doubt.

The Qur'an itself is the great ocean of truth that lies undiscovered before us. In "Journey of the Universe" the Shaykh has built an island in this vast Qur'anic sea of knowledge so that we on the shore can build a bridge to it from religion, or from science or from wherever we may stand. Then, when we have bridged this gap between our intellectual knowledge and what is already written in our hearts we see, on looking back to the shore we left, the whole landscape of our existence from an entirely new perspective.

The creation of the Universe is the eternal instant unfolding in time. There was the "nothingness" and with the fiat of creation, "*kun fa-yakun*", the "nothingness" was split into the duality of existence, symbolized in the first Arabic letter "*alif*", the primary mark of creation that descends from God. Viewed from the other side of time, from where we stand, there was this vast creation of immense energy that flung everything into separation, which we can liken to an explosion, or theorize as the "Big Bang". But everything is from its Creator and must return to its Lord. From the effulgent flux of cosmic energy was formed the first condensation of matter, the lowest heaven of existence. Within this heaven is the first movement of the return journey, as the separated parts circle about their local center of mass.

The planets wheeling about the central sun are sustained by the initial energy of creation that forced them into separation. This course is exactly determined by the balancing energy of gatheredness that draws everything back to its source. Separation is temporary and apparent but gatheredness is hidden and permanent. In this broad picture of the duality of creation, gravity is the force opposing creation. And so it is in ourselves, flung from the Garden of a former existence and ever yearning to return to that which is our home. We persistently seek to unify our knowledge because that is the message already written in our hearts.

Journey of the Universe as Expounded in the Qur'an *by* Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Foreword

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Ibrahim Stokes

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the book of *tawhid*, divine unity, the book of *la ilaha illa-llah*, there is no god but Allah. It is the direct revelation of Reality. The Qur'an illuminates the connectedness between man and his environment and the interconnectedness of all aspects of creation, visible or invisible. It expounds upon the meaning of time and the experience of man in time, although the truth from which it emanates is beyond time, for time itself is encompassed in a timeless dimensional reality.

Shedding light on man's biological passage through life, this divine revelation promises another experience after death in which time ceases to have meaning, where action is not possible, and where everything stays as it is forever – beyond time.

The Qur'an expresses the opposing aspects of finity and infinity through that most concordant language in which it was revealed, the pure and ancient tongue of Arabic. The life and culture of the Arabs was always held in a finely tuned balance between two extremes, and their language necessarily reflected this. The most startlingly beautiful flowers grew out of the harsh sun-scorched desert; the most eloquent and passionate poetry emerged from the hearts of men who daily faced the mundane and sometimes treacherous challenge of surviving in such barren, unfriendly lands. The Arab mind, with its finely honed faculty of awareness, was in harmony with its environment; and the Arabs unified with the demands their lives made on them.

The sharpness in the contrasts of opposites made the Arabic language fit for giving expression to the duality that emanates from unity. The desert night is bleak, cold, and black, while the day is blindingly ablaze with heat and light. Yet, at what point does night end and day begin? They are part of one continuous cycle.

The linguistic structure of Arabic reveals this diversity within unity. Arab, the language of primordial high consciousness, of *tawhid*, reflects the knowledge which is inherently embedded

within us. The only way to gain access to these truths is to trace the Arabic words to their roots and see how all their multifaceted levels of meanings develop from one root.

In the following chapters, we shall try to explore aspects of the Qur'an that relate to the creation of this world, and take from them what is directly, commonly, and experientially meaningful to us. Examining the Arabic words of those relevant Qur'anic verses will be our major tool in decoding these truths. But because the Qur'an transcends time and man's experiences, this is inherently a very difficult task. We therefore have to approach it cautiously and with great courtesy.

We will try to extract from the Qur'an the knowledge that is already programmed within us, to glean from this infinite ocean what appeals to us as human beings who are subject to the limitations of our temporary existence. What we would like to take from the Qur'an is subject to time, so we will try to put this in a chronological order – and may Allah forgive us because time has been created by the one and only Reality Whose nature transcends time.

As creatures and products of creation living in time, we experience a natural flow of time from small to large, from embryo to child, from young to old. We see things chronologically. We are familiar with regarding time as linear – each week our nails grow longer, our beards become grayer, and so on. Although we experience its passage, time itself can only exist or be experienced if it is projected onto non-time. From the point of view of the Creator – Who is not in time but transcends time, Who is the foundation of time – the act of creation, maintenance, and destruction is part of one cycle. That Reality created what appears to be the quality of direction in time and its reverse. The Qur'an, coming as it does from the Source of creation, shows us and differentiates between early creation, man's story, sustenance, and the laws that govern this life and the final destruction. We must bear in mind, however, that the entire creation came into being by the command "Be" – an instant blown into millions of years. Therein lies the secret of life.

Allah said: "I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known. I therefore, created, so that I may be known." The purpose of creation is to know God in this time zone. When life in this time

zone comes to an end, that knowledge will be absolutely irrefutable because there will be no possibility of misinterpretation. In the following chapters we will try to categorize the different phases for the convenience of the reader: how creation, earth, and man came into being; how creation is sustained; the meaning of time; the signs of the end and the final collapse. There is, however, a limit to how far we can separate them. When the interlinks between the phases and states of Reality in these *ayat* (signs, verses) are clearly shown as parts of one continuous cycle, we will leave them; we cannot separate them just for the convenience of illustration. One must take the entire model and only then may one read and understand the whole creational act.

Each individual perceives his life as having a beginning and an end. In order to understand the total and true nature of existence, however, we must understand the nature of its roots or causes, and that is Allah – and Allah is timeless. “Capsules” of existence in time have come from the void of “non-time”, and this is where the difficulty in intellectualized understanding lies. The true understanding of the nature of this continuum can only be subjective rather than analytical or intellectual. In essence, what we are trying to do here is to be separatist; yet we realize that this goes against *tawhid*, that divine unity which is the true nature of the entire creation.

