

## **Belief and Worship**



*from the Risale-i Nur Collection*  
Humanity's Encounter with the Divine Series

# Belief and Worship

Bediüzzaman  
SAİD NURSI

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## **Bediüzzaman and the Risale-i Nur**

In the many dimensions of his lifetime of achievement, as well as in his personality and character, Bediüzzaman (1877-1960) was and, through his continuing influence, still is an important thinker and writer in the Muslim world. He represented in a most effective and profound way the intellectual, moral and spiritual strengths of Islam, evident in different degrees throughout its fourteen-century history. He lived for eighty-five years. He spent almost all of those years, overflowing with love and ardor for the cause of Islam, in a wise and measured activism based on sound reasoning and in the shade of the Qur'an and the Prophetic example.

Bediüzzaman lived in an age when materialism was at its peak and many crazed after communism, and the world was in great crisis. In that critical period, Bediüzzaman pointed people to the source of belief and inculcated in them a strong hope for a collective restoration. At a time when science and philosophy were used to mislead young generations into atheism, and nihilistic attitudes had a wide appeal, at a time when all this was done in the name of civilization, modernization and contemporary thinking and those who tried to resist them were subjected to the cruelest of persecutions, Bediüzzaman strove for the overall revival of a whole people, breathing into their minds whatever and spirits whatever is taught in the institutions of both modern and traditional education and of spiritual training.

Bediüzzaman had seen that modern unbelief originated from science and philosophy, not from ignorance as

previously. He wrote that nature is the collection of Divine signs and therefore science and religion cannot be conflicting disciplines. Rather, they are two (apparently) different expressions of the same truth. Minds should be enlightened with sciences, while hearts need to be illuminated by religion.

Bediüzzaman was not a writer in the usual sense of the word. He wrote his splendid work the *Risale-i Nur*, a collection exceeding 5,000 pages, because he had a mission: he struggled against the materialistic and atheistic trends of thought fed by science and philosophy and tried to present the truths of Islam to modern minds and hearts of every level of understanding. The *Risale-i Nur*, a modern commentary of the Qur'an, mainly concentrates on the existence and unity of God, the Resurrection, Prophethood, the Divine Scriptures primarily including the Qur'an, the invisible realms of existence, Divine Destiny and humanity's free will, worship, justice in human life, and humanity's place and duty among the creation.

In order to remove from people's minds and hearts the accumulated 'sediment' of false beliefs and conceptions and to purify them both intellectually and spiritually, Bediüzzaman writes forcefully and makes reiterations. He writes in neither an academic nor a didactic way; rather he appeals to feelings and aims to pour out his thoughts and ideas into people's hearts and minds in order to awaken them to belief and conviction.

This book includes selected sections from the *Risale-i Nur* collection.





# Belief and Worship

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

And from Him do we seek help. Praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds, and blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad,<sup>1</sup> his Family,<sup>2</sup> and his Companions.

## Introduction

Fellow Muslims. You asked for advice, so listen to a few truths contained in the following allegories. Since you are soldiers, I will express them in military terms.

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<sup>1</sup> In any publication dealing with Prophet Muhammad, his name or title is followed by “upon him be peace and blessings,” to show our respect for him and because it is a religious requirement to do so. For his Companions and other illustrious Muslims of the past: “May God be pleased with him (or her)” is used. However, as this might be distracting to non-Muslim readers, these phrases do not appear in this book, on the understanding that they are assumed and that no disrespect is intended. (Ed.)

<sup>2</sup> The Prophet’s Family: The Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. These people are known as the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the Family (or People) of the House. The Prophet’s wives are not included in this designation. (Tr.)



## THE FIRST WORD

# The Worth of *Bismillah*

*Bismillah* (In the Name of God) is the start of all good things, so we shall start with it. This blessed phrase is a mark of Islam, one constantly recited by all creatures through their tongues of disposition. If you want to perceive its inexhaustible source of strength and blessing, consider the following allegory:

Travelers in Arabian deserts must travel under a tribal chief's name and protection, or else they will be bothered by bandits and unable to acquire what they need for the journey. Two people,<sup>3</sup> one humble

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<sup>3</sup> God declares in the Qur'an : *I shall not allow to go to waste the deed of any doer among you, whether be a male or female: you are one from the other* (3:195). It is clear that Islam does not discriminate between men and women in religious responsibility. Each gender shares most of the responsibilities, but each one has certain responsibilities that are particular to it. The Qur'an usually uses the masculine form of address, for this is one of Arabic's characteristics. In almost every language, the masculine form is used for a group comprising both men and women, like the English word *mankind*, which includes both

and the other arrogant, set out on a journey. The humble one obtained the name of a tribal chief; the arrogant one did not. The former traveled everywhere in safety. Whenever he met a bandit, he said: "I'm travelling in the name of this chief," and so was left alone. He was treated with respect in every tent he entered. In contrast, the arrogant one suffered disaster and constant fear, for he had to struggle and beg for every need. He became base and vile.

O arrogant soul! You are that traveler, and this world is the desert. Your weakness and poverty are endless, and the enemies and privations to which you are exposed are beyond number. Given this, invoke the name of the Eternal Owner and the Everlasting Ruler of this world, for only this can deliver you from such begging and fear.

*Bismillah* is a blessed treasure. It transforms your boundless weakness and poverty, by binding you to the Omnipotent and Merciful One's infinite Power and Mercy, into the most heeded intercessor

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men and women. So, brotherhood also includes sisterhood, and, since the believers comprise both male and female believers, the believers are brothers and sisters. However, in order to maintain the original text and avoid repetition, usually we do not mention the feminine forms in translation. (Tr.)

at His Exalted Court. When you say *bismillah*, you act in His name. You are like a soldier acting in the state's name, fearing no one, doing all things in the name of the law and the state, and persisting against all odds.

How does everything recite *bismillah* via its very mode of existence? For example: A stranger arriving in a city can order its people to gather at a certain place to work on a certain task. If this order is obeyed, the stranger obviously is acting in the name of the ruler's strength and authority, not his own. In the same way, everything acts in the name of God, the All-Mighty. Small seeds and grains carry huge trees on their heads and raise weights as heavy as mountains. Each tree says *bismillah* and, filling its hands with fruit from Mercy's treasury, offers them to us on a tray. Each garden, a cooking pot from the Divine Power's kitchen where countless varieties of delicious foods are prepared, says *bismillah*.

All blessed animals (e.g., cows, camels, sheep, and goats) say *bismillah* and become fountains of milk from Mercy's abundance. They offer us, in the Provider's name, a most delicate and pure food like the water of life. Every plant and blade of grass, every root and stem, says *bismillah*. All plant, tree, and

grass roots and fibers, soft as silk, say *bismillah* and pierce hard stones and soil. Mentioning His Name, the Name of the Merciful, subjects everything to them.

A tree's branches spread in the sky, and its roots spread unhindered among stones and soil. It generates underground spontaneously, and its delicate green leaves hold moisture despite intense heat. These realities vex the naturalist. It jabs a finger into the naturalist's unseeing eye and says: "You put so much trust in the power of hardness and heat, yet they obey the Divine Command.

That is why each soft fiber of the plant's roots, like Moses' staff, obeys: *And We said: "O Moses, strike the rock with your staff"* (2:60) and penetrates the rock. Every delicate, paper-thin leaf, like one of Abraham's limbs, recites: *O fire, be coolness and peace* (21:69) in defiance of the intense heat.

All things inwardly say *bismillah* and deliver God's bounties to us in His name. Thus we also should say *bismillah*, give and take in His name, and accept nothing from those who do not give in God's name.

**QUESTION:** We pay people for whatever they bring us, even though they are only "tray-bearers."

What payment does God, their true Owner, ask of us?

**ANSWER:** That true Bestower of all precious bounties and goods we enjoy requires three things: remembrance, thanksgiving, and reflection. Saying *bismillah* at the beginning is a manner of remembrance, and saying *al-hamdu lillah* (praise and thanks be to God) at their end is a manner of thanksgiving. Reflection means always being mindful and thinking of the precious and ingenious bounties we receive as miracles of the Eternally-Besought-of-All's Power and as gifts from His Mercy.

If you kissed the hand of someone who brought you a precious gift without recognizing the true sender (the king), you would be making a great mistake. Praising and loving the apparent bestower of bounty, while forgetting the true Bestower of Bounty, is far worse. O soul! If you wish to avoid such stupidity, give and receive in God's name. Begin and act, to the very end, in His name. This will suffice you.

### **The Fourteenth Gleam's second station**

I expound upon six of the innumerable mysteries of the *basmala*: In the Name of God, the Merciful,

the Compassionate.<sup>4</sup> Even though addressed particularly to myself, I call it the “Second station of the Fourteenth Gleam.” May it benefit those with whom I am associated spiritually and whose souls are wiser than mine. The argument touches the heart rather than the mind, and seeks to content the spirit rather than to regard rational proofs.

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

[The Queen] said: “Chieftains, here delivered to me is a letter worthy of respect. It is from Solomon, and is: In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.”  
(27:29-30)

**FIRST MYSTERY:** Three stamps of Lordship are impressed upon the face of the universe, Earth, and humanity. They are one within the other, and each carries a pattern of the others:

*DIVINITY:* We see this in how all entities in the universe help and cooperate with each other, and in

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<sup>4</sup> A bright light from the *basmala* concerning Divine Mercy touched my dimmed mind from afar. I wanted to record it as notes and then pursue and gather its light in 20 to 23 sections of “Mysteries.” Alas, I have not been able to do this yet, and my 20 to 30 have been brought down to 6.



their general interconnectedness and reciprocity. The referent is In the Name of God.

*DIVINE MERCIFULNESS:* We see this in the mutuality of likeness and form, the orderliness and harmony, and the grace and compassion in disposing, raising, and administering plants and animals. The referent is the Merciful, in In the Name of God, the Merciful.

*DIVINE COMPASSION:* We see this in the subtleties of Divine Goodness, the delicate adjustments of Divine Mildness, and the scattering of the light of Divine Compassion on the face of our own comprehensive nature. The referent is the *Compassionate*, in *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*.

Thus the *basmala* is the holy expression of Divine Oneness' three stamps. They form a luminous line on the page of the universe, a robust stay, and a golden thread. Revealed from above us, the tip of *basmala* rests upon humanity, a miniature of the universe and its fruit. The *basmala* links the world to the Divine Throne and is a stairway for our ascent thereto.

**SECOND MYSTERY:** Divine Unity is evident in the boundless multiplicity of individualized creatures.

So as not to overwhelm our minds all at once, the Qur'an, being a miracle of exposition, constantly reiterates the manifestation of Oneness<sup>5</sup> within Unity—the manifestation of a Divine Name on all beings.

Consider this analogy: The sun encompasses innumerable things in its light. But to hold the totality of its light in our minds, we would need a vast conceptual and perceptual power. So lest the sun be forgotten, all shining objects reflect its properties (light and heat) as best they can and so manifest its being the sun. This manifestation is reciprocated, for those properties (heat, light, and the color spectrum) encompass the objects that the sun is facing.

Just as God's Oneness, His being Eternally Besought, and His Divine Names are manifested in everything, particularly in sentient creatures and especially in our mirror-like nature, each Divine Name related to creatures encompasses all creatures through Divine Unity. Thus the Qur'an constantly draws our attention to the stamp of Divine Oneness within Divine Unity, lest our minds be overwhelmed by Unity and our hearts become heedless of the Pure

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<sup>5</sup> Oneness: The concentration of the Divine Names' manifestations on one thing.

and Holy Essence. The *basmla* indicates the three important aspects of the stamp of Divine Unity.

**THIRD MYSTERY:** Divine Mercy causes the universe to rejoice. It gives the spark of light and life to dark entities, and nurtures and raises up creatures struggling with their endless need. It causes the universe to be directed toward humanity, just as a tree is directed toward its fruit, and to hasten to our assistance. It fills and lights up boundless space, an otherwise void and empty world, making it rejoice. For transient humanity, Divine Mercy also appoints eternity and the rank of the creature addressed and beloved of the One, Eternal before and after eternity.

Since Divine Mercy is so powerful a truth, so inviting, mild, helpful, and worthy of love, say: *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*. Cling to this truth, and be rescued from endless desolation and need. Draw near to the Sovereign, Eternal before and after eternity, and become the one He addresses, befriends, and loves.

Why do all entities gather around humanity with purpose and foresight, and hasten to meet our needs with perfect orderliness and grace? Do they recognize us and so run to help us—as irrational as it is, in many respects, impossible? Or do we, who have

no power, have the power of the mightiest, absolute sovereign? Or does this help reach us via the recognition of One Absolutely Powerful behind the veil of the visible universe? In other words, all entities recognize us because the One, All-Knowing and Compassionate, is acquainted with and recognizes us.

Consider this: How could the All-Majestic One, Who causes all entities to turn toward you with their hands outstretched to help you, not know, see, or be aware of you when you are in need? He teaches you that He knows you through His Mercy. So know Him, and reverently show that you do. Understand with conviction that Divine Mercy's truth subjects the universe to your service, even though you are a slight, transient, wholly feeble, powerless, and needy creature.<sup>6</sup>

Such Mercy requires total and sincere gratitude as well as honest and ardent reverence. Say: *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*, which expresses and interprets such feelings. Make it the means of admission to His Mercy, an intercessor and advocate at the Court of the All-Merciful.

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<sup>6</sup> Divine Mercy also includes (Divine) Wisdom, Grace, Knowledge, and Power.

Divine Mercy's presence and actuality is as clear as the sun. A center-patterned tapestry is woven by positioning and sequencing the warp and weft and then gathered to the center. In the same way, bright threads extending from manifesting Divine Names weaves a seal of such compassion, a tapestry of such gentle mildness, a pattern of such goodness within the stamp of Mercy, that it is impressed upon the mind more brilliantly than the sun.

The Gracious All-Merciful One, Who causes everything to serve life; Who demonstrates His Compassion in the self-sacrifice, the extraordinary sweetness of compassion, of motherhood in plants and animals; Who subjects animate life to humanity and thereby displays our importance and status as the finest and loveliest weave from the Divine Lordship as well as His Mercy's brilliance—that One has, due to His lack of need, made His Mercy the acceptable intercessor for His sentient creatures and humanity.

If you are truly human, say: "O humanity: *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.*" Seek and find that intercessor. Nothing but Divine Mercy brings to life, nurtures, and administers all plant and animal species. It neither overlooks nor con-

fuses one with another, but raises each at the right time and with perfect order, wisdom, and goodness. It then impresses the Seal of Divine Oneness upon Earth's surface. Just as Divine Mercy's existence is as certain as the existence of Earth's creatures, each creature also is a proof.

The Seal of Mercy and Divine Oneness is impressed upon Earth and upon humanity's nature. The Mercy stamped upon us is not less than the Compassion and Mercy stamped upon the universe. Our nature is comprehensive, as we are the weave's center and the Divine Names' focal point.

How could the One Who gives you this face, Who impresses upon it Mercy's stamp and Oneness' seal, leave you to your own devices? How could He consider you of no account, have no regard for your actions, and so make all creation, which is directed toward you, futile and wasteful? How could He make the Tree of Creation worthless and rotten with decayed fruit? Would He cause His Mercy to be denied when it is as obvious as the sun, and His Wisdom, which is as clear as light? Neither can be doubted or considered to contain any defect.

You can ascend to the throne of Divine Mercy by *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compas-*

*sionate*. Grasp its importance by looking at the beginning of each Qur'anic *sura* (chapter), all worthwhile books and good actions. A clear argument for this phrase's greatness, a greatness determined by Him, is the comment of Imam Shafi'i<sup>7</sup>: "Although the *bas-mala* is a single verse, it was revealed 114 times in the Qur'an."

**FOURTH MYSTERY:** Divine Unity is manifested within the boundless multiplicity [of individualized creatures]. To say: *You alone do we worship* (1:5) is not enough, for our minds wander [from Reality]. Our heart would have to be as comprehensive as Earth to observe the One in His Oneness behind the Unity within the totality of individualized entities, and then say: *You alone do We worship, and from You alone do We seek help* (1:5). Thus, the seal of Divine Oneness must be apparent on all entities' minds and species, just as on each individualized entity.

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Shafi'i (d. 820): Muslim legal scholar, founder of the Shafi'i legal school. He developed a new synthesis of Islamic legal thought. Most of the ideas were already familiar, but he structured them in a new way. He mainly dealt with what the sources of Islamic law were and how they could be applied by the law to contemporary events. His *Al-Risala*, written during the last 5 years of his life, entitles him to be called the "father of Muslim jurisprudence." (Ed.)

In addition, they should remember the One in His Oneness. This need is met by the Divine Oneness being shown within the stamp of Divine Mercy. As a result, everyone at every level can turn to the Pure and Holy One and, by saying: *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help (1:5)*, address Him directly.

To express this mighty mystery and point to the seal of Divine Mercy, the All-Wise Qur'an abruptly juxtaposes individualized detail with totality, small with large, particular with general. To prevent the mind from wandering and the heart from drowning, to allow the spirit to find its True Object of Worship directly, it broaches such subjects as our creation and speaking, the fine details of the favors and wisdom in our features, while mentioning the creation of the heavens and Earth. This truth is miraculously shown in *And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and Earth, and the varieties in your languages and in your colors (30:22)*.

The stamp of Divine Unity, being within innumerable creatures and limitless multiplicity, is of various kinds and degrees. They are as in concentric circles, from the greatest to the smallest. But however clear that Unity is, it is still a Unity within multiplicity and cannot be truly addressed by observers.



Thus the stamp of Divine Oneness must be behind the Unity, so that individuality does not call to mind multiplicity, and so that a way may be opened up to the heart directly before the Pure and Holy One.

Also, a most entrancing design, radiant light, agreeable sweetness, pleasing beauty, and powerful truth have been placed upon the stamp of Divine Oneness to draw our attention and hearts to it. Mercy's vigor draws sentient beings' attention and attracts them to it. It enables them to attain to the seal of Oneness, to serve the One in His Oneness, and thereby manifest the true address of: *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do We seek help* (1:5).

Thus *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*, the index of the Chapter of Opening (*Surat al-Fatiha*) and an epitome of the Qur'an, is the sign and interpreter of this mighty mystery. Whoever attains to it may ascend through the levels of Divine Mercy; whoever causes it to speak may learn the mysteries of Divine Mercy and see the lights of Divine Compassion and Pity.