Our purpose in these chapters is to establish a platform in the sea of ignorance and loss for those of us who spend time and energy on specific aspects of contemporary science, to see if we can extend a bridge onto this platform. In doing so, we can only depend on the openings that come to us from the Qur'an, according to the extent of our abandonment and the manifestation of the knowledge of mercy upon us. We will try to identify this platform in the hope that later on we shall meet others in scientific fields to see how their endeavors fit within the broad spectrum of reality that the Qur'an presents. This is all we can do. The Qur'an does not give us specific mathematical formulae on how matter and energy, under some circumstances, can be exchanged without any imbalance in the formula. The Qur'an does, however, give us a broad description of the whole model which exists at all times and assures us of the perfect balance in every formula in creation.

The Qur'an has always been open to challenge. It challenges one to bring forth something that is like it, but then asserts that one would never be able to do so; for it is divine and absolute

whereas man's knowledge and endeavors are human, and therefore both limited and relative. The Qur'an is about the absolute, the permanent, the real behind what appears to be real – the substrata beneath the crust. Our current scientific discoveries can be changed, improved upon, expanded or negated, whereas the truths of Qur'an are forever fixed. Therefore, if you want to know whether a scientific or objective situation is true, you have to put it to the test of the Qur'an and not the other way around. This is the promise that we take from the Qur'an.

Everything is created in pairs, and every aspect of creation is based on the balance of its opposite. This fact is profoundly expounded upon throughout the Qur'an. The reality in the tablets contains everything that we can experience. The book of knowledge is one book. You cannot consider the tectonics of one specific geographical region of the earth and ignore the rest of the globe; it would make no sense. You may do that only as a preliminary step in showing how the sub-model uplifts and supports the whole model, how they connect. We are all connected; we are all subject to *tawhid*. We must only take chronology from that point of view; otherwise it will be in conflict with the totality of the Qur'an, because, in truth, in our beginning lies our end and our end contains the secret of our beginning.

The totality of the Qur'an is based on the totality of the Creator. We are simply trying to take aspects that we, as human beings, can unfold. The model we are tackling is so interlinked and multi-dimensional that beginning or end is meaningless in it. Where does Allah begin and end? The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, says (from a *hadith*; Prophetic saying, tradition): "The seven heavens, and what is in them and between them, and the seven earths, and what is in them and between them, are no more than a ring thrown in a barren land." This shows the insignificance of the heavens and earth from the point of view of the Creator. We are in creational limitation. The Creator, however, is unlimited, and the word of the Creator is the Qur'an.

## CHAPTER 1: CREATION BEGINS

The entire model of creation can be found in the Qur'an. In order to see the whole model, one has to look at all the *ayat* (Qur'anic verses, signs) referring to the event of creation, for each one of them reflects a certain angle. Only then will there be an interlinked picture one can visualize.

We try to be as faithful as possible to the interpretation of each *ayah* (verse, sign; singular of *ayat*) as it arises and build upon these verses layer by layer, until we have the full picture. Imagine it as an impressionist painting in which each different brush stroke has a certain independent meaning, but if we were to look at them all together we would see that they reinforce each other – a unified picture would emerge. Each brush stroke is therefore independent and yet dependent.

The same applies to the Qur'an. To understand a certain *ayah* one must hear its resonance or see its confirmation in another *ayah* – *al-Qur'an bil-Qur'an*; “the understanding of the Qur'an is by means of the Qur'an” – and the Qur'an contains its own system of checks and balances. As one of the Imams says: *Al Qur'an yufassir ba'duhu ba'dan*; “the Qur'an explains part of itself in other parts”. If there is an *ayah* that is vague or is a little hazy in its limits or application, another *ayah* will clarify or delineate it. Grasp the whole and one will then get the picture. That picture must be inherently and deeply rooted in our imagination, for otherwise we would not understand the mechanics of even part of it. However, we are its product, we are part of the picture, so how can we take a complete, objective overview of it? This must be borne in mind. It is not a simple matter of isolation where there is an observer and an observed. According to the Qur'an, the observer is the observed. At best, the Qur'an gives us a picture through which, by reflecting upon it, we will gain inner comprehension about the nature of creation.

Surely your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and is firmly established on the throne (of authority), regulating every affair; there is no intercessor except after His permission. This is Allah, your Lord, therefore serve Him: Will you not then remember? (Yunus:3)

*Rabb* (Lord) is related to *tarbiyah* (education, upbringing). It is the Lord who brings up everything to its full potential. Your Lord, you Sustainer, is Allah. He created the heavens and earth. *Sama'* (sky, heavens; singular of *samawat*) is what is high – high in actuality or in value. *Yawm* is a day; a day is a sequence in time that has a beginning and an end and has its own particular characteristics. A day from the Qur'anic point of view is a period of different states. The morning is different from the afternoon, and the beginning is different from its end.

God created the heavens and earth in six different phases and then established Himself upon the throne; meaning: He took complete control over them. *'Arah* (throne or foundation) is what manifested reality rests upon. A house is not held fast unless it has a foundation. The foundation holds this creation together in its movement. *Yudabbiru-l-amr* means regulating every affair; every matter will be regulated by the one Lord who is firm in His power and has control over all things.

“There is no intercessor except after His permission.” The word *shafi'* (intercessor) implies solace, compassionate intercession, additional aid. Nothing will give that support unless it is in accordance with the law, according to *idhn*. *Idhn* is permission, and its root is *adhina*, to listen, allow, hear. If God does not hear one, how can He aid him? But this is not the right way of putting it; Allah is All-Hearing. It is not that Allah does not hear it, it is man who has not been real in his calling. He has not generated the right “song”.

And they have not honored God with the honor that is due to Him;  
and the whole earth shall be in His grip on the day of  
resurrection and the heavens rolled up in His right hand; glory  
be to Him and may He be exalted above what they associate (with  
Him). (az-Zumar:67)

Man, being the highest of creation, contains the echo and the meaning of creation. He was elevated above the angels who are restricted in their channels of action, that is, angels are commanded to act only in specific directions in which they have no choice. Man, to whom angels were made to prostrate, is given that choice so that he may learn to choose the right path of action. If he chooses wrongly, he will be afflicted, resisted, and given the opportunity to

recognize his wrong action both inwardly and outwardly. That recognition comes about through suffering and punishment. If he chooses rightly, he will be in a dynamic state of peace and contentment, and will realize that he is acting correctly. The tests that man is given by having choice are a preparation for the next experience which is beyond time; and the next experience will either be hellish or paradisiacal, dominated by incessant turmoil and turbulence or infinite peace, bliss, and joy.

Man in this world is given the choice. If he transgresses the laws of the Creator he will inevitably act unjustly, and eventually bring about mass injustice and disturbance. It may appear that God's will is not prevalent and that matters are out of the Merciful's grip, but it is He Who has given man the choice in the first place. We are the children in nature's playpen. The question we must ask ourselves is: are we able to grow beyond the toys or do we continue to fight over them?

When this life ends and the universe collapses, it will be clear that everything is totally and directly in the grip of God. There will be no possibility of doubting that there is anything other than His justice, whereas in this life, it may appear that God's mercy does not encompass all. Apparent injustice is caused by man's choices and wrong actions. This is the meaning of the heavens being rolled up in His hand, where everything falls directly and completely under His command and mercy.

The phrase "will you not them remember" is repeatedly used in the Qur'an. The meaning of all that has gone beforehand is in one's inner memory bank, not in one's outer memory bank. It is an inner subgenetic remembrance that gives man the meaning of what is already within him. It is asking: "Can *you* not remember the big bang, the explosion, the meaning of which is already in your heart?" There was the order, *kun fa-yakun*, "be and it is", and creation instantly occurred from the void.

There is only Allah. We, in our clumsiness, want to understand, to physicalize, to be museum curators. We like to play God – we try to solve the cosmic jigsaw puzzles, whereas the echo of divinity is ringing in our hearts. We end up trying to outwardly rearrange and save the world; but save the world from what? Have we saved ourselves from our inner madness? That is more

difficult. Instead of setting ourselves right, however, we try to save the world. Indeed, it is this echo in man that makes him impatient and impulsive. When that inner memory becomes the looking glass, the man of *tawhid*, the lover of God, will receive all the surrounding manifestations as emanating from Allah. The Qur'an is the key which can unlock the divinity within his heart by its most glorious discriminating and divine light.

Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see, and He is firmly established on the throne (of authority); and He made the sun and the moon subservient (to His law); each one pursues its course to an appointed time. He regulated every affair, making clear the signs that you may be certain of meeting your Lord. (ar-Ra'd:2)

This description is of the beginning of creation. *Rafa'a* is to lift up; it implies that there was an outward expansion or an outer explosion. God lifted the heavens without visible support. The forces that keep the cosmos in balance are invisible, and we only know of some, such as the gravitational, centrifugal, and electro-magnetic fields. *Thumma-stawa `alal'arsh*, then He establishes Himself on the throne, the foundation from where He controls Creation; meaning that as this creation came about, its control was in His hand.

“And He made the sun and the moon subservient (to His law); each one pursues its course to an appointed time.” Both the sun and moon move in their orbits towards their destiny. All of creation moves according to a predetermined plan. The moon, which is by its nature a reflector, cannot exist without the sun. The fact that we can understand this means that its knowledge must be within us. We must inwardly contain the knowledge of explosions and of thunder (*ra'd*); how would we otherwise be able to understand them?

*Yufassilu-l-ayat* means “to clarify the signs”. Allah makes everything distinct for us. As far as human beings are concerned, we are living in *furqan* (distinction, separation). Our life is based on distinction, judgment, and wisdom: knowing this is right and that is not; this is wet, that is dry; this is black, that is white; this is growth, that is decay. It is based on duality, for life hinges on the two. Creation is balanced by opposites: man and woman, life and death. All experience

falls within the two scales of the balance, and the healthy state of a normal human being is to be balanced in the middle. If for twenty-four hours a day one had the taste of a sweet in his mouth, he would not be able to experience any other taste. Nature would eventually stop him from sucking sweets for so long by making him toothless and blistering his tongue. Imbalances will always be redressed, whether we are an active and conscious part of that process or not.

The Qur'an says: "And thus we have made you a medium (just) nation" (*al-Baqarah*: 143). In this way the signs are tailored, they are distinguished. The second, third, and fourth verses of *Surat ar-Ra'd* are very important. The second verse ends with *yaqin* (certainty), the third with *tafakku* (reflection) and the fourth one with *ta'aqqul* (exercise of reasoning, discernment, understanding). *Yaqin* is inner certainty; it is already there. The purpose of all of these signs is for man to have certainty so that he knows the Sustainer, so that he will know the meaning of that Lordship, that energy Whose objective is to bring everything to its fullness, to its full potential.

And He it is Who spread the earth and made in it firm mountains and rivers, and of all fruits, He has made in it two kinds; He makes the night cover the day; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. (ar-Ra'd:3)

Now we come to another level. The first one was about the heavens being lifted up without the aid of any visible pillars. Then we come to the earth: Allah spread the earth out. *Rawa si* means unshakable mountains. Its root word means to be firm, to be stable, and to anchor. *Marsan*, from the same root, means a port or anchorage. There is, therefore, an implied connotation of fluidity: Mountains "floated" on the molten rocks and came to rest after the cooling period of the earth. *Anhar* are rivers. The word derives from the same root as day, which means to gush or stream forth – day springing from darkness, rivers gushing from the darkness of earth.

"And of all fruits" – fruits are that which we can taste. Fruits are manifestations of all types from which we can benefit, enjoy, and use as aids in this journey. They are the final stage before decay, the final results of a plant's labor before it is recycled. Every type of fruit has been made

in pairs, *Zawjayn*. He created opposites for everything one can visibly or invisibly conceive of, such as taste: for every sourness there is sweetness.

Again we are given an example of the more visible things that dominate our lives: “The night cover(s) the day.” In Arabic the description is of how the night covers the day like a skin. *Ghisha* is skin, something that covers and hides.

“Most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” The signs are all there if only we contemplate the meaning of these forms and the cause of these effects, if only we look into their further meanings rather than into their immediate physical impact upon us.