**FIFTH MYSTERY:** There is a Tradition<sup>8</sup> to the effect that God created humanity in the form of the All-

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<sup>8</sup> The Arabic word *hadith*, commonly translated into English as Tradition, literally means "news, story, communication, or conver-

Merciful One. Its extravagant interpretation by some Sufis does not accord with the fundamentals of belief.<sup>9</sup> Some ecstatic Sufis claim that our spiritual nature is “in the form of the All-Merciful.” Immersed in their confusing contemplative trances, they might be excused for expressing mistaken views. If others consider such views acceptable, they also are in error.

The Pure and Holy God, Who orders and administers the universe as easily as if it were a palace or a house, Who turns galaxies as if they were particles and sends them travelling through space with wisdom and grace, Who dispatches the minutest particles as if they were obedient officials, has no equal or match, no partner or opposite. According to: *There*

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sation,” whether religious or secular, historical or recent. In the Qur’an, this word appears in religious (39:23, 68:44), secular or general (6:68), historical (20:9), and current or conversational (66:3) contexts. The Prophet used it in a similar sense, for example, when he said: “The best *hadith* is the Qur’an” (Bukhari). However, the *Muhaddithin* (Traditionists [scholars of Traditions]) state that the word stands for “what was transmitted on the Prophet’s authority, his deeds, sayings, tacit approvals, or descriptions of his physical appearance.” Jurists do not include this last item in their definition. (Tr.)

<sup>9</sup> Sufism: A spiritual Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find divine love and knowledge through the ways particular to it. Its adherents are known, in the West, as Sufis. (Ed.)

*is nothing like to Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing (42:11), He has no form, likeness, or peer. Nothing resembles or is similar to Him. On the other hand, according to: And His is the highest comparison in the Heavens and Earth, and He is Exalted in Might, the All-Wise (30:27), humanity can conceive of His acts, Attributes, and Names via allegory and comparison. Thus the Tradition's intended meaning is: "Humanity's form, in its totality, reflects the Divine Name the All-Merciful."*

This Divine Name is evident via the light of all Names manifested in the universe, and on Earth through innumerable evidences of God's absolute Lordship. In the same way, the All-Merciful is fully manifested, in miniature, in our comprehensive form.

A further indication may be derived from the following analogy: Animate creation and humanity are loci of evidences of the Necessarily Existent One, proofs and mirrors to the All-Merciful, All-Compassionate. These proofs are so certain, clear, and evident that just as we might say that a mirror reflecting the sun "has the form of (or is like) the sun" (emphasizing the brilliant evidence of the sun's light), we also might say: "Humanity has the All-

Merciful One's form," stressing the clear evidence within us, and the completeness of the connection in Him, of the All-Merciful. Therefore, the more moderate and balanced believers in the Unity of Being said: "There is no existent but He," expressing the evidence's clarity and the connection's perfection.

O God, O All-Merciful, All-Compassionate. Through the truth of *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*, have mercy on us according to Your being the Compassionate. Open to our understanding the mysteries of this phrase, according to Your being the Merciful. Amen.

**SIXTH MYSTERY:** O unhappy humanity laboring under limitless impotence and unending need. Understand Divine Mercy's value as a means and an intercessor. It is the means to a Glorious Sovereign in Whose army vast galaxies and minute particles serve together in perfect obedience and harmony. That Glorious Sovereign, the One, Eternal before and after eternity, is the Eternally Besought—everything needs Him Who has no need.

He is infinitely rich and does not need the universe or its entities. Everything is under His authority and direction, obedient before His Majesty and Greatness, awed and prostrate before His Sublimity.

This is the Divine Mercy, and it is for you. It uplifts you to the Presence of One without need, the Eternal Sovereign Who befriends you and addresses you as His well-loved servant.

Yet just as you cannot draw close to the sun, even though its light is reflected and manifested to you through your mirror, you are infinitely far from the Light of the Pure and Holy One, the Eternal before and after eternity. You cannot draw closer to Him unless the Light of His Mercy makes Him closer to you.

Whoever finds this Mercy finds an eternal treasure of unfailing light. This Mercy can be reached through the Sunna<sup>10</sup> of the most noble Prophet, its most brilliant exemplar and representative, its most eloquent voice and herald, who the Qur'an hails as "a mercy for all the worlds." He can be reached by calling the blessings of God upon him, for the intent

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<sup>10</sup> The Sunna is the record of the Messenger's every act, word, and confirmation, as well as the second source of Islamic legislation and life (the Qur'an is the first one). In addition to establishing new principles and rules, the Sunna clarifies the ambiguities in the Qur'an by expanding upon what is mentioned only briefly in it, specifies what is unconditional, and enables generalizations from what is specifically stated and particularizations from what is generally stated. (Ed.)

of this prayer is mercy. As a prayer of mercy for the living embodiment of Divine Mercy, it reaches the “mercy to all the worlds.”

So use this prayer to reach him, and make him the way through which you can reach the Mercy of the Most Merciful of the Merciful. All Muslims say this prayer for the “mercy to all the worlds,” which is synonymous with Mercy. Doing so is a dazzling demonstration of how precious a gift Divine Mercy is, and how broad is its sphere.

In conclusion, the most precious jewel in Mercy’s treasury is its door-keeper: Prophet Muhammad. The first key is *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*, and the easiest key to use is praying for the Prophet.

O God! For the sake of the mysteries of *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*, bestow blessings and peace on the one You sent as a mercy to all the worlds in accordance with Your Mercy and the honor due to him, and on his Family and Companions. Grant us mercy so that we are free of need for the mercy of any, among your creatures, other than You. Amen. Glory be to You! We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Truly, you are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

## THE SECOND WORD

# The Way to Contentment

If you wish to understand how to enjoy great contentment and blessing through belief, and how to experience fulfillment and ease, listen to the following parable:

Two people travel for both pleasure and business. The first one is conceited and pessimistic, and so ends up in what he considers a most wicked country. He sees himself surrounded by poor and hopeless people tormented by bullies and living ruined lives, for everyone suffers the same misery. Trying to forget everything by intoxicants, he perceives everyone as a stranger or an enemy. He has awful visions of corpses and orphans, and his soul is plunged into torment.

The second person, a God-serving, decent, and fair-minded man, goes to a country that he considers quite excellent. Seeing a universal festival, he finds joy and happiness in every corner, and a house for remembering God overflowing with rapture. He

sees the celebrations of a general discharge from duties (death) accompanied by cries of good wishes and thanks.

Hearing a drum and a band for enlisting soldiers with happy calls of “God is the Greatest” and “There is no god but God,” he becomes happy at his own joy and that of others. He enjoys a comfortable trade and thanks God.

When he meets the other man, he understands his friend’s situation and says: “You’ve become crazy. The bad and ugly things you see come from and reflect your inner world. You imagine laughter to be weeping, and discharge from duties to be sack and pillage. Come to your senses and clean your heart, so that this inauspicious veil will be raised from your eyes and you may see the truth. This is an orderly, prosperous, and civilized country with a powerful, compassionate, and just ruler. Things are not as you see or think.” The man comes to his senses and is full of regret: “Yes, I’ve really gone crazy because of all those intoxicants. Thank you. May God be pleased with you for rescuing me from such a hellish state.”

O my soul! The first person represents an unbeliever or a heedless sinner who sees this world as a place of general mourning, all living things as weep-



ing orphans due to the pain of separation and decay, people and animals as lonely and uncivilized creatures cut down by death, and great masses (mountains and oceans) as terrible corpses without souls. His unbelief and misguidance breed great anxieties that torture him.

The second person believes in and affirms God Almighty. He sees the world as a place where people praise Him, a practice arena for people and animals, and an examination hall for people and jinn. Animals and humanity are demobilized so that after death believers can travel in spiritual enjoyment to the other world—for this world needs a new generation to populate and work in it.

All animals and people enter this world for a reason. All living things are as soldiers or officials, happy with their appointed task. The sound we hear is their praise and glorifying as they begin, or their pleasure while working, or their thanksgiving as they finish. Believers see all things as obedient servants, friendly officials, a lovable book of their Most Generous Master and All-Compassionate Owner.

Many more such beautiful, sublime, and pleasurable truths arise from belief. This is because belief bears the seed of what is, in effect, a Tuba tree of

Paradise, whereas unbelief contains the seed of a Zaqqum tree of Hell. Safety and well-being are found only in Islam and belief. Therefore, always thank God, saying: “Praise be to God for Islam and perfect belief.”

## THE THIRD WORD

# Choosing the Right Way

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

O you people, worship... (2:21)

If you want to understand the bliss and benefit that come with prayer, and the loss and destruction that come with vice, dissipation, and ignoring God's commands, listen to this short parable:

Two soldiers are told to go to a far town. Travelling together, they come to a fork and meet a wise person who says: "The right road is risk-free, and nine out of ten travelers meet with great advantage but no difficulty. The left road offers no benefit, and nine out of ten travelers suffer great loss. Both roads are the same length. But there is one difference: Those who take the left road, which has no rules or someone in charge, travel without equipment or arms, and so appear comfortable and at ease. Those who take the right road must submit to military rules, carry their own food, and a heavy weapon in case of attack."

One soldier takes the right fork. Shouldering his heavy load, his heart and soul are simultaneously freed of any burdensome debt and fear. Travelling in peace, the townspeople he meets treat him as an honest soldier who fully performs his duties. The other soldier takes the left fork. Carrying nothing heavy, his heart and soul nevertheless suffer from countless dangers and anxieties. He is constantly fearful and in need. When he reaches any town, he is treated as a rebel and fugitive.

Now, my undisciplined and carnal soul, pay attention. The first soldier represents an obedient servant of God; the second soldier represents rebels and those who follow their own desire. The road is the lifeline coming from the world of souls, passing through this world and the grave, and continuing toward the Hereafter.

The heavy load and weapon are worship and piety. Prayer seems to be a strenuous demand, but in reality gives indescribable peace and comfort. Those who pray recite *ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah* (I bear witness that there is no god but God),<sup>11</sup> the Creator

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<sup>11</sup> The Islamic profession of faith. Anyone who says it is considered a Muslim, and is entitled to all the rights and benefits, as well as regulations and duties, of Islam. (Ed.)

and All-Provider. Only He can give harm and benefit. He is the All-Wise Who does nothing useless, the All-Compassionate Whose mercy and bounty are abundant. The believing soldier sees in every event a door to the wealth of God's Mercy and knocks on it via supplication. Realizing that his Lord and Sustainer controls everything, he takes refuge in Him. Putting his trust in and fully submitting to God, he resists evil. His belief gives him total confidence.

As with every good action, courage arises from belief in and loyal devotion to God. As with every bad action, cowardice arises from misguidance. If Earth were to explode, those servants of God with truly illuminated hearts would not be afraid—they might even consider it a marvel of the Eternally Besought's Power. A rationalist but unbelieving philosopher might tremble at the sight of a comet, lest it should strike Earth (as did some Americans to the recent sighting of Haley's comet).

Our ability to meet our endless demands is negligible. We are threatened with afflictions that our own strength cannot withstand. Our strength is limited to what we can reach, yet our wishes and demands, suffering and sorrow, are as wide as our imagination.

Anyone not wholly blind to the truth knows that our best option is to submit to God, to worship, believe, and have confidence in Him. A safe road is preferable to a dangerous one, even one with a tiny probability of safe passage. The way of belief leads one safely to endless bliss with near certainty; the way of unbelief and transgression is not profitable and has a near certainty of endless loss.<sup>12</sup> Even its travelers agree on this truth, as do countless experts and people of insight and observation.

Thus, just like the other world's bliss, happiness here depends upon submitting to God and being His devoted servant. So always praise Him, saying: "Praise be to God for obedience and success in His way," and thank Him that we are Muslims.

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<sup>12</sup> The author uses *near certainty*, as opposed to *absolute certainty*, out of respect for His absolutely free will. God cannot be made or regarded as obliged to put believers in Paradise and unbelievers in Hell, for He does whatever He wills. But as He promised that He would reward those who believe and do good deeds with eternal bliss in Paradise, and punish those who do not believe in Hell, He will fulfill His promise. (Tr.)

## THE FOURTH WORD

# The Prescribed Prayers' Value

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

The prescribed prayers (*salat*) are Islam's pillars. To fully understand their importance, consider this parable: A ruler gives each of his two servants 24 gold coins and sends them to a beautiful farm that is 2 months' travel away. He tells them: "Use this money to buy your ticket, your supplies, and what you will need after you arrive. After traveling for a day, you will reach a transit station. Chose a method of transportation that you can afford."

The servants leave. One spends only a little money before reaching the station, and so wisely that his master increases it a thousandfold. The other servant gambles away 23 of the 24 coins before reaching the station. The first servant advises the second one: "Use this coin to buy your ticket, or else you'll have to walk and suffer hunger. Our master is generous. Maybe he'll forgive you. Maybe you can take a plane, so we can reach the farm in a day. If not,

you'll have to go on foot and endure 2 months of hunger while crossing the desert." If he ignores his friend's advice, anyone can see what will happen.

Now listen to the explanation, those of you who do not pray, as well as you, my soul that is not inclined toward prayer. The ruler is our Creator. One servant represents religious people who pray with fervor; the other represents people who do not like to pray. The 24 coins are the 24 hours of a day. The farm is heaven, the transit station is the grave, and the journey is from the grave to eternal life. People cover that journey at different times according to their deeds and conduct. Some of the truly devout pass in a day 1,000 years like lightning, while others pass 50,000 years with the speed of imagination. The Qur'an alludes to this truth in 22:47 and 70:4.<sup>13</sup>

The ticket is the prescribed prayers, which can be prayed in an hour. If you spend 23 hours in worldly affairs and do not reserve the remaining hour for the prescribed prayers, you are a foolish loser. You may be tempted to use half of your money for a lot-

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<sup>13</sup> ... *A day in the sight of your Lord is like 1,000 years of your reckoning, and ... The angels and the spirit ascend to Him in a day, the measure of which is 50,000 years of your reckoning, respectively.*



tery being played by 1,000 people. Your chance of winning is 1:1,000, while those who pray have a 99 percent chance of winning. If you do not use at least one coin to gain an inexhaustible treasure, something is wrong with you.

Prayer comforts the soul and the mind and is easy for the body. Furthermore, correct intention transforms our deeds and conduct into worship. Thus our short lifetime is spent for the sake of eternal life in the other world, and our transient life gains a kind of permanence.



## THE FIFTH WORD

# The Right Training for Believers

In the Name of God  
the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Surely God is with those Who refrain from disobeying Him in awe of Him and who do good deeds (as if they saw Him). (16:128)

The allegory below shows how necessary it is to pray and avoid major sins, and that both tasks are directly related to our own nature:

During a war, one private is well-trained and conscientious while another is a recruit and a slave to his self. The first one attends training exercises and struggles against the enemy. He never worries about rations and allowances, because he knows the government will supply the necessary military equipment, food, and medical care. All he has to do is train for war and fight for the country. He helps out by supplying food and working in the kitchen. When asked what he is doing, he responds: "Some of the state's chores." He does not say he is working for his living. But the other soldier does not train or fight, for: "It's none of my business. It's a

government matter.” He cares only about his livelihood, and so deserts the battlefield and goes to the marketplace.

The first soldier advises him: “Brother, you’re supposed to be training to fight for the country. That’s why you’re here. The king will meet your needs, because that’s his duty. You can’t meet all your needs regardless of time or place. As we’re in a state of war, you might be accused of desertion or rebellion and be punished. We have our duty, and the king has his. We prepare to fight, and the king meets our needs.” Imagine what trouble the second soldier will be in if he ignores his friend’s words.

O my indolent soul! The battlefield represents the tumult of worldly life. The army divided into regiments represents humanity divided into nations. That particular battalion stands for an Islamic society. One soldier is a devout and pious Muslim who knows what he is asked to do and so struggles against his self and Satan. The other soldier is a sinner who ignores his duties as a servant, commits many sins, and is so obsessed with his rations and allowances that he even accuses the true Sustainer.

Training represents the daily prayers and other duties required of believers. The war stands for the

process through which the spirit achieves everlasting salvation—fighting carnal passions. These two duties are easily understood: The first (the creation and maintenance of life) is the Creator's responsibility, while the second (beseeching from the Creator and Sustainer and relying on Him totally) is ours.

Only He Who gives life, a most brilliant miracle of the Eternally Besought's art and a wonder of the Master's Wisdom, sustains life with provision. Do you need convincing? The weakest and simplest animals are the best fed. The least capable and most vulnerable creatures, such as babies or newborn animals, get the best food. Obtaining food has nothing to do with strength or free will, but of being in need and suffering shortages. See how trees and animals, fish and foxes, as well as babies and young animals and adults and beasts are fed. This should convince you.

Those who ignore their daily prayers to pursue their livelihood are like the soldier who neglects his exercises, deserts the front for fear of hunger, and wanders around the marketplace. In contrast, seeking one's rations from Earth—the kitchen of the All-Generous Provider's Mercy—after praying and not

burdening others is fine and proper. This too is a kind of worship.

Furthermore, our nature and spiritual being show that we are created to worship God. As for our physical powers and ability to live here, we are in worse shape than sparrows. But in respect to our knowledge, understanding our need, and supplication and worship, which are necessary for our spiritual life and the life of the Hereafter, we are the king and commander of all animate creatures.

O my soul. If you consider this world your major goal and work for it, you will remain only a soldier with no more control over your affairs than a sparrow. But if you move toward the Hereafter, consider this world a field to be sown, a preparation for the other world, and act accordingly, you become the ruler of the animal kingdom, a supplicant of Almighty God, and His favored or indulged guest in this world. You can choose either option. So ask for guidance and success in His way from the Most Compassionate of the Compassionate.

## THE SIXTH WORD

# The Supreme Transaction

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

Verily God bought from the believers their selves and their possessions in exchange for Paradise. (9:111)

If you want to understand how profitable and honorable such a transaction is, listen to the following parable: A king entrusted two servants with one estate each, including all necessary workshops, machinery, horses, weapons, and other equipment. But as it was wartime, when everything is in flux, this merciful and compassionate king sent his noblest officer to them with the following message:

Sell me the entrusted property so that I may keep it for you. Don't let it be destroyed in vain. After the war is over, I'll return it to you in better shape than it was before. It's your property in trust, and I'll pay a higher price for it. The machinery and tools will be used in my name at my workbench. Both the price and the fee for their use shall be increased, maybe a thousandfold. I'll give all the profit to you. You are weak and poor, and can't pay for these great tasks.

Let me take care of the expenses and equipment, and give you the income and profit. You can use it until demobilization. Consider the five advantages of this transaction.

If you don't sell the property to me, consider this. You can't preserve what you possess, and so will lose what you now hold. It will go in vain, and you will miss out on the high price I offer you. All the delicate, precious tools and fine scales that are ready to be used will lose their value, since there are no metals worthy of their use. You'll have to find some way to administer and preserve them. Moreover, you'll be punished for betraying your trust. So consider the ways you may lose.

If you sell your property to me, you'll become my soldier and act in my name. Far from being a mere recruit or irregular, you'll be an honored and free officer of an exalted monarch.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Some may see a threat here. However, human existence here is a reality out of human will. Therefore it is much more than a bargain, for God's creation of us is a pure blessing. How many people complain of being in the world? Is there anybody who does not love life? Only those misusing their willpower and engulfed in dissipation complain about life. No true believer complains. Whatever we do not like in life and in the world is due to the fact that we neglect our responsibilities as the most honored of beings. God's informing us of how to act in life and then rewarding us with eternal happiness is as great and infinite a blessing as eternity. If some still see a threat, that threat is also pure blessing, as it compels us to find the straight way and attain happiness in both worlds, where a promise is not



After the two men had listened to this gracious decree, one said: "I'm honored and happy to sell. Thank you so much." The other was as proud, arrogant, selfish, and dissipated as Pharaoh. As if he would stay on that estate forever, he ignored the earthquakes and tumults and said: "No! Who is this king? I won't sell my property or diminish my comfort." After a while, the first man reached such a high rank that everyone envied his position. He had the king's favor and lived happily in the king's palace. The other one fell so low that everyone pitied him but realized that he deserved his position. As a result of his mistake, he forfeited his happiness and property, and suffered punishment and torment.

Now, O soul full of caprice, consider the truth shown here. The king is the Monarch, Eternal before and after eternity, your Lord and Creator. That which He has entrusted to you represent your body, spirit, and heart, and so on, as well as your outer and inner senses (e.g., sight, taste, intelligence, imagination). The officer is the Messenger; the compassionate decree is the Qur'an, which states: *God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions*

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enough for weak-willed, spiritually corrupt, obstinate persons to change their ways. (Tr.)

*in exchange for Paradise* (9:111). The surging battlefield is the tempestuous surface of a world in flux, and causes us to reflect.

People ask: “Everything will leave our hands, perish, and be lost. Maybe there is a way to make it eternal, to preserve it?” While engaged in such thoughts, they suddenly hear the Qur’an’s heavenly voice say: “There is a beautiful and easy way that offers five advantages or profits.” What is this way? To sell the trust to its real Owner. The resulting five profits are:

**FIRST PROFIT:** Transient property becomes everlasting. This waning life, when given to the Eternal and Self-Subsistent Being of Majesty and spent for His sake, is transmuted into permanence and gives everlasting fruits. The moments of one’s present life vanish and rot, as do kernels and seeds. But then the flowers of happiness open and bloom in the Realm of Eternity, and each presents a luminous and reassuring aspect in the Intermediate Realm.

**SECOND PROFIT:** The price paid is Paradise.

**THIRD PROFIT:** The value of each bodily limb and sense is increased a thousandfold. For example, if you use your intelligence for the sake of the self, it becomes an ill-omened, destructive, and debilitating instrument burdening you with sad sorrows of

the past and terrifying fears of the future. This is why sinful people frequently resort to drunkenness or other frivolous pleasures. But if you sell your intelligence to its true Owner and use it on His behalf, it becomes like a mysterious key unlocking Compassion's infinite treasure-house and wisdom-filled vaults, and elevates you to the rank of a pious and righteous guide deserving eternal happiness.

The eye is a window through which the spirit looks at this world. If you use it on behalf of the self, by gazing at transient, impermanent beauties and spectacles, it panders to lust and other carnal desires. But if you sell it to its All-Seeing Maker and use it on His behalf and within His limits, it rises to the rank of a reader of the Great Book of the Universe,<sup>15</sup> a witness of the miracles of His creation, a blessed bee sucking on the blossoms of Mercy in the garden of this world.

If you use your taste on behalf of the self and for the sake of your tongue or stomach, it sinks to the

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<sup>15</sup> In Said Nursi's thought, God created the universe as a "book" to be "read" by those who want to learn of and draw close to Him. The universe's order, regularity, interconnectedness, functioning, and so on display some of his Names and Attributes. Others are displayed through the animate and inanimate members of His creation, such as the All-Compassionate, All-Providing, All-Merciful, Forgiver, and so on. (Ed.)

level of a gatekeeper at the stomach's stable, a watchman at its factory. But if you sell it to the Noble Provider, the sense of taste rises to the rank of a skilled overseer at Divine Compassion's treasure house, a grateful inspector in the kitchens of the Eternally Besought's Power.

O intelligence, be careful! Think of what is an instrument of destruction and what is a key to all being. O eye! See the difference between an abominable panderer and a learned overseer of the Divine Library! O tongue! Taste well the difference between a stable doorkeeper or a factory watchman and the trustee of the treasure house of God's Mercy!

When you compare all other instruments, faculties, and limbs to these, you understand that believers acquire a nature worthy of Paradise and unbelievers a nature conforming to Hell. Each attains its respective value. Due to their belief, believers use what the Creator has entrusted to them on His behalf and within His limits. Unbelievers betray the trust and use it for the sake of the carnal self.

**FOURTH PROFIT:** You are helpless and exposed to misfortune, indigence, uncountable needs, and impotence. Life's burden is very heavy. If you do not rely on the All-Powerful One of Majesty, trust

in and submit to Him with full confidence, your conscience remains troubled by vain torment, pain and regret, all of which destroy your understanding. Eventually, you become beasts.

**FIFTH PROFIT:** Those who unveil the true nature of things and experience the truth agree that the reward for worshipping and glorifying God performed by your limbs, senses, and faculties will be given at the time of greatest need, in the form of Paradise's fruits.

If you refuse, you suffer the following five-fold loss:

**FIRST LOSS:** Your beloved property and offspring, your adored self and its caprice, your foolishly loved youth and life all are replaced by pain and sin.

**SECOND LOSS:** You are punished for betraying the trust, for you wrong yourself by using the most precious tools on the most worthless objects.

**THIRD LOSS:** By debasing your precious faculties to a level much inferior to animals, you insult and transgress God's Wisdom.

**FOURTH LOSS:** In your helplessness and poverty, you shoulder life's heavy burden and continually groan under the blows of transience and separation.

**FIFTH LOSS:** You convert the Compassionate One's fair gifts, meant to be used for laying the foundations of everlasting life and blessedness in the Hereafter, into ugliness. All they will be suitable for is opening the gates of Hell before you.

Why do many people not want to sell? Is it so hard? By no means! The resulting burdens are not hard. The limits of the permissible are broad and adequate for your desire, and so you do not need to indulge in what is forbidden. The duties imposed by God are light and few. To be His servant and soldier is an honor beyond description.

Your duty is to act and embark on all things in God's name, like a soldier, to receive and give on God's behalf, and to obey His permission and law. If you sin, seek His forgiveness by saying: "O Lord, forgive our sins and accept us as your servants. Entrust us with Your trust until the time of restitution arrives. Amen." And petition Him.

## THE SEVENTH WORD

# The Door to Human Happiness

Belief in the All-Mighty Creator and the Hereafter is precious, since such belief is used to reveal the universe and open the door to happiness. Patiently relying on the Creator, beseeching the Provider in gratitude, and seeking refuge in Him are invaluable medicines for all ailments. Heeding the Qur'an, abiding by its laws, praying, and refraining from major sins provide us with the documents and passport needed for our journey to Eternity.<sup>16</sup> They are a light for the grave and a provision for the next life.

If you want to understand this truth, understand the following story: Once a soldier in the middle of a battlefield found himself in frightening cir-

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<sup>16</sup> The major sins consist of associating partners with God; disrespecting one's parents; consuming the property of others, especially of orphans; engaging in usury; retreating when the army advances; slandering chaste women; committing crimes with a prescribed punishment (e.g., theft, fornication, adultery, murder); engaging in prohibited acts despite the Qur'an's or the Traditions' threat of a severe punishment for doing so in the next life; and deeds cursed by the Prophet. (Tr.)

cumstances. He was wounded on his right and left sides. Behind him was a lion ready to tear him apart, and ahead of him his friends and comrades were being hanged. Beyond him lay the long road into exile.

A wise, pious person appeared on his right and said: “Don’t despair. I’ll give you two precious phrases that will render the lion harmless, like a horse, and make the gallows like a swing for your enjoyment. I’ll give you two medicines that will heal your wounds and make them smell like roses. I’ll also give you a ticket that allows you to travel the distance of years in one day. Try them and see if my words are true.” The soldier did so. Finding his words true, the soldier believed and followed the person’s advice.

Suddenly, a devilish man appeared on his left and said: “Let’s enjoy ourselves, listen to music, and eat and drink these delicious things.” He asked the soldier what he was mumbling. The soldier replied: “A sacred invocation,” to which the man said: “Leave these complicated issues. Let’s not ruin our comfort. What’s that in your hands?” The soldier replied “Medicine.” The man snorted: “Throw it away. There’s nothing wrong with you. What’s that



paper with five seals upon it?” When the soldier said it was a ticket and a rations card, the man said: “Tear them up! How can you think of going anywhere on such a beautiful spring day?” This is how that devilish man tried to lead the soldier astray. The soldier eventually will be tempted to follow, for he is human and thus subject to deception.

To his right, the soldier suddenly hears a thunder-like voice: “Wake up! Don’t be deceived. Say to that devil: ‘If you can kill the lion, do so. If you can remove the gallows, do so. If you can heal my wounds, do so. If you can arrange it so that I don’t need to leave this place, do so. Do these things, and then we can enjoy ourselves. If you cannot, be quiet!’”

To return to reality: The soldier represents each one of us. The lion is our appointed hour of death, while the gallows stand for our continual separation from friends. The two wounds are our infinite and troublesome impotence and our grievous and boundless poverty. The long journey goes from the World of Spirits to our life as an embryo, then to youth, old age, being laid out in the grave, life in the grave up to the Day of Resurrection, and passage over the Sirat bridge to begin eternal life in the

Hereafter. The two talismans are belief in God and the Hereafter.

Understand: *Belief in the All-Mighty Creator and the Hereafter*. This precious talisman gives us peace of mind and God's Mercy. The lion, unable to act without His permission, becomes like an obedient horse. Thus the pious and learned, those who have a true understanding of death, are not afraid of dying and actually wish to die before their appointed time.

The passage of time, punctuated by separation from friends (because of death, represented by gallows), is transformed by belief in the Hereafter into a means to see the perpetually renewed and always colorful embroideries of God's wonderful acts, His Power's miracles, and His Compassion's manifestations. Its like is this: Since the "mirrors" reflecting the sunlight's colors are varied and replaced, the resulting views are even more beautiful.

The first medicine is patience and trusting in God, relying on His Power, and having confidence in His Wisdom. What is there to fear when, realizing our helplessness, we rely upon the Owner of *Be, and it is* (36:82)? Even when confronted with a most frightening situation and a great calamity, he says: *Verily, to God do we belong, and to Him is our*

*return* (2:156), and places his trust in his Most Compassionate Lord with utmost serenity.

Thus the pious are content to realize their helplessness before God and put their hope in His decision. Surely there is pleasure in the fear of God. If a one-year old were asked what is the most pleasant thing he or she knows, the reply would be: "Being protected in my mother's warm embrace, conscious of my weakness and helplessness—instead of being punished as I expected." As a mother's compassion is only a small spark from God's Compassion, people of perfection take great pleasure in their helplessness and fear of God. Forsaking what is in their power, they take refuge in God and make their fear and helplessness a means of intercession before Him.

The other medicine is petitioning God with thanksgiving and contentment, and relying upon the Generous All-Provider's mercy. We ask and God gives. How could the guests of a Generous All-Provider, Who has made Earth's surface as a table and the spring for flowers to put on that table, regard their own poverty and helplessness before God as unbearable? They could not. Their poverty and need become their appetite, and so they try to increase their

poverty. This is why such people are proud of their poverty.<sup>17</sup>

The passport to Eternity comprises the five daily prayers, observing the other obligations, and avoiding the major sins. All people of discernment and learning agree that the only way to get a light, some provisions, and a vehicle for the long journey to Eternity is to abide by the Qur'an's laws and prohibitions. Science, philosophy, and craftsmanship alone are not worth much, for they only light the road as far as the grave.

The importance and ease of performing the five prayers and renouncing the seven major sins cannot be overemphasized. If you understand the truth here, you will turn to the one already astray and the one who wishes to lead you astray, and say: "If you can abolish death, impotence, and poverty, and close the door on the grave, do so. Otherwise, be still! In the greatest mosque of the universe, the Qur'an explains the universe, so let's listen to it. Let's become filled with its light and act according to its guidance. The

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<sup>17</sup> Poverty in the sense that God owns everything and we own nothing. It should not be confused with begging from people to meet one's worldly needs. (Ed.)

Qur'an is the truth, since it comes from the Creator. It speaks the truth, spreading its light everywhere.”

O God, illuminate our hearts with the light of belief and the Qur'an. Enrich us with poverty in relation to You. Don't impoverish us with indifference toward You. We have given up our power and strength for Your sake and taken refuge in Your Power and strength, so make us among those who place their trust in You. Do not leave us to ourselves. Preserve us with Your preserving. Have mercy on us and all believers.

Bestow blessings and peace upon our master Muhammad, Your servant and Prophet, Your chosen one and intimate friend—the beauty of Your Kingdom, the foremost of Your creation, the focus of Your affection, and the sun of Your guidance; the tongue of Your proofs, the embodiment of Your Compassion, the light of Your creation, and the noblest of Your creatures; the lamp of Your Oneness among the multiplicity of Your creatures; the discloser of the mystery of Your creation; the herald of Your Lordship's Kingdom; the preacher of what pleases You; the proclaimer of Your Names' Treasures; the instructor of Your servants; the interpreter of Your signs; the mirror of Your Lordship's Beauty; the circle and compass of witnessing You and Your making us witnesses; Your beloved one and Messenger whom You sent as a mercy to the worlds—and upon his Family and Companions, his fellow Prophets and Messengers, Your angels brought near, and Your righteous servants. Amen.



## THE EIGHTH WORD

# The Necessity of Religion

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

God, there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent. (2:255)

The religion with God is Islam. (3:19)

The following allegory explains the world and our spirit within it, and religion's nature and worth. It also explains how the absence of True Religion makes this world the darkest dungeon and the unbeliever the most unfortunate creature, and why belief in God's Existence and Unity, as well as reliance upon Him, opens the universe's secret sign and saves our souls from darkness.

Two brothers travel together. Coming to a fork in the road, they see a wise old man and ask him which way to take. He tells them that the right fork requires observance of the road's law and brings a certain security and happiness, while the left fork promises a certain kind of freedom as well as cer-

tain danger and distress. He tells them to choose. The well-disciplined brother, relying on God, takes the right fork and accepts dependence on law and order.

The other brother takes the left fork for the sake of freedom. He seems comfortable, but in fact feels no inner tranquillity. Reaching a desert, he suddenly hears the terrible sound of a beast that is about to attack him. He runs away and, seeing a waterless well 60 meters deep, jumps into it. Halfway down, he grabs a tree growing out of the wall to break his fall. The tree has two roots, both of which are being gnawed away by two rats, one white and the other black. Looking up, he sees the beast waiting for him. Looking down, he sees a horrible dragon almost at his feet, its large mouth open to receive him. Looking at the wall, he sees that it is covered with laboring insects. Looking again at the tree, he notices that although it is only a fig tree, it miraculously has many different fruits growing on it, such as walnuts and pomegranates.

Hanging in the well, he does not understand what has happened. He cannot imagine that somebody has caused all of these things to happen, for he cannot reason. Although inwardly distressed, and despite his



spirit's and heart's complaints, his evil-commanding self pretends everything is fine and so ignores their weeping. Pretending that he is enjoying himself in a garden, he starts eating all kinds of fruits—for free. But some of them are poisonous and will harm him.

In a *hadith qudsi*, God says: “I will treat My servants in the way they think of Me.”<sup>18</sup> This man sees everything happening to him as unimportant, and thus that is the way it is for him. He neither dies nor lives well, but merely persists in an agony of suspense.

The wiser and well-disciplined brother always thinks of the good, affirms the law, and feels secure and free. Finding beautiful flowers and fruits or ruined and ugly things in a garden, he focuses on what is good and beautiful. His brother cannot, for he has concerned himself with evil and finds no ease in such a garden. The wise brother lives according to: “Look on the good side of everything,” and so is generally happy with everything.

Upon reaching a desert and meeting a beast, he is afraid. But thinking that it must be serving some-

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<sup>18</sup> *Hadith Qudsi*: This is a specific category of sayings from the Prophet. The wording is the Prophet's, but the meaning belongs to God.

one, he is not so afraid. He also jumps down a well and, halfway down, catches hold of some tree branches. Noticing two rats gnawing at the tree's two roots, as well as the dragon below and the beast above, he finds himself in a strange situation.

But unlike his brother, he infers that everything has been arranged by someone and constitutes a sign. Thinking that he is being watched and examined, he understands that he is being directed and guided as a test and for a purpose. His curiosity aroused, he asks: "Who wants to make me know him?" Meanwhile, he remains patient and self-disciplined. This curiosity arouses in him a love for the sign's owner, which makes him want to understand the sign, what the events mean, and to acquire good qualities to please its owner.

He realizes that the tree is a fig tree, although it bears many kinds of fruit. He is no longer afraid, for he realizes that it is a sample catalogue of the unseen owner's fruits prepared for guests. Otherwise, one tree would not bear so many different fruits. He starts to pray earnestly and, as a result, the key to the secret is inspired in him. He declares: "O owner of this scene and events, I am in your hands. I take refuge in you and am at your service. I desire your approval and

knowledge of you.” The wall opens, revealing a door (the dragon’s mouth) leading onto a wonderful, pleasant garden. Both the dragon and the beast become two servants inviting him in. The beast changes into a horse on which he rides.