And in the earth there are tracks side by side and gardens of grapes and coral and palm trees having one root and (others) having distinct roots - they are watered with one water, and We make some of them excel others in fruit; most surely there are signs in this for a people who understand. (ar-Ra'd:4)

Here we are given the example of earthly systems on a physical level. There are pieces of land on earth that lie next to each other and gardens which contain similar or dissimilar plants with tap or diffuse root systems. All of these differences that we can physically observe on this land are nourished and sustained by one water. From it will come bitter or sweet poisonous or health-giving plants. Everything has its use in this world. Its ecology is a complete fiber, a complete network. Some are preferred over the others from the point of view of the *Rabb* (Lord). Some of them are right for us under certain circumstances, while others are not. As human beings with our own *dhawq* (taste), we sometimes prefer one fruit to another. We taste them differently and yet their water is one, that is, they are fed by one source. We use our *`aql*, our reasoning, if we can understand that all of this diversity is physically based on one feeding source, then “most surely there are signs in this”.

The Sun and the moon follow a reckoning. And the herbs and the trees do adore (Him). And the heaven, He raised it high and He made the balance. (ar-Rahman:5-7)

Everything has been made according to a plan and measure, a *qadr*. The Qur'an says: *Inna kulla shay'in khalaqnahu bi-qadr*; "surely We have created everything according to a measure" (*al-Qamar*: 49). Some of these measures are visible and quantifiable, like the orbital paths of the sun and the moon, while some of them are not, such as the time when they will come to an end in the big collapse.

Everything is in prostration to Allah. Everything is magnetized in a certain direction. Whether that magnet is faithful and points north or south as it should or is distorted in its orientation is a secondary matter. All things are already programmed to acknowledge their beginning and end and the laws that govern them.

*Was-sama`a rafa'aha* implies that in the early stages of cosmic expansion, creation was tight and unexpanded. Creation was dense, concentrated into a dot. Elsewhere the Qur'an says: *Khalaqa-s-samawati bi-ghayr `amdin tarawnaha*; "He created the heavens without pillars as you see them" (*Luqman*:10). This statement implies that the heavens were not really lifted but were exploded, opened out of their compactness, according to a measure, a certain balance, the *mizan*.

Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were closed up, but We have opened them; and We have made of water everything living, will they not then believe? (*al-Anbiya'*:30)

The voice of truth calls us from within ourselves, from the seat of our faculty of discrimination. Do those who deny – those *kuffar* (deniers), who cover themselves up as if that knowledge is not also deeply ingrained in them – not see the truth of the one source behind every manifestation and the one essence behind every attribute? Do they not comprehend, do they not witness that "the heavens and earth were closed up but We have opened them"? This *ayah* refers to the early stages of creation when there was what might have appeared as a uniform mass – thin gas. The two aspects of our creation (heavens and earth) were connected and then were split along a certain seam. *Fataqa* is to tear a cloth at its seam, to rip apart. This means separation was already destined to happen. The seam of garment is inherently the easiest place for there to be a separation.

The meaning of *qadar* (related to *qadr*) is, therefore, divine predestination. Before anything bursts out into existence, it is set on a predetermined path. The heavens and earth were connected, but there was a boundary that was not visible along which they split. That determination was mathematically inevitable.

Here we encounter a vast, broad-brush treatment of the movement of time. The *ayah* then says: “and We have made of water everything living”. Everything that has sentience has been made from water. Creation is based on the most dynamic common denominator, which is fluid – water. Indirectly this *ayah* is asking us, “Do you still not trust? Do you not believe in the one and only, all-engulfing, all-encompassing Reality? Do you not see that this is how it all came about?”

Many a living form has a rigid structure (bones, etc.) as well as a rigid outlook, and yet, even physically, its foundation is subtle. This, too, is based on something subtler, the condensation of a gas, which in turn, has a subtler foundation that is undiscoverable scientifically but is recoverable by those who submit to the sea that contains all and who dive into it.

And We have made great mountains in the earth lest it might be convulsed with them, and We have made in it wide ways that they may follow a right direction. (al-Anbiya':31)

We have seen an *ayah* similar to this one before. It is a reference to how the earth became firm and apparently stable. The mountains have been made the earth's point of anchor. Once they were settled, the open tracts between them made it easy for one to find one's way in this world.

And We have made the heaven a guarded canopy and (yet) they turn aside from its signs. (al-Anbiya':32)

The canopy of heaven is held aloft, is preserved in its destiny by the knowledge of the Creator. But the people who are not in *iman* (trust, faith) turn away from these signs.

The heavens symbolize the limits of observable systems. Clearly it is futile and a folly to attempt to understand what encompasses a system unless we go beyond that system. In order to go beyond the systems that we can experience, we must take a quantum leap; we must abandon and

submit. To understand the meaning of life, we must penetrate its boundary, which is called death. The outer cosmic system can be comprehended if the Creator is comprehended.

And He it is Who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon; all (ones) travel along swiftly in their celestial spheres. (al-Anbiya':33)

Night and day, sun and moon were each created in a predetermined cycle or orbit – “their celestial spheres”. *Sabaha*, the root of *yasbahun*, is to float or swim. *Sabaha* is to glorify or praise. They relate in that by letting oneself submit and unify with the total current of creation, one will naturally want to express wonder and to glorify Him, just as the sun and moon glorify God by being true to their destiny.

The Qur'an says that whatever is in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah; meaning, is loyal to its prescribed path. Every created entity announces its nature and is true to it. Man is also true to His Creator in that he will never rest until he discovers his real Lord. By submitting to Him, he is freed. All pursuits, whether high or low, mental or physical, are steps towards that discovery. Man is programmed to seek contentment and peace, not realizing that his real nature is already that. He thinks that he can bring about contentment and peace by satisfying desires and strengthening attachments. What he is really attached to are the Lord's attributes – *al-Hayy, as-Samad, as-Salam* (the Everliving, the Everlasting, the Everpeaceful).

Glorification implies devotion, connectedness, and therefore *tawhid*. The electron has no choice but to be loyal to its path and the changes that occur therein, according to the variations in circumstances. In that sense, we can say that it is totally devoted to, and therefore worships, its reality. In the same way, man is a creature of devotion, adoration, loyalty, and therefore worship. He seeks and therefore he is sought. If he does not seek along the prescribed path of knowledge, he will be sought by afflictions, troubles, and tribulations which are all natural ways of reminding him to bring himself back to the path of *tawhid*, through experience and knowledge.

## CHAPTER 2: THE STORY OF MAN

Read in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clot. (al-`Alaq:1-2)

The Qur'an reflects the signals which echo in man's heart. The clarity of the echo is proportionate to the purity of the heart, and that is the meaning of the command to read.