And so, my lazy soul and imaginary friend! Let’s compare their positions and see how good brings good and evil brings evil. The brother who took the left road of self-trust and self-willed freedom is about to fall into the dragon’s mouth. He is always anxious and lonely, and considers himself a prisoner facing the attacks of wild beasts. He adds to his distress by eating apparently delicious but actually poisonous fruits that are only samples; they are not meant to be eaten for their own sake, but to persuade people to seek the originals and become customers of them. He changes his day into darkness. He wrongs himself, changing his situation into a hell-like one, so that he neither deserves pity nor has the right to complain.

In contrast, the brother who took the right way is in a fruitful garden and surrounded by servants. He studies every different and beautiful incident in awe, and sees himself as an honored guest enjoying his generous host’s strange and beautiful servants.

He does not eat up the fig tree's fruits; rather, he samples them and, understanding reality, postpones his pleasure and enjoys the anticipation.

The first brother is like one who denies his favored situation in a summer garden surrounded by friends, and instead, becoming drunk, imagines himself among wild beasts in winter and complains thereof. Wronging himself and insulting his friends, he deserves no mercy. The other brother, who accepts trustingly what is given and observes the law, sees and accepts reality, which for him is beautiful. Respecting the owner of reality, he deserves mercy. Thus can we attain a partial understanding of: *Whatever good befalls you is from God, and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself* (4:79).

Reflecting upon the brothers, we see that one's inner self prepared a hell-like situation for him, corresponding to his own attitude of reality, whereas the other's potential goodness, positive intention, and good nature led him to a very favored and happy situation. Now, I say to my own inner self as well as to the reader's: If you desire success, follow the guidance of the Qur'an.

The gist of the allegory is as follows: One brother is a believer; the other is an unbeliever. The right

road is that of the Qur'an and belief; the left road is that of unbelief and rebellion. The garden is human society and civilization, which contain both good and evil, cleanliness and pollution. A sensible person "takes what is clear and pleasant, leaves what is turbid and distressing," and proceeds with a tranquil heart. The desert is Earth, the beast is death, the well is our life, and 60 meters is our average lifespan of 60 years.

The tree in the well is life, the two rats gnawing on its roots are day and night, and the dragon is the grave's opening. For a believer, it is no more than a door opening onto the Garden. The insects are the troubles we face, and in reality are God's gentle warnings that prevent believers from becoming heedless. The fruits are the bounties of this world presented as samples from the blessings of the Hereafter, inviting customers toward the fruits of Paradise.<sup>19</sup> The sign shows the secret will of God in creating. It is opened with belief, and its key is: "O God, there is

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<sup>19</sup> The tree with various fruits shows the seal of Divinity, Whose unique virtue is "to create everything out of one thing" and "to change everything into one thing"; to make various plants and fruits from the same soil; to create all living things from one drop of water; and to nourish and sustain all living things in the same manner but through different foods. (Tr.)

no god but God; God, there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent.”

For one brother, the dragon’s mouth (the grave) changes into a door to the Garden (Paradise). For the other, as for all unbelievers, the grave is the door to a place of trouble (Hell). The beast changes into an obedient servant, a disciplined and trained horse. In other words, for unbelievers death is a painful detachment from loved ones, an imprisonment after leaving the Paradise-like Earth. For believers, it is a means of reunion with dead friends and companions. It is like going to their eternal home of happiness, a formal invitation to pass into the eternal gardens, an occasion to receive the wage bestowed by the Most Compassionate and Merciful One’s generosity for services rendered to Him, and a kind of retirement from the burden of life.

In sum, those who pursue this transient life place themselves in Hell, even though they stay in what appears—to them—as a paradise on Earth. Those who seek the eternal life find peace and happiness in both worlds. Despite all troubles, they thank God and patiently conclude that all of this is merely a waiting room opening onto Heaven.

O God, make us among the people of happiness, salvation, the Qur'an, and belief! Amen. O God, bestow peace and blessings upon our master Muhammad, and upon his Family and Companions, to the number of all letters contained in the Qur'an, reflected by the permission of the Most Compassionate One in the sound waves of each word recited by Qur'anic reciters from its first revelation to the end of time. Have mercy on us and our parents, and upon all believers to the number of those words, through Your Mercy, O Most Merciful of the Merciful. Amen. All praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds.





## THE NINTH WORD

# The Different Prayer Times

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

Glory be to God whenever you reach evening and whenever you rise in the morning. All praise is for Him in the Heavens and on Earth, in the late afternoon, and whenever you reach the noon. (30:17-18)

You ask me, fellow Muslims, why the five daily prayers must be prayed at specific times. I will give just one of the many reasons for this. Each prayer time is the opening of a significant turning point, a mirror to the Divine disposal of power as well as the universal Divine bounties therein. We are told to pray at those specific times to give more adoration and glory to the All-Powerful One of Majesty, and to give more thanks for the bounties accumulated between any two periods. To comprehend this subtle and profound meaning a little better, consider these five points:

**FIRST POINT:** Each prayer stands for praising, glorifying, and feeling grateful to God. We glorify

Him by saying *subhan Allah* (Glory be to God) by word and action in awareness of His Majesty. We exalt and magnify Him by saying *Allahu akbar* (God is the Greatest) through word and action in awareness of His Perfection. We offer thanks to Him by saying *al-hamdu lillah* (All praise be to God) with our heart, tongue, and body, in awareness of His Grace. From this, we conclude that the heart of prayer consists of glorification, exaltation, praise, and thanksgiving. Thus, these three phrases are present in all words and actions of those who pray. Further, following each prayer, they are repeated 33 times each to confirm and complete the prayer's objectives. The meaning of prayer is pronounced consecutively with these concise utterances.

**SECOND POINT:** We are God's servants. Aware of our defects, weakness, and poverty in the Divine presence, we prostrate in love and awe before His Lordship's perfection, His Divine Might on which every creature relies, and His Divine Compassion. Just as His Lordship's sovereignty demands devotion and obedience, His Holiness requires us to see our defects and seek His pardon, to proclaim that He has no defect, that the false judgments of the

ignorant are meaningless, and that He is beyond all failings of His creatures.

His Might's Perfection requires that, realizing our weakness and the helplessness of all creatures, we proclaim: "God is the Greatest" in admiration and amazement before the majesty of the Eternally Besought One's works. Bowing humbly, we are to seek refuge in Him and place our trust in Him. His Compassion's boundless treasury demands that we declare our need and those of all creatures by praying and asking for His help, and that we proclaim His blessings through praise and gratitude by uttering *al-hamdu lillah*. In short, the prayer's words and actions comprise all these meanings, and so were ordered and arranged by God.

**THIRD POINT:** Each person is a miniature of the universe. In the same way, the Qur'an's first *sura* (chapter), *Surat al-Fatiha*, is an illuminated miniature of the whole Book, and the prayer is a bright index involving all ways of worship, a sacred map hinting at the diverse kinds of worship practiced by all living entities.

**FOURTH POINT:** The consecutive divisions of day and night, as well as the years and phases of your

life, function like a huge clock's wheels and levers. For example:

The time for *fajr* (before sunrise) may be likened to spring's birth, the moment when sperm takes refuge in the protective womb, or to the first of the 6 consecutive days during which Earth and the sky were created. It recalls how God disposes His Power and acts in such times and events.

The time for *zuhr* (just past midday) may be likened to the completion of adolescence, the middle of summer, or the period of humanity's creation in the world's lifetime. It points to God's compassionate manifestations and abundant blessings in those events and times. The time for *'asr* (afternoon) resembles autumn, old age, and the time of the Last Prophet (the Era of Happiness). It also calls to mind the Divine acts and the All-Compassionate's favors in them.

The time for *maghrib* (sunset) reminds us of many creatures' decline at the end of autumn and also of our own death. It thus forewarns us of the world's destruction at the Resurrection's beginning, teaches us how to understand the manifestation of God's Majesty, and wakes us from a deep sleep of neglect. The time for *'isha* (nightfall) calls to mind the world of darkness, veiling all daytime objects with its black

shroud, and winter covering the dead Earth's surface with its white shroud. It brings to mind the remaining works of the dead being forgotten, and points to this testing arena's inevitable, complete decline. Thus *'isha* proclaims the awesome acts of the Overpowering One of Majesty.

Night reminds us of winter, the grave, the Intermediate World, and how much our spirit needs the All-Merciful One's Mercy. The late-night *tahajjud* prayer reminds and warns us of how necessary this prayer's light will be in the grave's darkness. By recalling the True Bestower's infinite bounties granted during these extraordinary events, it proclaims how worthy He is of praise and thanks.

The next morning points to the morning following the Resurrection. Just as morning follows night and spring comes after winter, so the morning of the Resurrection or "spring" follows the intermediate life.

Each appointed prayer time is the beginning of a vital turning point and a reminder of greater revolutions or turning points in the universe's life. Through the awesome daily disposals of the Eternally Besought One's Power, the prayer times remind us of the Divine Power's miracles and the Divine Mercy's gifts regardless of time or place. So the prescribed

prayers, which are an innate duty, the basis of worship, and an unquestionable obligation, are most appropriate and fitted for these times.

**FIFTH POINT:** We are created weak, yet everything involves, affects, and saddens us. We have no power, yet are afflicted by calamities and enemies. We are extremely poor, yet have many needs. We are indolent and incapable, yet the burden of life is very heavy. Being human, we are connected with the rest of the world, yet what we love and are familiar with disappears, and the resulting grief causes us pain. Our mentality and senses inspire us toward glorious objectives and eternal gains, but we are unable, impatient, powerless, and have only a short lifetime.

Given all of this, several things become quite clear:

The *fajr* prayer is essential, for we must present a petition before the day's activities begin. Through prayer and supplication, we must beseech the Court of an All-Powerful One of Majesty, an All-Compassionate One of Grace, for success and help. Such support is necessary to bear and endure the troubles and burdens waiting for us.

The *zuhr* prayer is essential, for this is when the day starts to move forward to complete its course.

People take a break from their activities. The spirit needs a pause from the heedlessness and insensibility caused by hard work, and Divine bounties are fully manifest. Praying at this time is good, necessary, agreeable, and proper. This prayer gives relief from the pressures of daily life and heedlessness. We stand humbly in the presence of the Real Bestower of blessings, express gratitude, and pray for His help. We bow to demonstrate helplessness before His Glory and Might, and prostrate to proclaim our wonder, love, and humility before His everlasting Perfection and matchless Grace.

The *'asr* prayer resembles and recalls the sad season of autumn, the mournful state of old age, and the distressing period at the end of time. The day's tasks are brought toward completion, and the Divine bounties received that day (e.g., health, safety, and good service in His way) have accumulated to form a great total. It is also the time when the sun fades away, proving that everything is impermanent. We, who long for eternity, are created for it and show reverence for favors received, also are saddened by separations. So we stand up, perform *wudu'* (ablution), and pray.

Thus praying *'asr* is an exalted duty, an appropriate service, a reasonable way of paying a debt of

gratitude, and an agreeable pleasure. We acquire peace of mind and find true consolation and ease of spirit by supplicating at the Eternal Court of the Everlasting, the Eternally Self-Subsistent One, and seeking refuge in His infinite Mercy, offering thanks and praise for His endless bounties, bowing humbly before His Lordship's Might and Glory, and prostrating humbly before His Eternal Divinity.

Evening reminds us of winter's beginning, the sad farewells of summer and autumn creatures, and our sorrowful separation from loved ones through death. The sun's lamp is extinguished, and Earth's inhabitants will emigrate to the other world following this one's destruction. It is also a severe warning for those who adore transient, ephemeral beloveds, each of whom will die.

By its nature, the human spirit longs for an Eternal Beauty. During this prayer, it turns toward the Eternal Being, Who creates and frames everything, Who commands huge heavenly bodies. At this time, the human spirit refuses to rely on anything finite and cries *Allahu akbar* (God is the Greatest). Then, in His presence, we say *al-hamdu lillah* (all praise be to God) to praise Him in the awareness of His faultless



Perfection, matchless Beauty and Grace, and infinite Mercy.

Afterwards, by declaring: *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do We seek help* (1:5), we offer our worship of, and seek help from, His unassisted Lordship, unpartnered Divinity, and unshared Sovereignty. Bowing before His infinite Greatness, limitless Power, and perfect Honor and Glory, we demonstrate, with the rest of creation, our weakness and helplessness, humility and poverty by saying: “Glory be to my Lord, the Mighty.” Prostrating in awareness of the undying Beauty and Grace of His Essence, His unchanging sacred Attributes, and His constant everlasting Perfection, we proclaim, through detachment from all that is not Him, our love and servanthood in wonder and self-abasement. Finding an All-Beautiful Permanent, an All-Compassionate Eternal One to Whom we say: “Glory be to my Lord, the Most Exalted,” we declare our Most Exalted Lord free of any decline or fault.

Then we sit reverently and willingly offer all creatures’ praises and glorifications to the Eternal, All-Powerful, and All-Majestic One. We also ask God to bestow peace and blessings on His holy Messenger in order to renew our allegiance to him, proclaim our obedience to His commands, and renew and strength-

en our belief. By viewing the universe's wise order, we testify to the Creator's Oneness and Muhammad's Messengership, herald of the sovereignty of God's Lordship, proclaimer of what pleases Him, and interpreter of the Book of the Universe's signs or verses.

Given this, how can we be truly human if we do not realize what the evening prayer represents: an agreeable duty, a valuable and pleasurable service, a fine and beautiful worship, a serious matter, a significant conversation with the Creator, and a source of permanent happiness in this transient guest-house?

The time of *'isha* (nightfall), when night covers Earth, reminds us of the mighty disposals of God's Lordship as the Changer of Night and Day. It calls to our mind the Divine activities of the All-Wise One of Perfection as the Subduer of the sun and the moon, observed in His turning the white page of day into the black page of night, and in His changing summer's beautifully colored script into winter's frigid white page. It recalls His acts as the Creator of Life and Death in sending the dead entity's remaining works to another world. It reminds us of God's majestic control and graceful manifestations as the Creator of the Heavens and Earth, and that this narrow, mortal, and lowly world will be destroyed.

The same is true for the unfolding of the broad, eternal, and majestic world of the Hereafter. It also warns that only the One Who so easily turns day into night, winter into summer, and this world into the other world can be the universe's Owner and True Master. Only He is worthy to be worshipped and truly loved.

At nightfall our spirits, which are infinitely helpless and weak, infinitely poor and needy, tossed to and fro by circumstances and whirling onward into a dark and unknown future, perform the *'isha* prayer. We say, like Abraham: *I do not love those that set* (6:76). We seek refuge at the Court of the Ever-Living, the Ever-Worshipped, the Eternal Beloved One. From our transient life in this dark, fleeting world and dark future, we beseech the Enduring, Everlasting One. For a moment of unending conversation, a few seconds of immortal life, we seek the All-Merciful and Compassionate's favors. We ask for the light of His guidance that will illuminate our world and our future, and bind up the pain from the decline of all creatures and friends.

We forget the world, which has left us for the night, and pour out our heart's grief at the Court of Mercy. Before death-like sleep comes, after which

anything can happen, we perform our “last” duty of worship. To close our day’s activities on a favorable note, we pray and enter the Eternal Beloved and Worshipped One’s presence, rather than the mortal ones we loved all day; the All-Powerful and Generous One’s presence, rather than the impotent creatures from which we begged all day; and the All-Compassionate Protector’s presence in the hope of being saved from the evil of the harmful creatures before which we trembled all day.

We start the prayer with *Surat al-Fatiha*, which extols praising the Lord of the worlds, Perfect and Self-Sufficient, Compassionate and All-Generous. We move on to *You alone do We worship* (1:5). That is, despite our insignificance and being alone, our connection with the Owner of the Day of Judgment, the Eternal Sovereign, causes us to be treated like an indulged guest and important officer. Through *You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help* (1:5), we offer Him the worship of all creatures and seek His assistance for them. Saying *Guide us to the Straight Path* (1:6), we ask to be guided to eternal happiness and the radiant way.

Saying *God is the Greatest*, we bow down and contemplate the Grandeur of the Majestic One, Who

orders hidden suns and waking stars, that are like individual soldiers subject to His command just like the plants and animals that have now gone to sleep, and are His lamps and servants in this world.

We think of all creatures' universal prostration. That is, like the creatures that sleep at night, when all creation living in a certain age or period is discharged from the duty of worship by the command of "*Be!*" *and it is* like a well-ordered army of obedient soldiers, and is sent to the World of the Unseen, it prostrates on the rug of death in perfect orderliness saying: "God is the Greatest." They are resurrected in the spring by an arousing, life-giving trumpet-blast from the command of *Be! and it is*, and rise up to serve their Lord. Insignificant humanity makes the same declaration in the presence of the All-Merciful One of Perfection, the All-Compassionate One of Grace, in wonder-struck love, eternity-tinged humility, and dignified self-effacement. We then prostrate and achieve a sort of Ascension.

Thus each prescribed prayer time points to a mighty revolution, is a sign to the Master's tremendous activity, and a token of the universal Divine bounties. And so this matter is a result of perfect wisdom.

Glory be to You. We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Truly, you are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

O God! Bestow blessings and peace upon the one You sent as a teacher to Your servants to instruct them in knowledge of You and worship of You; to make known the treasures of Your Names, the interpreter of the signs or verses of Your Book of the Universe; to serve as a mirror, through his worship, to the Grace of Your Lordship; and upon his Family and Companions. Have mercy on us and all believers. Amen. For the sake of Your Compassion, O Most Compassionate of the Compassionate.

**THE ELEVENTH WORD**  
**Creation and Prayer**

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

By the sun and its brightness, the moon when it follows it, the day when it reveals it, the night when it enshrouds it, heaven and He Who built it, Earth and He Who spread it, and the soul and Him Who perfected it. (91:1-7)

If you want to understand something of His purposes for creating humanity and the universe, and why the five daily prayers are obligatory, listen to this parable: A king had a vast treasury of precious stones and buried treasures known only to him. He was well-versed in all industries, and had a vast knowledge of all artistic and scientific disciplines. As anyone who has beauty and perfection naturally tends to show them to others,<sup>20</sup> he wanted to build a palace that would show his kingdom's magnificence, his wealth's splendor and extent, and the wonderful products of his artistry and skill. He also

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<sup>20</sup> Especially beauty and perfection that is admired by all and beneficial to others. (Tr.)

desired to behold his beauty and perfection with his own discerning eye and through the eyes of others.

And so he began to build a very large, magnificent palace. Dividing it into many apartments and rooms, he decorated it with his finest and most beautiful works of art, and embellished it with his precious stones. Designing it according to artistic and scientific principles and disciplines, he furnished it with the miraculous products of his knowledge. Finally, he prepared delicious specific foods and drinks for each family that would live therein, and provided them so elaborately, generously, and artistically that each food seem to be derived from at least 100 separate skills.

Then, the king settled some of his subjects in the palace. He sent his aide-de-camp to explain why he had built it, the rules they had to obey, what kind of being the king was, and about the palace's architecture, decorations, furniture, and ornaments. The king told his aide-de-camp to explain how the palace's structures, designs, and contents demonstrate his artistry and perfections, and how those dwelling in it can please him.

The aide-de-camp had many students, and each of his numerous assistants was deputed for a certain



apartment. Standing among his students, he addressed the audience:

O people! Our master, who owns this palace, built it to make himself known to you. In return, know and recognize him properly. He wants to make himself lovable to you through these ornaments. In return, appreciate his artistry and commend him for his works, thereby making yourselves loved by him. His favors demonstrate his love for you, so love him by obeying him. His offerings display his care and compassion for you, so thank him by showing your respect for him. Through the works of his perfection, the master wants to show his beauty and grace. In return, exhibit a great desire to see him and secure his attention. By setting his special stamp, which cannot be copied, on everything you see, he demonstrates that he is unique, absolutely independent and without partner, that this palace and its contents are his work and belong to him exclusively. So, acknowledge his uniqueness, absolute independence, and having no partner.

The aide-de-camp continued his address. The palace's inhabitants were of two types. People in the first group, sensible and aware of themselves, saw the palace's wonders and concluded that everything had a purpose. While thinking about this, they listened to the aide-de-camp and learned what those purposes were. They did what the king wanted, and

so pleased him. In return, the king invited them to a far larger and indescribably more beautiful palace, wherein he gave them all kinds of eternal bounties and blessings.

People in the second group were morally corrupt, unaware, and lacked sound reasoning. They only saw delicious food and did not understand the meaning behind the decorations and embellishments. Ignoring the address and directives of the aide-de-camp and his assistants, they focused on eating and sleeping. After drinking forbidden beverages, they became drunk, bothered the servants and guests, and broke the rules. So, the king imprisoned them.

In short, the glorious king built the palace for the purposes explained by his aide-de-camp. Realizing these purposes depends on two things. First, if the aide-de-camp did not exist, those purposes would be as nothing, for a book without a teacher to explain it is only a pack of sheets. Second, the aid-de-camp must be obeyed, for his existence is the reason for creating the palace, and its inhabitants' obedience is the reason for maintaining it. Without an aide-de-camp to make the palace known to its inhabitants and tell them of the king's will, the latter would not

have built it. Also, if they ignore the king's instructions, the palace will be destroyed.

If you understand this, reflect upon its meaning. The palace is this world, whose roof is the heavens illuminated with smiling stars, whose floor is Earth's surface embellished with many kinds of flowers. The king is the Most Holy One, the Eternal King, Whom the seven firmaments and Earth, along with all their contents, glorify and extol in tongues specific to each. He is such a Powerful King that He created the heavens and Earth in 6 days.<sup>21</sup> Seated on His Throne of Lordship (that is, through His Lordship's continuous manifestations),<sup>22</sup> He alternates day and night like a white and a black thread, to inscribe His signs on the vast sheet of the universe. He is One, All-Majestic and Powerful, to Whom the sun, the moon, and the stars are all subjugated.

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<sup>21</sup> Like the Bible, the Qur'an mentions that God created the universe in 6 days. However, the Qur'an never mentions mornings and evenings, and presents "day" as a relative period whose measure is unknown. See 22:47, 32:5, and 70:4: (Tr.)

<sup>22</sup> The original word translated as "Lord" is Rabb. It denotes God as One Who brings up, trains, educates, sustains, and administers His creatures. Note: It must not be confused with the Christian understanding of "Lord," namely, Jesus Christ as the "Son of God." (Tr.)

The palace's rooms are the thousands of worlds, each designed, furnished, and decorated in a specific way. The finest and most beautiful works of art are what we see here, each of which is a miracle of Divine Power; the foods are the wonderful fruits of Divine Mercy that we see here, especially in summer; and the kitchen is the fire in Earth's center and the sun's heat. The precious stones are manifestations of the Divine Sacred Names, and the embellishments are the well-ordered, finely made beings and perfectly proportioned inscriptions of the Pen of the Power that adorn this world and point to the Names of the Majestic All-Powerful One.

The aide-de-camp is our master Prophet Muhammad. His assistants are all other Prophets, and his students are all saints and purified scholars. The servants are angels, the palace's inhabitants are jinn and humanity, and the invited guests are those animals created to serve humanity. The first group of people are believers, students of the Qur'an that interprets the verses of the Book of the Universe. The second group are the unbelievers and rebels, "deaf and dumb" misguided people who, obeying their carnal selves and Satan, accept only the worldly life and so place themselves below animals.

The first group, the good and spiritually prosperous people, listened to the master's message of intellectual enlightenment and spiritual well-being, the path of prosperity in both worlds. That master is a worshipping servant in regard to servanthood, who describes his Master and makes Him known to people; his community's envoy in Almighty God's court; and a Messenger in regard to Messengership, who communicates his Master's commandments to humanity and jinn via the Qur'an.

These people found themselves in elevated stations and invested with many subtle and pleasing duties of the prescribed prayer, the index of all varieties of worship:

- **FIRST:** They saw the Divine works and, seeing themselves in the station of objective observers of the Kingdom of Divine Lordship's wonders, said "God is the Greatest" while glorifying and extolling Him.
- **SECOND:** Seeing themselves in the station of announcing the Divine Sacred Names' precious manifestations, they praised and esteemed Him as the All-Holy via these words: "Glory be to God. All praise be to God."

- **THIRD:** In the station of tasting and perceiving (with their outer and inner senses) the bounties stored in Divine Mercy's treasuries, they gave thanks and praised Him.
- **FOURTH:** In the station of weighing the jewels in the Divine Names' treasuries with the scales of their mental and spiritual faculties, they praised and declared God to be without fault.
- **FIFTH:** In the station of studying the Master's Messages written on the lines of Destiny by the Pen of His Power, they contemplated and commended Him.
- **SIXTH:** In the station of observing the subtle beauties and delicacies in the creation of things, as well as in the art of creation and declaring God to be without fault, they set out to fulfill their duty of loving and yearning for their Majestic Originator and Gracious Maker.

Therefore, while observing the universe and its contents, they addressed God indirectly and did all duties of worship in the stations mentioned above. Then, seeing the Wise Maker's actions and the way He acts, they were amazed by the realization of how the Majestic Creator makes Himself known to conscious beings through the miracles of His art.

In direct response, they proclaimed in His presence: “Glory be to You. We cannot know You as required by Your knowledge—as the duty of knowing You requires. What makes You known are Your miracles displayed in Your creatures.” In response to the All-Merciful making Himself loved through the lovely fruits of His Mercy, they proclaimed in love and ecstasy: *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help* (1:5). In response to the Real Giver of Bounties exhibiting His Care and Compassion through His decorous gifts, they thanked and praised Him, saying: “Glory be to You, and all praise be to You.” In other words:

You are so worthy of thanks and praise that all Your favors in the universe praise You in the tongue of their disposition. All Your bounties arranged and exhibited in the world’s market and on Earth’s face declare Your praise and commendation. The beautiful, well-proportioned fruits and produce of Your Mercy and Graciousness on Earth in due measure and quantity bear witness to Your Generosity and Magnificence, and thereby thank You before the eyes of all creatures.

In response to His displaying His Grace, Majesty, Perfection, and Grandeur in the “mirrors” of creatures constantly recruited and renewed, they stated:

“God is the Greatest,” and bowed before Him in due perception of their own impotence. Afterward, they prostrated in humility and with wonder and love. Then, before the All-Wealthy One’s display of His Wealth’s abundance and His Mercy’s comprehensiveness, they showed their poverty and need by praying: *From You alone do we seek help* (1:5).

In response to the Majestic Maker’s exhibition of His art’s subtlety and wonder through animate beings, they showed their appreciation by saying: “What (wonders) God has willed,” and their commendation by saying: “How beautifully they have been made.” Continuing to observe, they said: “God bless them. How wonderfully they have been made,” and testified to Him by proclaiming their belief. In full admiration, they called everyone to witness the same: “Come and see! Attach yourselves to the way to prosperity!”

In response to the Eternal King’s declaration of His Lordship’s Kingdom and His Oneness’ manifestation throughout the universe, they believed in and confirmed His Unity, and showed their obedience and submission by saying: “We have heard and obeyed.” To the manifestation of the Lord of the Worlds’ Divinity, they responded with worship



by declaring their impotence embedded in weakness, their poverty embedded in need, and the prescribed prayer (the essence of worship).

While in that huge mosque of the world, they devoted themselves to these and similar duties of worship and so assumed the best pattern of creation. Above all other creatures, they became God's trustworthy vicegerents, equipped with the blessing of belief and trustworthiness.<sup>23</sup> After this trial and testing, and to recompense their devotion to Islam, their Munificent Lord rewarded their belief with eternal happiness and invited them to the Abode of Peace.

There, out of His Mercy, He bestowed on them dazzling bounties beyond description and imagination, and eternity and everlasting life. The observing and reflecting lovers of an eternal, abiding beauty will go to eternity. Such is the end and final station of the Qur'an's students. May Almighty God include us among them. Amen!

Members of the second group, all of them sinners and wicked people, entered the palace of this

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<sup>23</sup> God's vicegerency is defined as humanity being the "means" used by God to execute His commands on Earth and ruling on it according to His laws. (Tr.)

world at the age of discretion.<sup>24</sup> Disbelieving the evidence of Divine Oneness and ungrateful for the bounties, they insulted all creatures by accusing them of being worthless, and rejected and denied the Divine Names' manifestations. In sum, they committed an infinite error in a short time and deserved eternal punishment.

We have been given this capital of life and human faculties to spend on the duties mentioned above. Given this, our duty is not restricted to living an easy life (according to the requisites of modern corrupt civilization) and gratifying our carnal desires. Nor are our delicate senses and abilities, sensitive faculties and organs, well-ordered members and systems, and inquisitive senses and feelings included in the "machine" of our life (our body) to satisfy the base, carnal self's low desires.

Rather, they were included therein and made a part of our nature for two reasons: First, to make us feel all varieties of the bounties bestowed by the Real Giver of Bounties, and to urge us to be grateful. So, feel them and be grateful to Him. Second, to make known and urge us to experience all manifestations

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<sup>24</sup> Islam considers a person to have reached the "age of discretion" when he or she becomes physically mature.

of each Divine Sacred Name seen in the universe. So experience and know them, and believe. If we can realize these aims, we can gain human perfection and become true human beings.

As shown in the following parable, we were not given our human faculties only to earn our worldly sustenance: A master gave a servant 20 gold coins and told him to buy a suit of a particular cloth. The servant bought and then wore a fine suit made from the best quality of cloth. The master gave another servant 1,000 gold coins, put a written list in his pocket, and sent him to do some trade. Obviously the money was not to be used for clothes. So if the second servant did not read the list, but rather chose to imitate the other servant by buying a suit with the money given to him, and, moreover, received a suit of the worst possible quality, would not his master reprimand and punish him severely for his stupidity?

O my carnal self and my friend! You are not sent here to spend your life's capital and your vital potentials on material pleasures and this transient life. If you do, you will fall to the lowest ranks, although you are far superior with regard to "capital" than the most developed animal.

O my heedless self! If you want some understanding of your life's aim and nature, apparent form and meaning, and the perfect happiness in your life, weigh on the scales of your body's senses the bounties stored in Divine Mercy's treasuries and offer thanks on your body's behalf. Through the feelings, tendencies, and faculties embedded in your nature, discover the hidden treasuries—the works and manifestations—of the Divine Sacred Names and then recognize the Most Holy One through those Names.

In this place of exhibition, consciously display through your life the Divine Names' subtle manifestations in your being [such as your senses, faculties, and abilities] before all creation. Proclaim your worship and servanthood to the Court of the Creator's Lordship, verbally and through the tongue of your disposition. In the manner of a soldier who, appearing before the king with the decorations received from him, displays the marks of the king's favor, consciously adorn yourself with the "jewels" of subtle human senses and faculties embedded in your being through the Divine Names' manifestations and present yourself before the Eternal Witness.

Other living beings worship and glorify their Creator by consciously or unconsciously obeying the

laws He established for their lives. This is the main purpose for their creation and life. Thus you should consciously observe their obedience to Him, their worship and glorification of Him, and reflect on and testify to these deeds.

Using your defective attributes (e.g., partial knowledge, power, and will) as units of measurement, recognize the Majestic Creator's absolute Attributes and sacred Qualities. For example, you can build a beautiful and well-ordered house by using your limited attributes, so understand that the Maker of this palace of the universe is far more powerful, wise, and capable. As for the Creator's Oneness and the Maker's Lordship, you can and should perceive how each being proclaims them in its own language. From your impotence and weakness, poverty and need, infer the degrees of the Divine Power's manifestations and the Master's Richness. Just as food's pleasures and varieties are understood or distinguished according to your hunger and need, understand the degrees of infinite Divine Power and Richness through your infinite impotence and poverty.

Briefly, those are the aims of your life, the nature of which can be summarized as follows: It is an index of wonders originating in the Divine Names, a meas-

ure to consider the Divine Attributes, a unit to know the worlds in the universe, a catalogue of the macrocosm, a map of the universe and its fruit or compressed form, a set of keys with which to open Divine Power's hidden treasures, and a most excellent pattern of the Divine perfections reflected in creatures and manifested through time.

The following describes the apparent, observable form of your life and its meaning: Your life is an inscribed word, a wisdom-displaying word written by the Pen of Power. Observed and sensed, it points to the Divine Beautiful Names. Your life's meaning is to be a mirror to reflect the Divine manifestation of Divine Oneness and the Divine manifestation as the Eternally-Besought-of-All. Through its comprehensiveness as the focal point for all Divine Names shown in the world, it functions as a mirror to reflect the Single and Eternally Besought One.

As for the perfection of your life in happiness, it is to perceive and love the lights of the Eternal Sun pictured in the mirror of your life, to display ardor for Him as a conscious being, to be enraptured with love of Him, and to establish His Light's reflection in the center of your heart. As a result of all this, a *hadith qudsi* expresses your rank among the high-

est ranks by saying: “(God said): I am not contained in the heavens and Earth, but I am contained in the believer’s heart.”

So, my selfhood! Your life was given to you so that you could realize such sublime aims. As you have the potential to acquire such priceless treasures, how can you even think of wasting it on gratifying fleeting carnal desires and seeking transient worldly pleasures? So as not to waste it, reflect on the oaths and the following truths in the verses below and act accordingly:

By the sun and its morning brightness; by the moon when it follows it; by the day when it reveals it; by the night when it enshrouds it; by heaven and He Who built it; by Earth and He Who spread it; by the soul and Him Who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience) of what is wrong for it and what is right for it. He is indeed prosperous who purifies it, and he has indeed failed who corrupts it. (91:1-10)

O God! Bestow blessings and peace on the sun of the sky of Messengership, on the moon of the constellation of Prophethood, and on his Family and Companions, who are the stars of guidance. Have mercy upon us and all believers. Amen! Amen! Amen!





THE TWENTY-THIRD WORD

# Virtues of Belief and Remarks on our Happiness and Misery

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

Surely We created humanity of the best pattern; then  
We reduced it to the lowest of the low, save those  
who believe and do good deeds. (95:4-5)

## First chapter

In the following five points, we will explain five out of the thousands of virtues of belief.

*FIRST POINT:* We reach the highest degree of perfection and become worthy of Paradise via the light of belief. The darkness of unbelief reduces us to the lowest level so that we deserve Hell. Belief connects us to our Majestic Maker, and our value derives from using our belief to show the Divine art and manifest the Divine Names. Unbelief breaks this relation, thereby veiling the Divine art and reducing our value to that of a mere physical entity with almost no value (a physical entity perishes and is

no more than a transient animal). We will explain this through a parable.

The value of the iron (or any other material) from which a work of art is made differs from the value of the art expressed in it. Sometimes they may have the same value, or the art's worth may be far more than its material, or vice versa. An antique may fetch a million dollars, while its material is not even worth a few cents. If taken to the antiques market, it may be sold for its true value because of its art and the brilliant artist's name. If taken to a blacksmith, it would be sold only for the value of its iron.

Similarly, each person is a unique, priceless work of God Almighty's art. We are His Power's most delicate and graceful miracles, beings created to manifest all His Names and inscriptions in the form of a miniature specimen of the universe. If we are illuminated with belief, these meaningful inscriptions become visible. Believers manifest these inscriptions through their connection with their Maker, for the Divine art contained in each person is revealed through such affirmations as: "I am the work of the Majestic Maker, the creature and object of His Mercy and Munificence." As a result, and because we gain value in proportion to how well we reflect this art,

we move from insignificance (in material terms) to beings ranked above all creatures. We communicate with God, are His guests on Earth, and are qualified for Paradise.<sup>25</sup>

But if unbelief is ingrained in us, all of the Divine Names' manifestations are veiled by darkness and thus non-expressive. If the artist is unknown, how can the aspects expressing the worth of his or her art be identified? Thus most meaningful instances of that sublime art and elevated inscriptions are concealed. In material terms, unbelievers attribute such art and inscriptions to trivial causes, nature and chance, thereby reducing them to plain glass instead of sparkling diamonds. They are no more significant than any other material entity, self-condemned to a transient and suffocating life, and no better than a most impotent, needy, and afflicted animal that eventually will become dust. Unbelief thus spoils our nature by changing our diamond into coal.

*SECOND POINT:* Just as belief illuminates human beings and reveals all the messages inscribed in their being by the Eternally-Besought-of-All, it also illuminates the universe and removes darkness from the

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<sup>25</sup> For example, prayer is a form of communication with God, who speaks to us through Prophets, inspiration, or Scriptures. (Tr.)

past and future. We will explain this truth through what I experienced regarding the meaning of: *God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of the layers of darkness into the light* (2:257).