The origin of man is the command of God – Be. The *ruh*, the spirit, is like a subtle force, the origin of which is in another realm and cannot be directly experienced or intellectually understood. The presence of such a force is indicated by the experienceable manifestation it causes. A divine breeze causes the coagulation of the first cells, which then derive nourishment from the earth of the womb and move through the various stages of growth into a discernible form. Man was formed in such a way as to enable him to reflect upon his true origin.

In Arabic the root word of *ruh* (soul) is the same as that of *rih* (wind, breeze) and *rahah* (comfort, ease). The search for comfort and ease is ingrained in man's nature. The subtle force that results in the creation of man is divine, sublime, and indiscernible by our gross intellects. The power of the intellect is derived from the *ruh* so how can it directly comprehend the nature of its originator? The Qur'an explains the origin of the *ruh* as a command – an instant of creation.

Man is in physical growth, and if he does not accompany that with spiritual growth he will then be out of balance. Physical growth signifies a cycle of stabilization and maturity and a return to the physical origin, the earth. Spiritually, the *ruh* rises from the unseen and is captured in the body, seeking its source by upholding and desiring the attributes of its creational source – harmony, peace, independence, contentment, etc. – and eventually returning at death. It is as though the body is loaned by the gross earth to the subtle *ruh* for it to discover and know its Creator so that it knows its own nature, and thereby knows the right courtesy of gaining access to Him and getting close to Him, before its promised return – death.

That loan will be a successful one if the path of abandonment, of Islam and *tawhid*, has been followed in this journey of life. After death, other processes of purification and neutralization, such as the fire and the garden, are part of the process of bringing the *ruh* to acknowledge its origin. Man is therefore physically sustained only for him to recognize his original state, and his original state is to be in true submission and abandonment.

The Beneficent God, taught the Qur'an. He created man, taught him the clear evidence. (ar-Rahman:1-4)

The mercy (*rahmah*) of Allah pervades everything. The Adamic state of being in the garden was one of complete bliss and tranquility; there was no hardship. God's advice to Adam, for it was advice and not a command, was not to go near that tree of turmoil, jealousy, and discontent. If it had been a command, Adam would have obeyed it because at that stage the Adamic consciousness knew only obedience and truth. It had no discrimination because it had not experienced untruth, until, that is, the rise of *shaytan* (Satan, the devil).

Once Adam tasted the "fruit" of the tree, he had to go through the full process of learning discrimination, which comes about by being exposed to opposites. The descent to earth was a natural outcome of the process of guidance. The earth is man's arena of practice where he can exercise choice and learn to select the right course of behavior and action. Man has inherited this knowledge from his primal state when choice did not exist.

Man was told: be in the garden and you will be in complete bliss – a state of positive neutrality. You are the closest to the Creator, but do not venture near that *shajarah* (tree or bush). Here we would not translate it as "tree". The root of the word is from *shajara* (to happen, break out, and in other forms, to quarrel, fight) and is related to *shijar*, fight or quarrel. *Shajarah* implies upheaval. The warning to avoid that tree implies avoiding that state of questioning which causes man to be in uncertainty and upheaval. The moment he asks, "Why am I here?", he shows his impertinence; for were it not for the grace of life within him, he would not even be able to ask the question.

The tree of desire and expectation arose when Adam was told, “don’t”, and he asked, “why?”. It is in the nature of the beast, for he contains the exception, which is *shaytan*. If we allow that state to predominate, the exception will be the rule, as it is now in the world.

A river has the main characteristics of viscosity and flow. The molecules of water that lie on the river banks are immobile. The rule is the mainstream, but the exception defies the mainstream. The rule is the abandonment into the natural creational laws, and the exception, we are reminded, is that there will be opposition. The rule is that a child is conceived out of intercourse between a man and woman and the exception is immaculate conception. As we know, this exception occasionally occurs and did in the case of Sayyidna ‘Isa (Jesus). This is the *sunnah* (way) of creation.

The mercy of Allah is always there, and it is this mercy that enables Adam to return to that state of bliss. He returns when he recognizes the mercy. The knowledge of the Book of creation is the first and most encompassing manifestation of that mercy – and that knowledge implies the knowledge of *tawhid*, the divine unity behind diversity, the unity of good and bad, the garden and the fire.

Adam was taught this knowledge. The knowledge was subgenetically ingrained in him. That is why the angels protested the creation of man who was going to squander his wealth and shed his brothers’ blood. God taught Adam the knowledge of *furqan*, discrimination, the knowledge that comes from *shaqa’*, mercy and wretchedness. Man encompasses the meanings of all the divine attributes.

Adam remained in primal indiscriminating bliss without being tormented by opposites until he unwittingly transgressed the bounds. Adam knew the conditions for remaining in the garden, but desire was encouraged in him. The conditions of unquestioning, desireless tranquility and bliss excluded desire, and by desiring he was made unfit for the garden.

The rise of that desire – wanting the taste of the tree’s fruit, wanting its meaning – heralds the birth of understanding and choice. As a consequence, man experiences differing outcomes of his

discriminating actions which will result in his claiming of his heritage and original abode, the garden. Following the whispering suggestions of *shaytan* (from the verbal root *shatana*, to be cast off, e.g., a path) will, however, result either in man's waste and destruction, or in his recognition of the bounds. By recognizing the bounds, he remains within the garden walls, content with submission and *tawhid*, as he was in his original state.

Man was created with total potential. He was created in order to be the hand of Allah, the eye of Allah, the ear of Allah, and to be in bliss. His consciousness arose by the fall from which his rise occurred. Consciousness of consciousness arose by him asking "why not?", by wanting to know, that is, by testing the fruit of the tree. Immediately after that he was caused to descend to the earth, the scene of future experiments. In other words, man contains the highest elements within himself, but in order to get to them he must first reconstruct himself from the bottom upwards. That is why we say man must go down to his lowest level, his foundation, in order to recognize the enmity within himself. Half of man is fighting, trying to demolish the other half; half of him is doubting and the other half inclines to *iman*; half of man is trying to see the mercy in everything and the other half is full of selfishness. Man must reconstruct himself from the lowest level so that he can rise to the highest level already within him.