I saw myself standing on an awe-inspiring bridge set over a deep valley between two mountains. The world was completely dark. Looking to my right, I imagined I saw a huge tomb. Looking to my left, I felt as if I were seeing violent storms and calamities being prepared amid the tremendous waves of darkness. Looking down, I imagined I saw a very deep precipice. My torch's dim light revealed a dreadful scene. All along the bridge were such horrible dragons, lions, and monsters that I wished I had no torch. Whichever way I directed it, I got the same fright. "This torch brings me only trouble," I exclaimed, angrily throwing it away and breaking it. Suddenly darkness was replaced by light, as if I had switched on a huge light by breaking my torch. I saw everything in its true nature.

I discovered that the bridge was a highway on a smooth plain. The huge tomb was a green, beautiful garden in which illustrious persons were leading assemblies of worship, prayer, glorification, and dis-

course. The turbulent, stormy, frightening precipices appeared as a banqueting hall, a shaded promenade, a beautiful resting place behind lovely mountains. The horrible monsters and dragons were actually camels, sheep, and goats. “Praise and thanks be to God for the light of belief,” I said, and then awoke reciting: *God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of the layers of darkness into the light.*

The two mountains are this life’s beginning and end, and the life between death and Resurrection. The bridge is the lifespan, between the two phases of the past (on the right) and the future (on the left). The torch is our conceited ego that, relying on its own achievements, ignores Divine Revelation. The monsters were the worlds’ events and creatures.

Those who have fallen into the darkness of misguidance and heedlessness because of their confidence in their egos resemble me in the former state—in the dim light of a torch. With their inadequate and misguided knowledge, they see the past as a huge tomb in the darkness of extinction and the future as a stormy scene of terror controlled by coincidence or chance. The torch shows them events and creatures. In reality, these are subjugated to the All-Wise

and All-Merciful, fulfill specific functions, and serve good purposes in submission to His Decree. However, they see such things as harmful monsters. These are the people referred to in: *As to those who do not believe, their protecting friends are false deities. They bring them out of light into layers of darkness (2:257).*

If, however, people are favored with Divine guidance so that belief enters their hearts and their Pharaoh-like egos are broken, thereby enabling them to listen to the Book of God, they will resemble me in my later state. Suddenly the universe will fill with Divine Light, demonstrating the meaning of: *God is the light of the heavens and Earth (24:35).*

Through the eye of their hearts, such people see that the past is not a huge tomb; rather, each past century is the realm of authority of a Prophet or a saint, where the purified souls, having completed the duties of their lives (worship) with: "God is the Greatest," flew to higher abodes on the side of the future. Looking to his left and through the light of belief, they discern, behind the mountain-like revolutions of the intermediate world and the next life, a feasting place set up by the All-Compassionate One at palaces of bliss in gardens of Paradise. They

understand that storms, earthquakes, epidemics, and similar events serve a specific function, just as the spring rain and winds, despite their apparent violence, serve many agreeable purposes. They even see death as the beginning of eternal life, and the grave as the gateway to eternal happiness.

*THIRD POINT:* Belief is both light and power. Those who attain true belief can challenge the universe and, in proportion to their belief's strength, be relieved of the pressures of events. Relying on God, they travel safely through the mountainous waves of events in the ship of life. They voyage through the world comfortably until their last day, since they entrusted their burdens to the Absolutely Powerful One's Power. The grave will be a resting place, after which they will fly to Paradise to attain eternal bliss. If they do not rely upon God, their worldly life will force them down to the lowest depths.

Belief, therefore, consists of affirming Divine Unity, which requires submitting to God, which requires relying upon God, which yields happiness in both worlds. Such reliance upon God should not be misunderstood as ignoring cause and effect. Rather, it means that one should think of causes as a veil covering Power's hand. One observes them by seeking to comply with the Divine Will, which is a sort

of worship in action. However, such desire and seeking is not enough to secure a particular effect. We must understand that, in accordance with right belief, the result is to be expected only from God, the All-Mighty. As He is the sole producer of effects, we always should be grateful to Him.

To understand the truth and meaning of trust in God, consider this parable: Once two people boarded a ship with heavy burdens. One put his burden on the deck immediately after boarding and sat on it to keep it safe. The other one, even after being told to lay his burden down, refused to do so and said: "I won't put it down, because it might get lost. Besides, I'm strong enough to carry it." He was told:

This reliable royal ship is stronger and can hold it better. You will most probably get tired, feel dizzy, and fall into the sea with your burden. Your strength will fail, and then how will you bear this burden that gets heavier every moment? If the captain sees you in this state, he might say you are insane and expel you from the ship. Or maybe he will think you do not trust our ship and make fun of us, for which he will imprison you. Also, you will be marked out and become the butt of jokes. Your vanity reveals your weakness, your arrogance reveals your impotence, and your pretension betrays your humiliation. And so you have become a laughing-stock—look how everybody is laughing at you.



These words convinced him to follow his companion's example. He told him: "May God be pleased with you. I have obtained relief and am no longer subject to imprisonment or becoming a laughing-stock." So trust in God and come to your senses, as the man in the parable did. Put your trust in God and be delivered from begging from creation and trembling in fear at each happening. Doing so will deliver you from self-conceit, being ridiculous, the pressures of this life, and the torments of the Hereafter.

*FOURTH POINT:* Belief enables us to attain true humanity, to acquire a position above all other creatures. Thus, belief and worship are our most fundamental and important duties. Disbelief, by contrast, reduces us to the state of a brutal but very impotent beast.

A decisive proof for this truth is the difference between how human beings and animals come into existence. Almost from the very moment of birth, an animal seems to have been trained and perfected its faculties somewhere else. Within a few hours or days or months, it can lead its life according to its particular rules and conditions. A sparrow or a bee is inspired with the skill and ability to integrate into its environment within a matter of 20 days, while it

would take a person 20 years to do so. This means that an animal's basic obligation and essential role does not include seeking perfection through learning, progress through scientific knowledge, or prayer and petitioning for help by displaying their impotence. Rather, their sole purpose is to act within the bounds of their innate faculties, which is the mode of worship specified for them.

People, however, are born knowing nothing of life and their environment and so must learn everything. As we cannot do this even within 20 years, we must continue to learn until we die. We appear to have been sent here with so much weakness and inability that we might need as many as 2 years to learn how to walk. Only after 15 years can we distinguish good and evil. Only by living in a society can we become smart enough to choose between what is beneficial and what is harmful.

Thus the essential and intrinsic duty of our existence is to seek perfection through learning and to proclaim our worship of and servanthood to God through prayer and supplication. We should seek answers for: "Through whose compassion is my life so wisely administered? Through whose generosity am I being so affectionately trained? Through whose

favors and benevolence am I being so solicitously nourished?” and other questions. Then we should pray and petition the Provider of Needs in humble awareness of our needs, none of which we can satisfy on our own. This understanding and confession of impotence and poverty will become two wings on which to fly to the highest rank: being a servant of God.

And so our purpose here is to seek perfection through knowledge and prayer. Everything is, by its nature, essentially dependent on knowledge. And the basis, source, light, and spirit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God, of which belief is the very foundation. After belief, prayer is our essential duty and the basis of worship, for despite our infinite impotence, we are exposed to endless misfortune and innumerable enemies. And despite our infinite poverty, we suffer limitless need and demands.

Children express their need for something they cannot reach with words or tears. Both are a sort of plea or prayer, in word or deed, with the tongue of weakness. Eventually they get what they want. Similarly, we are quite like a beloved child, for at the Most Compassionate and Merciful Being’s Court we either will weep (due to our weakness and impotence) or pray (due to our poverty and need) so that our

need may be satisfied. In return, we should perform our duty of gratitude and thanksgiving for this provision. Otherwise, the ingratitude of those who claim to have so much intelligence and power over everything that they can meet their own needs finally will come to the point where they resemble mischievous children moaning about irritating flies. Such ingratitude is against our essential nature and makes us worthy of severe punishment.

*FIFTH POINT:* Belief requires prayer for attainment and perfection, and our essence needs it. God Almighty says: *Say (O Muhammad): "My Lord would not concern Himself with you but for your prayer"* (25:77), and: *Pray to Me and I will answer your (prayer)* (40:60).

If people say that they pray so many times but that their prayers are unanswered, despite the assurance given in the above verse, tell them that an answered prayer does not necessarily mean its acceptance. There is an answer for every prayer. However, accepting the prayer and giving what is requested depends upon the All-Mighty's Wisdom. Suppose a sick child asks a doctor for a certain medicine. The doctor will give what is asked for, something better, or nothing. It all depends upon how the medicine

will affect the child. Similarly the All-Mighty, Who is All-Hearing and All-Seeing, answers His servant's prayer and changes loneliness into the pleasure of His company. But His answer does not depend on the individual's fancies; rather, according to His Wisdom, He gives what is requested, what is better, or nothing at all.

Moreover, prayer is a form of worship and worship is rewarded mainly in the Hereafter. In essence, prayer is not done for worldly purposes, because worldly purposes are causes for the prayer. For example, praying for rain is a kind of worship occasioned by the lack of rain. If rain is the prayer's only aim, the prayer is unacceptable, for it is not sincere or intended to please God and obtain His approval.

Sunset determines the time for the evening prayer, while solar and lunar eclipses occasion two particular kinds of worship. Since such eclipses are two means of manifesting Divine Majesty, the All-Mighty calls His servants to perform a form of worship particular to these occasions. The prayer has nothing to do with causing the eclipse to end, for this is known already through astronomical calculations. The same argument applies to drought and other calamities, for all such events occasion certain kinds

of prayer. At such times, we best realize our impotence and so feel the need to take refuge in the high Presence of the Absolutely Powerful One through prayer and supplication. If a calamity is not lifted despite many prayers, do not say that your prayer has not been accepted. Rather, say that the time for prayer has not yet ended. God removes the calamity because of His endless Grace and Munificence. The end of that event marks the end of that special occasion for prayer.

We must pursue God's good pleasure through worship, affirm our poverty and weakness in our prayer, and seek refuge with Him through prayer. We must not interfere in His Lordship, but rather let God do as He wills and rely on His Wisdom. In addition, we should not accuse His Mercy.

Every creature offers its unique praise and worship to God. What reaches the Court of God from the universe is a kind of prayer. Some creatures, like plants and animals, pray through the tongue of their potential to achieve a full form and then display and show certain Divine Names.<sup>26</sup> Another kind of prayer

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<sup>26</sup>For example: A plant's seeds grow naturally into plants, and the joined semen and eggs of animals grow naturally into animals. Since they have this potential, their natural disposition to

is expressed in the tongue of natural needs. All living beings ask the Absolutely Generous One to meet their vital needs, as they cannot do so. Yet another kind of prayer is done in the tongue of complete helplessness. A living creature in straitened circumstances takes refuge in its Unseen Protector with a genuine supplication and turns to its All-Compassionate Lord. These three kinds of prayer are always acceptable, unless somehow impeded.

The fourth type of prayer is the one used by humanity. This type falls into two categories: active and by disposition, and verbal and with the heart. For example, acting in accordance with causes is an active prayer. We try to gain God's approval, by complying with causes, for causes alone cannot produce the result—only God can do that. Another type of active prayer is plowing the soil, for this is nothing other than knocking at the door of the treasury of God's Compassion. Such a prayer is usually acceptable, for it is an application to the Divine Name the All-Generous.

The second type of prayer, done with the tongue and the heart, is the ordinary one. This means that

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mature is, in essence, a prayer. By doing so they affirm the manifestation of such Divine Names as the All-Sustaining and All-Forming. (Tr.)

we ask God from the heart for something we cannot reach. Its most important aspect and finest and sweetest fruit is that we know that God hears us, is aware of our heart's contents, that His power extends everywhere, that He can satisfy every desire, and that He comes to our aid out of mercy for our weakness and inadequacy.

And so, O helpless and poor person. Never abandon prayer, for it is the key to the Treasury of Compassion and the means of gaining access to the Infinite Power. Hold on to it. Ascend to the highest rank of humanity and, as creation's most favored and superior member, include the whole universe's prayer in your prayer. Say, on behalf of all beings: *From You alone do we seek help* (1:5), and become a beautiful pattern for creation.

## **Second chapter**

(Five remarks on human happiness and misery.)

[Human beings were created of the best stature, on the best pattern of creation, and given a comprehensive potential. They have been sent to an arena of trial, where they either will rise to the highest rank or descend to the lowest level. These are the ways open to humanity. We are here as a miracle of power and



creation's ultimate pinnacle. I shall expound the mystery of humanity's ascent and descent in five remarks.]

*FIRST REMARK:* We have some relationship with and are in need of most species. Our needs range into all parts of the universe, and our desires range as far as eternity. We desire a single flower as well as a whole spring, a garden as well as an eternal Paradise. We long to see our friend as well as the Majestic, All-Beautiful One. We knock on our beloved friend's door for a visit, and so also must seek refuge in the Absolutely All-Powerful One's high Presence. This One will close this world's door and open the one to the Hereafter, the world of wonders, and will replace this world with the next one so that we may rejoin the 99 percent of our friends who have left for the Intermediate World.

Given this, our true object of worship can only be the Majestic, All-Powerful One, the All-Merciful One of Infinite Beauty, the All-Wise One of Perfection, in Whose hand are the reins of all things, in Whose possession is the provision of every existence, Who sees everything and is omnipresent, unbounded by space, and free of any constraint, flaw, defect, or deficiency. As our unlimited need can be satisfied only by the One with Infinite Power and

All-Encompassing Knowledge, He is the only One worthy of worship.

If you worship Him alone, you will attain a rank above all other creatures. If you do not, you will become a disgraced slave to impotent creation. If you rely upon your selfhood and power instead of prayer and trust in God, and claim an arrogant superiority, you will become lower than a bee or an ant and weaker than a fly or a spider with respect to positive acts and constructive invention. But your evil and destruction will weigh heavier than a mountain and be more harmful than a pestilence, for you have two aspects of being. One is positive and active, and has to do with constructive invention, existence, and goodness. The other is negative and passive, and concerns destruction, nonexistence, and evil.

As for the first aspect of your being, you cannot compete with a bee or a sparrow, are weaker than a fly or a spider, and cannot achieve what they can. As for the second aspect of your being, however, you can surpass mountains, Earth, and the heavens, for you can bear a burden that they cannot. Thus your acts have a wider impact than theirs. When you do something good or build something, it reaches only

as far as your hand and strength. But your evil and destructive acts are aggressive and expandable.

For example, unbelief is an evil, an act of destruction, an absence of affirmation. It may look like a single sin, but it implies an insult to creation, the debasement of all Divine Names, and the degradation of humanity. Creation has a sublime rank and important task, for each part of it is a missive of the Lord, a mirror of His Glory, and a servant of His Divinity. Unbelief denies them the rank bestowed by these functions and reduces them to playthings of chance, insignificant, useless, and worthless objects doomed to decay and decomposition.

Unbelief insults the Divine Names, Whose beautiful inscriptions and manifestations are seen in the mirrors of all created forms throughout the universe. It also casts us down to a level more wretched and weak, helpless and destitute, than the lowliest animal. It reduces us to an ordinary, perishable sign-board without meaning, confused and swiftly decaying. And this when humanity, in reality, is a poetic work of Wisdom that manifests all Divine Names; a great miracle of Power that, like a seed, contains the Tree of Creation; and God's vicegerent, superior to angels

and higher than mountains, Earth, and heavens by virtue of the trust we accepted.

Let me sum this up. As regards evil and destruction, the soul, the evil-commanding self, may commit countless crimes and cause unlimited destruction, while its capacity to do good is very limited. It can destroy a house in a day but cannot rebuild it in 100 days. But if it abandons self-reliance and vanity and relies upon Divine aid to do good and constructive things, if it abandons evil and destruction and seeks Divine forgiveness and so becomes a perfect servant of God, it becomes the referent of: *God will change their evil deeds into good deeds (27:50)*. Our infinite capacity for evil then is changed into an infinite ability for good. We attain the worth of “the best pattern of creation” and rise to the “highest of the high.”

Consider then, O heedless one, the All-Mighty’s Grace and Munificence. In reality, it is absolute justice to record one sin as 1,000 sins, due to its consequences and effects, and a good act as only one. But God does the reverse: He records a sinful act as one and an act of goodness as 10, 70, 700, or, in some cases, 7,000. From this we can understand that entering Hell is the result of one’s deeds and pure justice,

while entering Paradise is the result of His absolute Grace.

*SECOND REMARK:* Human beings have two faces. The first face looks to this worldly life because of our selfhood. Here we are poor creatures indeed. Human will is as feeble as a hair, human power is restricted to a most limited talent, human life is as short as a flash of light compared to the world's life, and our material existence is that of a tiny thing bound to decompose. In this state, we are no more than a feeble member of one species among countless others spread throughout the universe.

The second face looks to the eternal life because of our nature as God's servants. Our perception of helplessness and insufficiency as God's servants make us important, inclusive beings. The All-Wise Creator has implanted an infinite impotence and poverty in our nature so that each of us may be a comprehensive mirror reflecting the infinite manifestations of God's Compassion and Power, Richness and Generosity. Through belief and worship, therefore, we gain infinite power and limitless riches.

We resemble seeds, for each of us has the potential to engender and attain perfection. A seed is endowed by Power with great potential and is destined to

put it into effect. According to Destiny's subtle program, it should germinate underground to grow into a "perfect" tree via its worship according to the language of its potential. If that seed abuses its potential to attract harmful substances, it will soon rot away in its narrow place. If it uses its potential properly, however, and in compliance with the laws of *Him Who splits the seed for sprouting* (6:95), it will emerge from its narrow place and grow into an awesome, fruitful tree. In addition, its tiny and particular nature will come to represent a great and universal truth.

Our essence also is equipped by Power with great potential and is inscribed by Destiny with important programs. If we use our potential and spiritual faculties in this narrow world under the soil of worldly life to satisfy the fancies of our carnal, evil-commanding selfhood, we will become corrupt, a rotten seed, for an insignificant pleasure during a short life. Thus we will depart from this world with a heavy spiritual burden on our unfortunate souls.

But if we germinate the seed of our potential under the "soil of worship" with the "water of Islam" and the "light of belief" according to the Qur'an's decrees, and if we use our spiritual faculties for their true purposes, we will grow into eternal, majestic trees whose

branches extend into the Intermediate World and the world where our deeds take on the forms specific to the Hereafter. This will yield countless, perfect fruits in the next world. We will become the fruit of the Tree of Creation, which will be favored in Paradise with infinite perfections and countless blessings.

We can make true progress only when we turn our faculties (e.g., intellect, heart, spirit, and imagination) to the eternal life, so that each will be occupied with its own kind of worship. What the misguided consider progress—subjecting our faculties to the carnal, evil-commanding selfhood to taste all worldly pleasures—is nothing but decline and degradation. I once observed this truth in a vision, which is as follows:

I reached a huge city full of large palaces. Outside some of them, I noticed ongoing spectacles and shows to amuse and entertain. As I drew near to one of them, I saw that its owner was playing with a dog at the door. Women were chatting with young strangers, and girls were organizing children's games. The doorman was behaving as if he were their master. I realized that the palace was empty, with all important

tasks left unattended, for its corrupted inhabitants were pursuing useless affairs.

I then came across another palace. A faithful dog was lying at the door, and beside it was a door-man with a stern, serious, and sober expression. The palace seemed so quiet that I entered in wonder and amazement. Inside was a scene of great activity, for the inhabitants were engaged in different, important tasks. The men on the first floor were managing the palace. On the second floor, girls and boys were studying. The women on the third floor were producing beautiful works of art and delicate embroidery. On the top floor, the owner was in constant communication with the king to secure his household's well-being and so that he could perform noble duties for his own progress and perfection. As they did not see me, I walked about unhindered.

Once outside, I saw that the city was full of similar palaces. I asked and was told that the palaces like the first one belonged to the foremost unbelievers and misguided, while those of the second type belonged to upright Muslim notables. In one corner, I came across a palace on which my name was written: "Said." As I looked at it closely, I felt as if I saw



my image on it. Crying in bewilderment, I came to my senses and awoke.

The city is our social life and the terrain of human civilization. Each palace is a human being, and the inhabitants are human senses and faculties (e.g., eyes, ears, intellect, heart and spirit, and powers of anger and lust). Each sense and faculty has a particular duty of worship, as well as particular pleasures and pains. The self and fancies, as well as the powers of anger and lust, correspond to the dog and the doorman. Thus, subjugating the sublime senses and faculties to carnal desires and fancies so that they forget their essential duties is decline and corruption. It certainly is not progress. You may interpret the other details for yourself.

*THIRD REMARK:* In our actions and bodily endeavors, we are like weak animals and helpless creatures. The realm at our disposal is so limited that our fingers can touch its circumference. Our weakness, impotence, and indolence are so great that even domesticated animals are influenced by them. If a domesticated animal is compared with its undomesticated counterpart, great differences can be seen.

But as passive, recipient beings who need to pray and petition, we are worthy travelers allowed to stay

for a while in the guest-house of this world. We are guests of a Generous One, Who has put His infinite Compassion's treasuries at our disposal and subjugated His peerless works of creative power and special servants to us. Also, He has prepared for our use and pleasure such a vast arena that its radius is as far as sight or even imagination can reach.

If we rely on our physical and innate abilities, taking the worldly life as our goal and focusing on its pleasures, we will suffocate within a very narrow circle. Moreover, our bodily parts, senses, and faculties will bring suit and witness against us in the Hereafter. But if we know that we are guests and so spend our lives within the limits approved by our Generous Host, we will lead happy and peaceful lives and reach the highest rank. We will be rewarded with an everlasting life of bliss in the Hereafter, and all of our bodily members and faculties will testify in our favor.

Our wonderful faculties are not meant for this trivial worldly life; rather, they are for our eternal life. We have many more faculties and senses than animals do, but the pleasure we derive from our physical lives is much less than what animals derive. Every worldly pleasure bears traces of pain, is spoiled

with past sorrows and fears of the future, and pleasure's ultimate disappearance. Animals experience pleasure without pain, enjoyment without anxiety, and have no past sorrows or anxiety about the future. They enjoy comfortable lives and praise their Creator.

We have been created in the best pattern. If we concentrate on this worldly life we are far lower than a sparrow, although we have far more developed faculties than any animal. For example, a man gives his servant 10 gold coins and tells him to have a suit made for himself out of a certain cloth. He gives another servant 1,000 gold coins and sends him to the market with a shopping list. The former buys an excellent suit of the finest cloth. The latter acts foolishly, for he neither notices how much money he was given nor reads the shopping list. Thinking that he should imitate his friend, he goes to a shop and asks for a suit. The dishonest shopkeeper gives him a suit of the very worst-quality cloth. The unfortunate servant returns to his master and receives a severe reprimand and a terrible punishment. Anyone can see that the 1,000 gold coins were not given for a suit, but for a very important transaction.

In the same way, our spiritual faculties, feelings, and senses are much more developed than those of

animals. For example, we can see all degrees of beauty, taste all varieties of a food item's particular tastes, penetrate the many details of visible realities, yearn for all ranks of perfection, and so on. But animals, with the exception of a particular faculty that reaches a high state of development according to its particular duty, can realize only slight development, if any.

Our senses and feelings, which have developed a great deal owing to our mind and intellect, require that we have many faculties. Our many needs have caused us to evolve different types of feelings, to become very sensitive to many things. Also, due to our comprehensive nature we have been given desires turned to several aims and objectives. Our senses and faculties have greatly expanded due to the diversity of our essential duties. Furthermore, since we are inclined and able to worship, we have the potential to realize all kinds of perfection.

Such rich faculties and abundant potentialities cannot have been given to us for an insignificant, temporary, worldly life. In reality, they were given to us because our essential duty is to perceive our obligations, which are directed toward endless aims; to affirm our impotence, poverty, and insufficiency

via worship; to study by our far-reaching sight and penetrating understanding; to bear witness to creation's glorification of God; to discern and be grateful for the All-Merciful One's aid sent in the form of bounties; and to gaze, reflect upon, and draw warnings from the miracles of His Power as manifested in creation.

O world-worshipping one charmed by the worldly life and ignorant of the meaning of your nature as the best pattern of creation! Once I saw the true nature of this worldly life in a vision, as follows: My Lord had caused me to set out on this journey. He gradually gave me some of the 60 gold coins He had allotted to me. This went on for some time, and after a while I arrived at an inn that provided some entertainment. I gambled away 10 gold coins in one night of entertainment and frivolity. The next morning, I had no money for the provisions I would need at my destination. All I had left was pain, sorrow, and regret left by sins and illicit pleasures. While I was in this wretched state, someone said to me: "You have lost all you had and deserve to be punished. Moreover, you will go on to your destination with no money. But if you use your mind, the door of repentance is not closed. When you receive the rest

of the money, keep half in reserve and use it to buy what you will need at your destination.”

My selfhood did not agree, so the man said: “Save a third of it then.” Still my selfhood balked. The man insisted: “Then a quarter.” I knew that my selfhood could not abandon its addictions, so the man turned away indignantly and disappeared. At once, I found myself on a high-speed train travelling through a tunnel. I was alarmed, but there was no escape. To my surprise, I saw very attractive flowers and tasty-looking fruits alongside the track, hanging out from the sides of the tunnel. I foolishly tried to pick some of them. But all around them were thorns that, due to the train’s speed, tore at my hands and made them bleed. Whatever I tried to hold on to slipped from my grasp. Suddenly an attendant came and said: “Give me 5 cents and I’ll give you as many flowers and fruits as you want. Otherwise, with your hands all cut up, you will lose a 100 instead of 5 cents. Besides, there is a punishment for picking them without permission.”

Depressed by this condition, I looked out the window to see when the tunnel would end. But there was no end in sight. The tunnel’s walls had many openings into which passengers were being thrown. Suddenly

I caught sight of an opening just opposite me with a gravestone on either side. When I peered out, I made out my name, “Said,” written in capital letters on a gravestone. I gave a cry of bewilderment and repentance. Unexpectedly, I heard the voice of the man who had advised me at the inn, asking: “Have you come to your senses?” I replied: “Yes, but I am in despair and there is nothing I can do.” He told me to repent and trust in God, to which I replied that I would. Then I woke up and I found myself transformed into the New Said; the Old Said had gone away.

I will now interpret some aspects of this vision: The journey is our life, a journey from the incorporeal world of eternity, passing through the stages of your mother’s womb, youth, old age, the grave, the Intermediate World, Resurrection, and the Bridge. The 60 gold coins are the 60 years of an average lifetime. I was 45 when I had this vision. Only God knows when I will die. A sincere student of the Qur’an showed me the true path so that I might spend half of the remaining 15 years for the Hereafter.

The inn, I came to understand, was Istanbul. The train was time, and each wagon was a year. The tunnel was this worldly life. The thorny flowers and fruits were illicit pleasures and forbidden amusements that

make the heart bleed with the idea of separation at the very moment you reach for them. Disappearance of pleasures increases sorrow, and besides, being unlawful, cause one to suffer punishment. The attendant had said: "Give me 5 cents, and I'll give you as many flowers and fruits as you want." This means that the permissible tastes and pleasures, obtained in lawful ways, are enough to satisfy me and so there is no need to pursue illicit ways.

*FOURTH REMARK:* We resemble tender children. Our strength is in our weakness, and our power in our impotence. This lack of strength and power has caused creation to be subjugated to us. So if we perceive our weakness and become humble servants of God via verbal and active prayer, and if we recognize our impotence and seek God's help, we will have shown our gratitude to Him for this subjugation of nature to us.

Moreover, God will enable us to reach our goal and achieve our aims in a way far beyond our own capability. Sometimes we wrongly attribute a wish's attainment to our own power and ability, when in reality it has been obtained for us through the prayer offered by the tongue of our disposition. Consider how great a source of power is a chick's weakness, for



it causes the mother hen to attack even a lion. A lion cub's weakness subjugates a great lioness, which will suffer hunger to feed its baby. How remarkable is the powerful appeal inherent in weakness, and what a spectacular manifestation of Compassion for importunate beings.

In the same way, beloved children obtain their goals by weeping, wishing, or making sad faces, all of which can cause mighty people to serve them. If children rely on their own strength, in practical terms they can achieve nothing. Their weakness and powerlessness, as well as feelings of affection and protection, are so in their favor that a single gesture may allow them to subjugate powerful persons to themselves. But if they arrogantly deny the care and affection shown to them and claim to do all of this on their own, they deserve to be punished. Similarly, we deserve punishment if we deny our Creator's Mercy and show our ingratitude by saying that our own power and knowledge—not Divine Mercy—have achieved all of this. We will be like Korah, who said: *I have been given it (my possessions) on account of my knowledge* (28:78).

This shows that our observed dominion in nature, and our advancement and progress in civilization

and technology, are mainly due to our essential weakness and helplessness, which attract Divine aid. Our poverty is the source of Divine provision, our ignorance is compensated for by Divine inspiration, and our need draws Divine favors. Divine Mercy, Affection, and Wisdom, not our own power and knowledge, have empowered us with dominion over creation and have put things at our disposal. Divine Authority and Compassion enable us, beings so weak that we can be defeated by a blind scorpion and a footless snake, to dress in silk produced by a worm and to eat the honey produced by a stinging insect.

Since this is the truth, O people, renounce arrogance and self-trust. Rather, affirm your impotence and weakness in God's high presence by asking for His help, and by praying and entreating Him. Declare your poverty and insufficiency. Show that you are His true servant. Then say: *God is sufficient for us. Most sublime is He in Whom we trust* (3:173) and ascend to the higher ranks.

Do not say: "I am nothing. Why should the All-Wise Creator put creation at my disposal and demand universal gratitude?" In physical terms you are almost nothing, but your duty or rank makes you an atten-

tive observer of this magnificent universe, an eloquent tongue of beings declaring Divine Wisdom, a perceptive student of this Book of Creation, an admiring overseer of the creatures glorifying God's praise, a respected master of worshipping beings.

You are, O humanity, an insignificant atom, a poor creature and weak animal in terms of your physical being and soul. And so you are being carried away by creation's huge waves. But if you are perfected through the light of belief, which comprises the radiance of Divine love, and through the training of Islam, you will find a kingliness in your being a servant, a comprehensiveness in your particularity, a world in your small entity, and a very high rank in your insignificance. The realm of your supervision of the rest of creation will be so broad that you can say: "My Compassionate Lord has made the world a home for me. He has given me the sun and moon as lamps, spring as a bunch of roses, summer as a banquet of favors, and animals as obedient servants. He has put plants and vegetation at my disposal, as ornaments and provisions to my home."

In conclusion, obeying your evil-commanding selfhood and Satan leads to the lowest depth, whereas following the truth and the Qur'an leads you to

the highest rank and as the most excellent pattern of creation.

*FIFTH REMARK:* We have been sent here as guests with a special responsibility. Endowed with important potentials, we have been assigned important duties and strongly urged to carry them out. If we do not, we will be punished. To make “being the best pattern of creation” more comprehensible, I will summarize the essentials of worship and duties.

Our worship consists of two aspects. The first aspect is implicit and concerns reflection and consciousness. It involves our submitting to the Sovereignty of His Lordship over creation and observing in amazement the works of His Beauty and Perfection. We draw the attention of others to the intricate, ornamented works of art: the sacred Divine Names’ manifestations. We also measure in “units” of due perception and discernment the gems of the Lord’s Names, each of which is a hidden spiritual treasure, and evaluate them with our hearts’ grateful appreciation.

Then we study the pages of creation and the sheets of the heavens and Earth, each of which is a missive of Divine Power, and contemplate them in great admiration. Afterwards, as we gaze in amaze-

ment and admiration upon the subtle ornamentation and refined skills seen in creation, we ardently desire to know their Beautiful Creator and yearn to enter His Presence, where we hope to be received into His favor.

The second aspect, visible prayer, means turning toward our Majestic Creator, Who wills Himself to be known through His artistry's miracles. Supplicating directly in His presence, we unburden ourselves to Him in sincere belief and try to acquire knowledge of Him. We discern that a Compassionate Lord wants to be loved through His Compassion's beautiful fruits, and so make ourselves loved by Him through devoting our love and adoration to Him.

Seeing that the Generous Provider nourishes us with the best and dearest of His material and spiritual favors, we respond with gratitude and praise, expressed through our works, deeds, lifestyle and, if possible, our senses and faculties. Observing that a Lord of Beauty and Majesty manifests Himself in the mirror of beings and draws attention to His Glory and Perfection, Majesty and Beauty, we respond: "God is the Greatest. Glory be to God," and prostrate before Him in wonder and adoration.

Noticing that the One of Absolute Riches displays His limitless wealth and treasures in an infinitely generous fashion, we respond by glorifying and praising Him and, displaying our need, ask Him for His favors. Observing that the Majestic Creator has arranged Earth like an exhibition to display His matchless works, we appreciate them by saying: "What wonders God has willed and created," confirm their beauty by saying: "God bless them," show our wonder by saying: "Glory be to God," and express our admiration by saying: "God is the Greatest."

We see that the Unique One shows His Oneness throughout creation by His unique signs and specific decrees, and by His inimitable stamps and seals that He has put on each creature. He inscribes signs of His Oneness on everything and raises throughout the world the flag of His Unity to proclaim His Lordship. We respond to this with belief, affirmation, admission, and testimony to His Unity, and with devotion and sincere worship.

We may attain true humanity through such types of worship and reflection. We may show that we are the best pattern of creation and, by the grace of belief, become trustworthy vicegerents of God on Earth. Now, O heedless people who move toward the low-

est level by misusing your will, although you have been created as the best pattern of creation, listen to me. To see how ugly the world's face is, which turns toward passions and desires, and how extraordinarily beautiful is its other face, which turns toward the Hereafter, look at the tables below.

### **First Table**

(This table depicts the true spirit of the heedless one's world.)

*Do not invite me to the world,  
I came, and found it evil and mortal.  
Heedlessness was a veil;  
I saw the light of Truth concealed.  
All things, the whole of creation,  
I saw were mortal and full of harm.  
Existence, indeed I put it on.  
Alas. It was non-existence; I suffered much.  
As to life, I experienced it;  
I saw it was torment within torment.  
Intellect became pure retribution;  
I saw permanence to be tribulation.  
Life was like a wind, it passed in whims;  
I saw perfection to be pure loss.  
Deeds were only for show;  
I saw ambitions to be pure pain.  
Union was in fact separation;  
I saw the cure to be the ailment.*

*These lights became darkness;  
 I saw these friends to be orphans.  
 These voices were announcements of death;  
 I saw the living to be dead.  
 Knowledge changed into whims;  
 I saw in science thousands of ailments.  
 Pleasures became unmixed pain;  
 I saw existence to be compounded non-existence.  
 I have found the True Beloved;  
 Ah. I suffered much pain because of separation.*

## Second Table

(This table describes the true spirit of the world of the people of guidance and peace.)

*Hedlessness has disappeared;  
 I have seen the light of Truth to be manifest.  
 Existence is a proof of Divine Being.  
 See, life is the mirror reflecting Truth.  
 Intellect has become the key to treasuries.  
 See, mortality is the door to eternity.  
 The spark of self-attainment has died.  
 But see, there is the Sun of Grace and Beauty.  
 Life has become pure action. See, eternity is pure life.  
 Darkness is a thin membrane enclosing light.  
 See, there is true life in death.  
 All things have become familiar.  
 See, all sounds are the recitation of Divine Names.  
 All the particles in creation:  
 See, each recites God's Names and glorifies Him.*



*I have found poverty to be a treasury of wealth.  
See, in impotence lies perfect power.  
If you have found God, see, all things are yours.  
If you are a servant of the Owner of All Things,  
see His property is yours.  
If you are egotist and claim self-ownership,  
it is endless trial and tribulation.  
It is infinite torment you are to experience,  
it is an unbearable calamity.  
If you are truly a servant of God, devoted to Him,  
see, it is an infinite delight.  
Taste its uncountable rewards,  
experience its boundless bliss...*

Glory be to You. We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Truly, you are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. O my Lord, relieve my mind and ease my task. Loosen a knot from my tongue so they may understand my speech.

O God, bestow peace and blessings on Muhammad, his pure, unique essence, who is the light revealing all the mysteries, the manifestation of light, the point upon which manifestations of God's Majesty are centered, the pivot around which the world of His Grace and Beauty revolves.

O God, for the mystery of him in his relation to You, and for his journeying toward You, secure me from my fears, protect me from falling, diminish my sorrows, and purify me of my passions. Be with me, take me away from myself unto You, and favor me with effacement from myself. Do not leave me obsessed

with my self, veiled by my feelings. Unveil to me every mystery.