The start of that reconstruction begins with doubt, with questioning the meaning of the tree. The eating of the fruit of the tree symbolizes the alienation arising from the split between the angels and *shaytan*. *Shaytan* said, "I am better than him", and so Adam said to himself: "I am qualified to ask. Why should I be deprived of thinking, of questioning, of my mind or my attachments?"

There surely came over man a period of time when he was a thing not worth mentioning. Surely We have created man from a small life-germ uniting (itself): We mean to try him, so We have made him hearing, seeing. (al-Insan:1-2)

Man is forgetful. Even while diligently seeking, we forget some basic lessons we have learned along the way. Similarly we cannot remember our state in the womb. We cannot remember how we were created or how we grew in those nine months of darkness. Before that, no one could even talk about us; nobody knew of our existence because we were in the unseen. These *ayat*

remind us of that time when we could not be mentioned. What is meant is that there most certainly was a time when we were in the unseen, when we were hidden in the knowledge of God, when nobody knew that we were likely to come into this existence. Our existence was in another realm, one that we could not talk about or experience. That is why we say that this knowledge was with Allah, for His knowledge encompasses the visible and the invisible and the laws that govern this existence and the unseen.

Everything was once in the non-time zone that now manifests itself in time. Marriage and intercourse, for example, are divine actions because we are interacting with and being the interspace with the unseen. The correct courtesy in approaching intercourse is to invoke the divine name: *Bismi-llahi-r-Rahmani-r-Rahim*; “In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.” One is entering a zone of the unknown. One does not know anything about this *ruh* that may result or what its nature will be. He has no idea. There will, of course be many connecting elements – physical resemblances and inherited characteristics – but ultimately it is yet another being. It is quite a different entity, one that asserts its individuality. It has all these interlinks with the seen, but it also has links with the unseen, with Allah.

Elsewhere in the Qur'an Allah says: *Alastu bi-rabbikum?* “Am I not your Lord?” (*al-A'raf*:172). When the experiencing of one's own self stops, the experiences of one's real self take over. By posing this question God is asking, “Why were you separate from Me, why did you not believe in My mercy, why did you not abandon yourself to Me? How did you forget? How could you forget? What is your excuse?” On the Day of Reckoning, when all excuses and props are meaningless and useless, man will see that he has no excuses.

Man was in the unseen, with Allah in a pure state, and has come here in order to have the distinction and the honor of recognizing this pure state. In a sense even to have the possibility of saying that he is separate, or of seeing that some sort of Lordship exists, is like playing God. Ultimately, when time stops for him, he will enter a zone of non-action. In order to elaborate on the magnificence of this situation, he is also reminded that there was a time when he was also unable to act, to do anything in the womb.

*Inna khalaqna-l-insana min nutfatin amshajin.* Man was created from a dot of a cell, from a liquid, from the lowest thing in existence. The smallest atom in existence is hydrogen, and once hydrogen is oxidized, it starts to decay and becomes water. All creation is based on water. We decay as we grow. In other words, we have been created from the tiniest, most insignificant, decaying thing. The magnificence of the Creator's divine being hides, in a sense, in that form.

*Nabtalihi* is derived from *ibtala*, which means to test, afflict, and wear out. *Thiyabun baliyah* (*baliyah* and *ibtala* come from the same verbal root) are clothes that are threadbare. We are tested so that what is not is worn off us. We are tried in order to recognize that all the accoutrements of life are of little value. Nature's way is to make us wary of our desires.

The first thing man physically experiences in the womb is sound, and then after he is born, he begins to experience sight. Allah alone is the all-Hearing and all-Seeing. Man can hear and see by the mercy and grace of God. If he uses his hearing and sight in order to recognize the perfection of God, then hearing and seeing are divine acts.

Certainly We created man in the best form. (at-Tin:4)

Man has been created in the most beautiful and perfect form. *Taqwim* (form) is from the verbal root of *qama*, to be built. Man's potential is higher and greater than all other creatures because it is divine. If *tarbiyah* (upbringing, education) and the worship of the *Rabb*, the Lord, takes place, then he is bound to experience the fulfillment of his potential. The choice is in man's hand.

And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right. (al-Baqarah:31)

Adam's status is higher than all angels. As a man he has more knowledge plus the gift of what appears to be choice – the choice of acting independently or dependently. By dependently we mean according to the laws that govern existence, according to the *sunnah* (way) of Allah. All the angels and all the other powers in existence were made to be subservient to the Adamic entity.

Man's indisputable and primary purpose in this life is to be healthy and content. For that to come about, he must go through a hierarchical order of stages. The first levels deal with the environmental and physical conditions: man needs shelter, clothing, food, good health. Then he needs stable mental and emotional health. After that, he can move towards the higher planes of the intellect and spirit to reach a point of highly developed inward sensitivity which will make him want to be in the most tranquil and balanced situation.

The physical and the spiritual interlink. Sustenance and maintenance begin at the physical level and end at the inner intellectual and spiritual levels; they cannot be separated. If man starts from one, he will end up at the other. If he is by nature a spiritual being, he will end up caring for his physical environment, his neighborhood and country and all of mankind and creation. If he starts from the physical level, he will end up at the spiritual. Man is a unified creature; he has both inward and outward aspects to his nature.

His sustenance and maintenance involve all of these aspects. The physical aspects of existence generally prevail, in that if one of them is off balance then the available attention and energy go towards putting it right. Once it is put right, there can then be movement along the other levels of the hierarchy – he can move into the right company and so on – until he reaches a point, usually referred to very unscientifically, of having the right “vibes” or the right “chemistry”. We often use such words to describe intangible feelings. All of them mean that the reasons for the harmony between individual A and individual B are not easily definable or tangible; they are, however, important. Nobody denies their importance, but what they are cannot be clearly expressed.

Man's ultimate purpose in sustaining himself is for him to reflect and move towards fulfilling his subtle, spiritual sides. The purpose of maintenance is to give him the opportunity to reach that point where he is able to reflect, to remember, to really see that he is journeying along routes that have already been mapped. Outwardly, the path of expansion and ultimate contraction on the cosmic map is decreed. Inwardly, the highways of correct action are bounded by the warning signs of transgression, disharmony, and unhappiness. Provision and sustenance can enable man to realize that the beginning and the end have already taken place; for he contains the knowledge

and experience of them subgenetically, in his inner recesses. If his life is not for this purpose, then it is nothing but a dislocated chain of events, abstractedly floating in time with no connection to anything in particular.