O Eternally Living and Self-Sustaining, O Eternally Living and Self-Sustaining, O Eternally Living and Self-Sustaining. Have mercy upon me and my companions. Have mercy upon all believers and all the people of the Qur'an. Amin, O Most Compassionate of the Compassionate, O Most Generous of the Generous.

The conclusion of their call will be: "All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds."

TWENTY-EIGHTH LETTER / FIFTH TREATISE

## The Holy Month of Ramadan

[A discussion of some Divine purposes for fasting Ramadan, as it is Islam's brightest and most splendid symbol or ritual. This section consists of nine points explaining nine purposes.]

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

The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed, a guidance for humanity, clear signs of guidance and the criterion. (2:158)

**FIRST POINT:** Fasting Ramadan is one of Islam's foremost pillars and greatest symbols. Many of its purposes relate to God's Lordship and giving thanks for His bounties, and to humanity's individual and collective life, self-training, and self-discipline.

One purpose connected with His Lordship is that God displays His Lordship's Perfection and His being the All-Merciful and All-Compassionate upon the

Earth's surface, which He designed as a table to hold His bounties in a way beyond human imagination. Nevertheless, people cannot perfectly discern this situation's reality due to heedlessness and causality's blinding veil. But during Ramadan, like an army waiting for its marching orders, believers worship as if they expect to be told to help themselves toward the end of the day. Thus they respond to that magnificent and universal Mercy with a comprehensive and harmonious act of collective worship. I wonder if those who do not worship or share in the honor of being so favored deserve to be called human.

**SECOND POINT:** As stated in the First Word, another purpose is to show that there is a price for the food brought by a servant from the king's kitchen. Obviously, it would be an incredible folly to tip the servant and not recognize the king, a clear disrespect for that gift. In the same way, God Almighty spreads His countless bounties on the Earth and bestows them for a price: thanksgiving.

The apparent causes of those bounties or those who bring them to us are like the servant in the above example. We pay the servants, feel indebted to them and sometimes thank them, even though they are only causes or means. Thus we show them

a degree of respect they have not merited. The true Giver of Bounties is infinitely more deserving of thanks for these bounties. Such thanksgiving assumes the form of acknowledging one's need for the bounties, appreciating them fully, and ascribing them directly to Him.

Fasting Ramadan is the key to a true, sincere, comprehensive, and universal thanksgiving. Many people cannot appreciate most of the bounties they enjoy, for they suffer no hunger. For example, a piece of dry bread means nothing to those who are full, especially if they are rich, although even their sense of taste testifies that it is a very valuable bounty of God in the sight of believers breaking their fast. During Ramadan, everyone is favored with a heartfelt thanksgiving by understanding the value of Divine bounties.

While fasting, believers think: "As these bounties do not originally belong to me, I cannot regard them as mere food or drink. Since the One owns and grants them to me, I should wait for His permission to eat them." By thus acknowledging food and drink as Divine gifts, believers thank God tacitly. This is why fasting is a key to thanksgiving, a fundamental human duty.

**THIRD POINT:** Fasting is related to humanity's collective life, for God's decision not to give each person livelihood means that the rich are to help the poor. Without fasting, many rich and self-indulgent people cannot perceive the pain of hunger and poverty, and to what extent the poor need care. Care for one's fellow-beings is a foundation of true thanksgiving.

There is always someone poorer, so everyone must help such people. If people do not suffer hunger, it is nearly impossible for them to do good or help others. Even if they do they can do so only imperfectly, for they do not feel the hungry one's condition to the same extent.

**FOURTH POINT:** Fasting Ramadan contains many Divine purposes related to self-training and self-discipline, such as: The carnal self desires—and considers itself—to be free and unrestricted. It even wishes, by its very nature, for an imagined lordship and free, arbitrary action. Not liking to think that it is being trained and tested through God's countless bounties, it swallows up such bounties like an animal, in the manner of a thief or robber, especially if its wealth and power is accompanied by heedlessness.

During Ramadan, everyone's selfhood understands that it is owned by One Other, not by itself; that it is a servant, not a free agent. Unless ordered or permitted, it cannot do even the most common things, like eating and drinking. This inability shatters its illusory lordship and enables it to admit its servanthood and perform its real duty of thanksgiving.

**FIFTH POINT:** Fasting Ramadan prevents the carnal self from rebelling and adorns it with good morals.

A person's carnal self forgets itself through heedlessness. It neither sees nor wants to see its inherent infinite impotence, poverty, and defects. It does not reflect on how it is exposed to misfortune and subject to decay, that it consists of flesh and bones that disintegrate and decompose rapidly. It rushes upon the world with a violent greed and attachment, as if it had a steel body and would live forever, and clings to whatever is profitable and pleasurable. In this state, it forgets its Creator, Who trains it with perfect care. Being immersed in the swamp of bad morals, it does not think about the consequences of its life here or its afterlife.

But fasting Ramadan causes even the most heedless and stubborn to feel their weakness and innate poverty. Hunger becomes an important considera-

tion, and reminds them how fragile their bodies really are. They perceive their need for compassion and care and, giving up haughtiness, want to take refuge in the Divine Court in perfect helplessness and destitution, and rise to knock at the door of Mercy with the hand of tacit thanksgiving-provided, of course, that heedlessness has not yet corrupted them completely.

**SIXTH POINT:** God began revealing the Qur'an during Ramadan. This has many implications, such as: Just as if the Qur'an were to be revealed during every Ramadan, believers should try to be like angels and abandon eating and drinking, and divest themselves of the carnal self's vain preoccupations and gross needs. During Ramadan, they should recite or listen to the Qur'an as if it were being revealed for the first time. If possible, they should listen to it as if they were hearing Prophet Muhammad recite it, or Gabriel reciting it to Muhammad, or God revealing it to Muhammad through Gabriel. They should respect the Qur'an in their daily actions and, by conveying its message to others, demonstrate the Divine purpose for its revelation.

Ramadan transforms the Muslim world into a huge mosque in which millions recite the Qur'an to the



Earth's inhabitants. Displaying the reality of *The month of Ramadan, in which the Qur'an was revealed* (2:185), Ramadan proves itself to be the month of the Qur'an. While some in the vast congregation in the great mosque of the Muslim world listen to its recitation with solemn reverence, others recite it. It is most disagreeable to forsake that heavenly spiritual state by obeying the carnal self, and thus eating and drinking in the sacred "mosque," for this provokes the whole congregation. It also is most disagreeable and must provoke the Muslim world's dislike and contempt to oppose those Muslims who fast Ramadan.

**SEVENTH POINT:** Fasting during Ramadan has many purposes related to a person's spiritual rewards, as everyone is sent here to sow this world with the seeds of the next life. The following paragraphs explain one such purpose, as follows:

The rewards for good deeds done during Ramadan are multiplied by a thousand. One Tradition states that 10 rewards are given for each letter of the Qur'an. Reciting one letter means 10 good deeds, and brings forth 10 fruits of Paradise. But during Ramadan, this reward is multiplied by 1,000, and even more for such

verses as the "Verse of the Throne."<sup>27</sup> The reward is even greater on Ramadan's Friday nights. Furthermore, each letter is multiplied 30,000 times if recited during the Night of Power (the night when the Qur'anic revelation started). During Ramadan the Qur'an, each letter of which yields 30,000 permanent fruits of Paradise, becomes like a huge blessed tree producing millions of permanent fruits of Paradise. Consider how holy and profitable this trade is, and how great a loss for those who do not appreciate the Qur'an's letters.

So Ramadan is the most proper time for such a profitable trade in the name of the afterlife. It is like a most fertile field to cultivate for the harvest of the afterlife. Its multiplication of rewards for good deeds make it like April in spring. It is a sacred, illustrious festival for the parade of those who worship His Lordship's Sovereignty.

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<sup>27</sup> *God! There is no god but He, the Living, Self-Subsisting, Supporter of all. Slumber and sleep do not seize him. Everything in the heavens and on the Earth belongs to Him. Who can intercede in His presence unless He permits it? He knows what (appears) before and after and behind His creatures, and they can only acquire as much of His knowledge as he permits. His Throne extends over the heavens and the Earth. He feels no fatigue while guarding and preserving them, for He is the Most High, the Supreme. (2:255)*

This is why fasting Ramadan is obligatory, why believers are not allowed to gratify the carnal self's animal appetites and indulge in its useless fancies. Since they become like angels while fasting or engaging in such a trade, each believer is a mirror reflecting God's Self-Sufficiency. They move toward becoming a pure spirit manifested in corporeal dress by abandoning the world for a fixed period. In fact, Ramadan contains and causes believers to gain, through fasting, a permanent life after a short period in this world.

One Ramadan may enable believers to gain 80 years' worth of reward, for the Qur'an declares the Night of Power to be more profitable than 80 years having no such night (97:3). A king may announce a few holidays to mark a special occasion like his enthronement, and then honor his faithful subjects on those days with special favors. Likewise, the Eternal, Majestic King of the 18,000 worlds revealed the Qur'an, His exalted decree, to each world during Ramadan. Thus wisdom requires that Ramadan be a special Divine festival during which God's Lordship pours out bounties and spirit beings come together. Given that Ramadan is a Divinely ordained festival,

fasting is commanded so that people withdraw from their bodily preoccupations to some extent.

Fasting also enables people to abandon sins committed by the bodily senses or members and use them in the acts of worship particular to each. For example, those who fast should stop their tongue from lying, backbiting, and swearing and busy it with reciting the Qur'an, glorifying God, seeking His forgiveness, and calling His blessing upon Prophet Muhammad. They should prevent their eyes from looking at, and their ears from listening to, forbidden things; rather, they should look at things that give a spiritual lesson or moral warning, and listen to the Qur'an and truths. When the factory-like stomach is stopped from working, other members (small workshops) can be made to follow it easily.

**EIGHTH POINT:** One purpose of fasting is to put people on a physical and spiritual diet. If the carnal self acts, eats, and drinks as it wishes, people's physical health is harmed. But, and more importantly, their spiritual life is harmed because they do not discriminate between the lawful and the unlawful. Such a carnal self finds it very difficult to obey the heart and spirit. Recognizing no principles, it takes the person's reins and drives him or her as it pleases. However,

fasting Ramadan accustoms it to dieting, and self-discipline trains it to obey; the stomach is not harmed from overeating before the previous meal has been digested properly and, learning to forsake the lawful, it can follow the decree of reason and religion to refrain from the unlawful. Thus the carnal self tries not to corrupt its owner's spiritual life.

Also, most people suffer hunger to various degrees. To endure a long-lasting hunger patiently, people should train themselves in self-discipline and austerity. Fasting Ramadan provides this patience-based training by causing people to feel hungry for 15 hours, or even for 24 hours if the predawn meal is missed. Thus fasting cures impatience and the lack of endurance, which double humanity's misfortune.

Many bodily members somehow serve the stomach. If that "factory" does not stop its daytime routines during a certain month, it keeps those members busy with itself and forgetful of their own worship and sublime duties. This is why saints always prefer austerity as a way to spiritual and human perfection. Fasting Ramadan reminds us that our bodily members were created for more than just serving the stomach. In Ramadan, many bodily members experience angelic and spiritual—as opposed to material-pleas-

ures. As a result, fasting believers receive degrees of spiritual pleasure and enlightenment according to their level of spiritual perfection. Fasting Ramadan refines a person's heart, spirit, reason, and innermost senses. Even if the stomach complains, these senses rejoice.

**NINTH POINT:** Fasting Ramadan breaks the carnal self's illusory lordship and, reminding it that it is innately helpless, convinces it that it is a servant. As the carnal self does not like to recognize its Lord, it obstinately claims lordship even while suffering. Only hunger alters such a temperament. God's Messenger relates that God Almighty asked the carnal self: "Who am I, and who are you?" It replied: "You are Yourself, and I am myself." However much God tormented it and repeated His question, He received the same answer. But when He subjected it to hunger, it replied: "You are my All-Compassionate Lord; I am Your helpless servant."

O God, grant peace and blessings to our master Muhammad in a way to please You and to give him his due, to the number of the rewards for reciting the Qur'an's letters during Ramadan, and to his family and Companions. Glorified be your Lord, the Lord of Honor and Power; exalted above what they falsely ascribe to Him. Peace be upon the Messengers, and all praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. Amen.

TWENTY-NINTH LETTER / SECOND TREATISE

## Thanksgiving

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

There is nothing that does not glorify Him with praise.  
(17:44)

The Qur'an uses such reiterated phrases as: *Will they not be thankful?* (36:35, 73) *We will reward the thankful.* (3:145) *If you are thankful, I will give you more.* (14:7) *Nay, but God do you serve, so be among the thankful,* (39:66) to show that the All-Merciful Creator's most important command is to give thanks. Proclaiming that not doing so means denying bounties, He reproaches them severely, in Surat al-Rahman, no less than 31 times: *Then which of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

This universe, like its microcosm the Qur'an, also demonstrates that creation's most important result is thanksgiving. We can see that the universe is arranged in a way to arouse thanksgiving, and that everything calls for it. It seems that thanksgiving is the tree of creation's most important fruit and the

best product of this factory of the universe, for the universe is in the form of a circle, at the center of which is life. The design of creation is directed toward life, for everything serves life and works to provide its necessities. This means that the universe's Creator drew up life from the universe, created the worlds of living beings in circular forms, and put humanity in the center. The purposes for creating living beings are directed toward humanity, which all other beings serve. This means that the Majestic Creator chose humanity to rule over them.

At the center of the circular human and animal worlds is providence. The Creator inculcated love for providence in people and animals, and urges them to work for it. He made providence a vast and rich treasury of infinite bounties. So that people and animals can recognize each taste, He enabled the tongue to distinguish as many tastes as there are foods and drinks. Given this, providence is the universe's most manifest, comprehensive, curious, and pleasing reality.

As everything is concentrated around and directed toward providence, providence itself comes through, subsists on, and points to thanksgiving. This is because the need and desire for providence are a nat-



ural thanksgiving, and the pleasure and satisfaction coming from providence are an unconscious thanksgiving. Both of these are common to all animate beings. Those who change the nature of such thanksgiving through misguidance and unbelief drift into associating partners with God.

The beautiful forms of bounties, their tastes and smells, are invitations to thanksgiving. By arousing desire in living beings and thereby directing them to appreciate and respect providence, they urge animals to give thanks through their disposition, and people to do so with their tongues and actions. They also cause living beings to experience the greatest pleasure and satisfaction through thanksgiving itself.

In other words, showing the All-Merciful, All-Generous Owner of the treasuries of Compassion's most pleasurable and permanent grace and favor behind the temporary enjoyment of bounties enables humanity to experience a permanent pleasure of Paradise while in this world. Providence becomes an invaluable and rich treasury through thanksgiving, but is reduced to almost nothing in the absence of being thankful.

As explained in the Sixth Word, if the tongue's sense of taste is used for God's sake, for distinguish-

ing the kinds of providence with the intention of giving thanks, it becomes a thankful examiner and a highly esteemed supervisor of the countless treasures of God's infinite Mercy. But if this sense is used for the carnal self and does not thank the Provider, it is only a watchman of the abdomen's factory, a doorman of the stomach's workshop. As not giving thanks lowers that servant of providence, the nature of providence itself and its other servants (e.g., air, light, and water) are likewise reduced to the lowest rank and assume a quality contrary and opposed to the Wisdom of the universe's Creator.

Thanksgiving is recognized by contentment and thrift, consent and gratitude; not giving thanks is recognized by greed and waste, ingratitude and consuming without regard for what is lawful and unlawful. Greed causes depravity and humiliation. It might even be said that the ant, that blessed animal having a social life, is trodden underfoot because its greed drives it to collect thousands of grains when a few might suffice. But the bee flies overheads due to its contentment, so to speak, and offers its honey to people.

The Divine Name the All-Merciful, the greatest Name of the Sacred Divine Essence coming after

God (Allah-His proper Name and the greatest of the Greatest Names) relates to providence. The first and most manifest meaning of the All-Merciful is the All-Provider. One is connected to that Name through thanksgiving. Of the many kinds of thanksgiving, the most comprehensive is the daily prescribed prayers.

Thanksgiving contains a sincere belief and a genuine declaration of God's Unity. One who eats an apple and says, "All praise and thanks be to God," proclaims that the apple came from the hand of Power, is a gift from His Mercy's treasury, and thereby ascribes everything to God's Hand of Power and sees His Mercy manifested in everything.

I point out one aspect of the loss suffered by those who do not give thanks. When people thank God for something delicious, a light is produced and becomes a fruit of Paradise. In addition to material pleasure, it gives a greater and permanent spiritual enjoyment because it causes people to reflect on it as a favor of Divine Mercy. Thus any food given by God as a bounty sends its spiritual outcome to the higher, incorporeal worlds due to thankfulness. After that, it is digested to nourish the body and excreted to become elements in the soil. Without thanksgiving, this material pleasure ultimately results in grief

because it disappears and the food becomes waste matter. Consumable bounties produce permanent pleasure and yield permanent fruit through thanksgiving; without it, they become the lowest form of the worst nature, as heedless, unthankful people see them only as things to be eaten and then excreted.

Providence deserves love. While thanksgiving elevates this love to a sublime, permanent love (love of God), the love that heedless and misguided people feel for providence is animalistic in nature. Consider the great loss such people experience!

Humanity has the greatest need for providence. God Almighty created humanity as a mirror to reflect His Names, as a miracle of Power able to weigh and recognize the contents of His Mercy's treasures, and as a vicegerent on the Earth able to measure His Names' most subtle manifestations. Given this, humanity needs all kinds of material and spiritual providence. Having such a comprehensive nature, people can attain the highest rank (being creation's "best pattern") only through thanksgiving. Without it, they commit a most dire sin and fall to the lowest rank.

There are four pillars of the way of being a worshipping and (thereby) beloved servant of God, as stated in the following:

In the way depending on awareness of one's impotence before God, four things are essential, the most important of which is thanksgiving: acknowledgement of one's absolute impotence (*ajz-i mutlaq*), and poverty (*fakr-i mutlaq*), and absolute zeal (*shawk-i mutlaq*) and thanksgiving (*shukr-i mutlaq*).

God, through Your Mercy cause us to be among the thankful, O Most Compassionate of the Compassionate. Glory be to You. We know only what You teach us. You are All-Knowing, All-Wise. O God, bestow blessings and peace on our master Muhammad, the lord of the thankful and the praising, his family and Companions. Amen.

Their last call is: "All praise be to God." (10:10)



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