The Qur'an makes the purpose of man's existence very clear. *wa ma khalaqtu-l-jinna wa-l-insa illa li-ya`budun*; "And I have not created the jinn and man except that they should worship Me" (*al-Dhariyat:56*).

The real purpose of creation is to know the true meaning of *`ibadah* (worship); and the word in Arabic implies complete harmony, the absence of resistance or friction. The verbal root of this word in one form is *`abbada*, to make smooth. Through *`ibadah* life becomes smooth and therefore it will be completely connected and unified. The journey becomes only an experience rather than an end in itself; it becomes a means to an end.

O you men! Surely We have created you of a male and female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware (*al-Hujurat:13*)

Creation on this earth is based on groups. When man started to unfold and awaken here on earth, his nature was markedly that of a gregarious gatherer. He is still tribal and ethnocentric. He likes the security of the same type of people, of kinship, of the same language and culture. Creation on this earth is based on tribes, nations, and the extended family. This *ayah* reminds us that increase in size and number is not necessarily the right gauge or measure of the degree of one's bliss, joy, or freedom. The real measure of this is *taqwa*, fearful awareness of falling into the trap into which it is possible for all us to fall. That trap is eating the fruit of the tree of turmoil, anxiety, attachment, expectation and jealousy, without learning from it. From that transgression and failure, man's faculty of reason and discrimination is nourished. His choice and resolve become decisive, and he learns the rules of safe conduct along his journey. How could nature be a more perfect teacher?

From the one comes two. God says in the Qur'an: "I created you from one self." Whatever man contains, woman also has within her and vice versa. How could he otherwise understand her compassion, passion, gatheredness, and especially her desire to maintain immediate existential factors in equilibrium.

The fall of Adam is the beginning of his real rise, a rise that is constructed step by step in order for him to attain his full potential. From the creation's point of view, Adam's potential is to have everything. He was told to give the angels the names, that is, to show them the knowledge of everything. The angels have their own wave band beyond which they cannot go, whereas man has access to higher knowledge.

The Adamic inner core is the visible light from the invisible *ruh* (spirit, soul). Think of the *ruh* as being the invisible power that comes from one source. Once that *ruh* becomes your *ruh*, it takes on a unique coloration. Each *ruh* at that point is given the opportunity to ascend again into the garden of complete and utter intelligent abandonment, detachment, and recognition of *faqr* (true poverty) – recognition of *la hawlah wa-la quwwata illa bi-llah* there is no way or strength other than by Allah.

In order to attain this state, man must first pass through various afflictions. First is the rise of "I-ness", of arrogance, the kind that makes one defiantly ask, "Why can't I?" Second is covetousness – "Why can't I have the fruit of this tree?" The third is jealousy, as in the example of one son of Adam killing the other. The rest follows, with one question leading to another, until man is swept into the flames of fire by his own inner fire which he inadvertently stokes.

First there was oneness. Then discernment and separation began to occur in the physical creation. Man was separated from a state of bliss and sent into a state where discrimination (*furqan*) was the key to balanced living. He was removed from a stream of primal, undisturbed, indiscriminate bliss to the consciousness of different states, in order for him to perfect his choice through the growth of the faculty of reason. What else could he choose but to return to the state of the garden?

The rise of consciousness can be understood if one considers, for example, the phenomenon of pain. Man is conscious of his pain, yet he is also conscious of the consciousness, because he can differentiate between greater and lesser pain. The light of awareness illumines that consciousness within him, and that light must be ever-glowing.

And know that your property and your children are a temptation,  
and that Allah is He with Whom there is a mighty reward. (al-  
Anfal:28)

The nature of man as described in the Qur'an is to be a collector, a gatherer; he wants increase and goodness for himself and wants to avoid badness and filter out anything that might cause him disharmony. That disharmony might simply be in his mind or in his desires, without having a physical reality to it. Nevertheless, every human being wants equilibrium.

As part of the props that give one the assurance of continuity, stability, security, and longevity, man has his possessions and immediate dependents. The *ayah* here warns us about them so that we recognize or come to see that one's wealth is merely a filter, giving one the power to have things that he likes and are beneficial, and to avoid the things that he dislikes and are harmful. It gives him the protection, so to speak, needed to try to recreate a garden-like situation here on earth.

Our offspring are also a sign of wealth, power, growth, and increase. The Qur'an warns us that they are a *fitnah*, a test in order to unveil reality. They are there to echo the ultimate garden, the ultimate state of freedom, detachment, and timelessness which one will experience after death. Man's worldly blessings are tests to see whether he will fall into the trap of trappings. *Dinar maftun* (*maftun* is from the same root as *fitnah*) is a gold coin whose authenticity has been tested and found to be true. *Fitnah* arises when an outer agency interacts with a system or an entity thereby revealing its state or nature. It is an affliction, a test, making the truth evident. All of these worldly trappings, then, are there to rub and test man. They are the carborundum against which his metal is rubbed and polished in order to reveal its true nature and the true nature of man is divine.

If children and wealth show how selfish and dependent one is on them rather than God, then that test was successful. One can then move on, higher and higher. The testing is not to condemn man to failure or success, but to highlight his state. If he loves his child and he or she falls ill, the parent becomes miserable. That test reveals to him his attachment – and the degree of it – to this false and temporary situation. All these objects and relationships are only there to increase his awareness of his own state. The more he is tested, the more he recognizes his true state.

Ultimately, one's true state is complete abandonment and submission, and that is the ultimate salvation and awakening. The trappings of this world and the attachment to them, the tests and affliction that come with them, are for one to recognize the cause of the turmoil and the toil. Man will always toil; it is his nature. He toils towards that inner state of complete acceptance, tranquility, peace, and abandonment. If that toil is seen in the right context, then all its ups and downs reveal to him his nature, both the lower and the higher aspects. What matters is not the outcome of the outer situation but its interpretation, and that should be his joy.

In other words, the man on the path, as he is alluded to in this *ayah*, is he who sees the laws of creation within the blessings that Allah bestows on him and who simply, courageously, and genuinely observes himself. He sees, for example, that whenever he is given a gift he loves it; whenever he is being criticized, even by a friend, he dislikes it because criticism contains a warning of discontinuity which man does not like. Discontinuity means disruption, and thus the unification between actions is broken. We do not like action to be broken up even if the actions were of the wrong sort. We all reflect and look for *tawhid*. *Tawhid*, however, is to be found equally in degeneration and decadence as it is in correctness and righteousness. Birds of a feather flock together regardless of whether they are good or bad.

We are all slaves of *tawhid*. We all seek the intertwined ecology of unification. It could either be the ecology of decadence or of regeneration, and either one would recycle itself. The decaying swamp has its own perfect ecology, with everything breaking down into smaller molecules and eventually letting off gases. The growing plants in spring also have their own ecology, where the mineral of one dead plant feeds the new plant so that it may grow to maturity and full beauty.

We have the choice of being in the swamp or of being in the garden of inner growth. The *karam*, the generosity of God that always pervades everything everywhere can be recognized in a total sense when one is cautious and aware of the two dimensions within oneself, one being divine, the other being animalistic and base.

In this life we experience tranquility and joy, as well as disruption and sorrow. Life's scales oscillate between these two extremes. The *fitnah* enables us to remain in the center, discerning and experiencing the extreme ends without being swung up or down. It helps us remain in a state of spontaneous awareness, and from this comes gratitude and contentment.

Surely man is created of a hasty temperament; Being greatly grieved when evil afflicts him, (al-Ma'arij:19-20)

Man is always restless and anxious. If something good comes to him, he keeps it. He hides his success fearfully, and, in doing so, he goes against the *sunnah* (way) of Allah. "If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more" (*Ibrahim:7*). *Shukr* is gratitude. When one is in gratitude, one's heart is empty. When his heart is empty it can then breathe the eternal song that is written in it.

Does every man of them desire that he should be made to enter the garden of bliss? (al-Ma'arij:38)

In this world, man will be rewarded according to his intentions, and in the next he will be exactly as he was at the point of departing this existence. If his intentions are pure, simple, and free, he will soar; if not, he will plummet downward. Gravity, so to speak, will prevail and he will have to go through a process of purification by fire or even by the garden. Many of our learned masters describe the situations in which good people go to the fire in order to taste it, to burn, and be purified. There are also those who go to the garden in order to go higher and higher within those states that being in the garden brings. The experience of the fire and the garden may well be part of a process of purification whereby the *ruh* (soul) becomes fit to attain its highest state.

Sayyidna `Isa, upon him be peace, once related a story saying: "I came upon a people who were praying for fear of the fire. I told them, you will be saved and given what you want. I came upon another people who were worshipping and praying for the garden, and I assured them that they would find what they sought. I then came upon worshippers who prayed neither out of fear of the fire nor out of desire for the garden, but out of gratitude and contentment, and they were my people." We will become the realization of our intentions and actions; and the reward of our actions will be as good or as bad as our intentions.

It is clear in all the *ayat* of the Qur'an that if we take their meanings further, we will reach a point where we are given a description of the end, of the big bang, of how the expansion of the cosmos reaches its finality. Whatever is created will be destroyed. Everything in creation is in dynamic flux, and anything in the mode of dynamic flux will come to an end; it may be that it will enter other modes. Whatever is in growth will reach a point of maturity and will decline. There can be no stagnation in creation.

It is the same for the subtler aspects of creation, such as the levels of consciousness. Consciousness will increase, rising higher and higher. That is why we say there is no stopping the people of Yathrib (Madinah). The name Madinah is based on *dayn*, obligation, debt; *madaniyyah*, from the same root, means civilization. Madinah is the place where one exercises the *din* (from the same root as *dayn*, and, while translated as religion, has the connotation of transacting, of repaying the debt that one owes to the Creator, or indeed, to oneself). Madinah is wherever there is a collection of people who pay the debt towards themselves and their Creator in order to be released from the burdens they have accumulated by imitating the misguided ways of their forefathers.

Surely We have shown him the way: he may be thankful or unthankful. (al-Insan:3)

The *sabil* (way) is the way of *tawhid*. The way of *tawhid*, the way of the mercy of Allah, is already imposed upon all of His creation. Elsewhere the Qur'an says: *kataba `ala nafsihi-rahmah*; "He has ordained mercy on Himself" (*al-An`am:12*). Mercy is His overwhelming

attribute. Allah possesses everything and everything is under His control and mercy. Allah says that He has shown us the way and the way is through Him. There is only Him – *la ilaha illa-llah*. One is either going to be in a state of gratitude – and when one is grateful his heart is open, tranquil and content and therefore he can see the unity between cause and effect which puts him more in *shukr* (gratitude) – or one is in *kufr* (denial) and will only see aspects of discord.

The way has been imposed on us whether we like it or not. We are all on the way from God to God. We can either recognize the laws of Allah and be grateful to that perfection – and therefore have an easy passage – or disobey them and become injured from constantly hitting the barriers on each side of the road. We are pushed from the experience of the womb to the experience of the tomb, whether we like it or not. The outward, existential passage is the clearly defined way, and the inward *sabil* is the path of abandonment and recognition of *tawhid* and Islam (submission).

We have no control over being born or dying, so what is this arrogance we have meanwhile that makes us think we have any control? The only thing we have control over is the choice of either obeying or disobeying. Obeying the laws brings us into the state of harmony and recognition of the *jannah* (garden). In the Qur'an, the people who have gone to the garden in the next life say that they remember this because they tasted this state before. To have truly tasted it in this life they must have attained a state of true unquestioning abandonment and submission, where the gross and the subtle emerge – that is the true worship.

What we know from the Qur'an about the creation of the physical world and the development of man is closely paralleled by what we have recently come to uncover and discover. Great emphasis is placed upon the cyclical nature of creation. We are given further indications of this by the form of life that exists in the next life. There the solid mass of our bodies, which in this life contains the subtle form of our souls, will appear like a mirage, and what was hidden or secret in our hearts will be clearly manifest. We are told that in the next experience we will be reconstructed according to what we know now in this life, and the knowledge that we can have now is our clarity of mind, purity of heart, and unity between our actions and intentions.

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*Edited By: Munawar A. Anees*

*Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

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